



**Humanitarian and Refugee Issues Working Group  
Brasilia, February 4-6, 2020  
Summary Statement**

Humanitarian and refugee crises in the Middle East have affected more than 47 million people and resulted in the forced displacement of over 20 million people in recent years. Children and youth across the region have been disproportionately affected. In particular, crises in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have hindered access to quality education for many children and youth, which could affect the future human capital, security, and economy of the Middle East for years to come. In addition to a lack of access to education, Syrian, Iraqi, and Yemeni children and youth also face grave threats to their safety and well-being due to the humanitarian crises these conflicts have generated, as well as the trauma resulting from individual and collective experiences of war. Thousands of children have been killed in fighting in conflicts in all three countries and many more face ongoing safety threats from unexploded ordnance. Millions of children throughout the Middle East also struggle to access medicine and basic health service. These problems need to be urgently addressed by the international community, in particular by supporting efforts on the ground by the United Nations and non-governmental humanitarian organizations.

Due to the disproportionate impact of conflict on children, the Warsaw Process Working Group on Humanitarian and Refugee Issues focused its attention on the issues of education and child protection in a broad sense, acknowledging that mental health and psychosocial support are critical parts of humanitarian responses. To this end, delegations discussed key child protection and education challenges and solutions for displaced populations in the Middle East, as well as in Latin America, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, and focused on innovative practices enabling children to continue education and find psychological support during displacement. Delegations also discussed the need to increase burden sharing and support for refugee-hosting countries.

Regarding Latin America, it was recalled that by the end of 2020 the total number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide is projected to increase from 4.8 million to 6.5 million. Nearly 85 percent, more than 5.5 million, will be found throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Brazil and Colombia drew from their efforts in welcoming, assisting and integrating Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Panelists discussed issues such as the treatment of trauma in children and addressing early childhood education and the needs of youth in humanitarian crises.

To advance the discussion on education, the agenda focused on improving access for out-of-school children and youth to safe and quality learning in the Middle East, from early childhood development to higher education. Delegations explored how to improve access to formal education and psychological support for the most vulnerable children and youth, especially girls and children with disabilities, and how to enable alternative learning pathways for those who face significant barriers to accessing the formal systems.

The working group also addressed the protection risks facing children and youth affected by these conflicts in the Middle East, including child labor, forced recruitment, family separation, lack of birth registration and access to civil documentation, bullying, and gender-based violence, including early

marriage. The group discussed the long-lasting impact of the trauma children experience during war and the importance of play and of engaging caregivers. The group further discussed the need to prevent children from being used in combat, the extent to which children are recruited and used by armed groups in Middle East conflicts, and the most effective methods in preventing such recruitment, as well as demobilizing and reintegrating children associated with armed groups. The group emphasized that forced recruitment is a form of modern-day slavery and children who have engaged as combatants should primarily be treated as victims. Children in recent conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen have suffered because of their affiliation with armed groups, and as a consequence are detained in camps, are unable to access basic services including education, and suffer further psychological trauma. The group has also discussed the pressing need to preserve schools and playgrounds as impartial and safe spaces for children and youth to continue their education. The group recognized the work carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict in the region, including its work around violence prevention.

Bearing in mind that, in context of conflict and humanitarian crises, education and protection activities for children and youth can be mutually reinforcing, the last panel discussion focused on the role of schools in ensuring protection in the Middle East. Delegations explored efforts to limit the effect of armed conflict and humanitarian crises on students, teachers, educational facilities and activities, as well as initiatives to reinforce the protective nature of quality education for children, recognizing the key role that teachers can play in identifying and addressing protection needs of children and their families. The panel further discussed risks children, particularly girls, face at or on the way to and from school, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Working Group on Humanitarian and Refugee Issues aims to support ongoing regional and national efforts, including those coordinated with UN agencies and humanitarian organizations, to protect children and youth in armed conflicts as well as to ensure access to quality education during displacement. The respect, protection, and promotion of the rights of children represent corner stones for the full and harmonious development of every society. Conflict produces a devastating, pernicious impact on the life of children, including on their bodies and minds. Despite efforts of the international community, violations against children continue unabated. Politically, we must look at conflict prevention and resolution efforts in a different manner. We must recognize that children suffer at the heart, not at the periphery, of contemporary armed conflict.

Participating Countries:	Ethiopia	Poland
	Finland	Portugal
Albania	Georgia	Qatar
Argentina	Greece	Republic of Korea
Australia	Hungary	Romania
Austria	Ireland	Saudi Arabia
Bahrain	Israel	Senegal
Belgium	Italy	Slovakia
Brazil	Japan	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Jordan	Spain
Canada	Kenya	Sweden
Croatia	Kuwait	Thailand
Colombia	Luxembourg	UK
Cyprus	Mexico	Ukraine
Czech Republic	Morocco	United Arab Emirates
Ecuador	Nigeria	United States
Egypt	Norway	Yemen