



Florida High Schools Model United Nations

FHSMUN GULF COAST 11

**UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S
EMERGENCY FUND**

EXPANDING CARE FOR DISPLACED CHILDREN

Authors: Noor Khokhar, Paloma Dean, Karla Fontan, Victoria Camacho

December 2025

Introduction

There is no singular definition for “displaced people,” but the term generally encompasses three main groups: refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people. At the end of 2024, there were 123.2 million displaced individuals worldwide¹—48.8 million of which were children². Only 14 years earlier, that number was 17 million; meaning that the amount of displaced children in the world has nearly tripled since 2010³. This increase is due in large part to the worsening of climate change and the development of international and domestic wars and conflicts. Environmental circumstances like droughts and floods as well as economic struggles and political violence often leave families and individuals with no choice but to flee their homes and seek shelter elsewhere. This forced displacement disproportionately impacts children, harming their mental health, disrupting their education, and exposing them to volatile and deeply unsafe environments⁴. Although the true solution to this problem is eliminating the root causes of displacement, in the meantime, it is imperative that children who are already displaced are given access to the resources they need in order to succeed in their new homes.

Healthcare

At a global scale, approximately 85% of one-year-olds are vaccinated⁵. Conversely, only 21% of displaced children have full vaccination coverage⁶. This difference is only one example of the countless aspects of healthcare that displaced children lack access to. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, children affected by forced migration often miss essential vaccines due to disrupted healthcare systems, unsafe travel conditions, and a lack of documentation⁷. Additionally, displaced children, especially those living in refugee camps or informal settlements, face higher risks of infectious diseases, malnutrition, and untreated chronic illnesses because of limited medical staff, poor sanitation, and shortages of medicine and equipment.

Expanding healthcare access for displaced children requires coordinated international efforts and long-term investment. Humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR and UNICEF recommend mobile health clinics, vaccination campaigns in refugee settlements, and partnerships with local governments to ensure consistent and equitable care⁸. By building stronger health systems that include displaced populations, the global community can help ensure that all children receive the care they need to grow up healthy and safe.

¹ “Figures at a Glance | UNHCR US.” 2024. UNHCR US. 2024. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance>.

² UNICEF. 2023. “Child Displacement - UNICEF Data.” UNICEF DATA. June 2023. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>.

³

⁴ https://immigrationinitiative.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/AUGUST-2024_Forced-Displacement_Implications-for-Refugee-and-Asylee-Students_final.pdf

⁵ World Population Review. “Education Rankings by Country 2025.” World Population Review, November 7, 2025. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/education-rankings-by-country>.

⁶ Virk, Sargun, Andrew Milewski, Nadia Khan, Celeste Cheung, Drew N Wright, and Gunisha Kaur. “Vaccination in Forcibly Displaced, Pediatric Populations: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” JAMA network open, June 2, 2025. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12171943/>.

⁷ “Immunization Coverage.” World Health Organization. Accessed November 1, 2025.

https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2025.pdf>

Mental health is another major concern for displaced children, who often experience trauma, anxiety, and grief after losing their homes, loved ones, and sense of safety. The WHO reports that children exposed to conflict or forced displacement are twice as likely to develop depression or post-traumatic stress disorder compared to non-displaced children⁹. Expanding psychosocial support programs, creating safe spaces for children to express themselves, and training teachers and community workers to recognize signs of trauma are crucial steps toward addressing this hidden health crisis. By prioritizing mental health alongside physical care, international organizations can help displaced children recover and build resilience for the future.

Education

When analyzing the situations faced by displaced children, it is important to consider the severe lack of education and its consequences faced in all parts of the world. There is an array of challenges faced by children trying to receive an education and institutions trying to provide an education, as many external and internal factors negatively impact the push for access to education. According to authors at UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, “Education in an emergency situation does not mean ‘emergency education’ – that is, temporary measures that accidentally turn into long-term responses to children’s educational needs. Children and adolescents have the right to an education that will ensure they meet their potential; a system with no recognized examinations or certification, with inadequate materials and poor infrastructure, taught by under-trained and under-qualified teachers, will in no way provide this.”¹⁰

One of the greatest challenges faced by displaced children is the loss of valuable learning time. Many refugee children have missed out on months or years worth of education, leaving great gaps in their education. Once they are in the position to receive a proper education, they are severely behind and often face alternate barriers such as language, trauma, a different system, and a new environment among other things.

Another key point to note is the challenges faced by many young girls and women across the world trying to access an education. It is an unfortunately common circumstance that many young displaced girls receive little education, with their educational journey ending mostly at a primary school level. Many girls, particularly in African, Middle Eastern, and Asian regions, face gender discrimination along with a lack of education. These girls are often expected to settle down, get married, and have children, regardless of their personal preferences. As worded by authors at UNICEF, “Girls and boys also face their own specific barriers. Girls are often expected to stay at home and support their families by taking care of their siblings, particularly if they are the eldest child, which puts greater pressure on them to drop out of school. Early or forced marriage and pregnancy are also barriers, particularly during humanitarian crises when

⁹ “Refugee and Migrant Mental Health.” World Health Organization. Accessed November 1, 2025. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-mental-health?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

¹⁰ “Education in Emergencies.” Left Behind Refugee education in crisis. Accessed November 1, 2025. <https://www.unhcr.org/left-behind/education-in-emergencies/>.

parents may send their daughters off to be married or cared for by another family.”¹¹ Many young girls face the challenge of coupling these expectations with their current situation of displacement, and it is almost impossible for them to receive a quality education while displaced as young women.

Unfortunately, there is a severe lack of measures put in place to provide quality education for displaced children. Humanitarian organizations and governments must place priority on finding methods to educate the youth. It is important to remember, as stated by authors at UNHCR, “For many refugee children, a classroom can be the first peaceful and reliable environment they encounter.”

Safety

Displaced children find huge threats to their survival at almost every point of their displacement—after leaving home, on their way to host communities or camps, or while living in such situations. According to a research titled *Exploring the Rights of Climate Displaced Persons*, authored by Scott Leckie and Shaun Butta, environmental disaster and conflict-displaced children, mostly do not enjoy secure shelter, sanitation, and supervision from adults—all circumstances that put them at risk of violence, exploitation, and trafficking¹². The family unit can often be broken during migration, exposing these children to a life of unaccompanied status and abandonment, usually to strangers. The displaced children, then, become easier prey for many forms of abuse and child labor, as well as conscription to armed groups. Situations in which social systems protecting children are compromised such as schools, family ties, or community networks operate to eliminate almost any guarantee of safety.

Beyond threats of violence, displaced children are indeed living under unsafe conditions. Overcrowded camps and informal settlements often lack clean water, sanitation, and medical services, making children especially vulnerable to disease and injury¹³. Infants and small children are at maximum risk. Such conditions are highly contributing to malnutrition, dehydration, and avoidable diseases. Sometimes, the very conditions of the camp constitute a risk to life due when resources are exhausted or when humanitarian assistance is interrupted because of conflicts or barriers politicized. In other words, for displaced children, 'safety' goes beyond the absence of violence—it is a guarantee to those basic conditions that would allow them to survive and thrive.

UNICEF's *Children Uprooted: What Local Leaders Can Do to Support Refugee and Migrant Children* argue that primary safeguard for displaced children must come from their physical and emotional safety¹⁴. This encompasses safe shelter, education, and the presence of trusted adults who can recognize and respond to abuse or neglect. According to UNICEF, local governing bodies have an important role to play in incorporating displaced children into child

¹¹ Education solutions for migrant and displaced children and their host communities | unicef. Accessed November 1, 2025.

<https://www.unicef.org/documents/education-solutions-migrant-and-displaced-children-and-their-host-communities>.

¹² “Exploring the Rights of Climate Displaced Persons.” Ethics Press. Accessed November 1, 2025.

<https://ethicspress.com/products/exploring-the-rights-of-climate-displaced-persons>.

¹³ Lives of children and newborns put at risk by living conditions in Gaza | MSF. Accessed November 1, 2025.

<https://www.msf.org/lives-children-and-newborns-put-risk-living-conditions-gaza>.

¹⁴ Children uprooted. Accessed November 1, 2025.

<https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/Children-Uprooted-What-Local-Governments-Can-Do.pdf>.

protection systems as opposed to isolating them in temporary camps. In addition, the concept of child-friendly spaces was emphasized as providing children the opportunity to play, learn, and heal in a safe environment. These spaces have been shown to alleviate trauma and restore a sense of normality amidst chaos.

Enhancing the safety of displaced children requires global solidarity, accountability, and long-term investment. Humanitarian agencies and governments should not only provide interventions for the short term but build long-lasting systems of protection to deal with the root causes of insecurity. Protection systems must include the training of law enforcement and border officials on trafficking recognition and prevention, legal documentation for displaced minors, and secure delivery routes to ensure the aid reaches those in need. It is paramount to embrace the protection of displaced children, as climate change and conflict continue to uproot families from their homes, as an international priority. Their safety is no longer just a humanitarian concern but rather a moral and legal responsibility of all humankind.

Internally Displaced Children

Not all displaced children are externally displaced, in fact the majority of displaced children are internally displaced. An estimated 33.8 million children are displaced within their own countries,¹⁵ and this number is rising. Even when children do not cross borders, they face significant risk and dangers when they are internally displaced. It is also important to note that nearly all refugees and externally displaced people were displaced internally first before being forced to leave their country.¹⁶

Sudan's humanitarian crisis is the largest in the world and the chaos and violence present in the country has led Sudan to have the largest number of internally displaced children in the world.¹⁷ The camps these children eventually settle in often are ill-equipped to handle the sheer number of displaced children present in the camps. Often, access to education is the first thing these children lose access to. Refugee camps often cannot provide adequate education and are often so full that not all internally displaced children can access the educational material that is present.¹⁸ In addition, the strain that is put on internally displaced Sudanese children often means they have other tasks that are more important for their survival than keeping up with schooling.¹⁹

A lack of access to education is not the only danger internally displaced children face. Sudan is currently facing one of the worst famines in the world, and internally displaced children often feel the full force of this famine. The famine was first confirmed in an internally displaced persons camp in North Darfur²⁰ and with the violence being waged around the camps, vehicles

¹⁵ United Nations Children's Fund. "Child Displacement and Refugees." UNICEF. United Nations. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Education on hold: Sudan war robs young people's hope for the future." UNHCR. United Nations. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/education-hold-sudan-war-robs-young-people-s-hope-future>.

¹⁹ United Nations Child Fund. "Two Years On: Children in Sudan are living through one of the world's worst crises." UNICEF. United Nations. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/two-years-children-sudan-are-living-through-one-worlds-worst-crises>.

²⁰ World Food Programme. "Famine in Sudan." WFP. United Nations. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/sudan>.

equipped with food aid are often unable to safely reach the refugee internally displaced people. Without access to aid thousands of internally displaced children are at risk of starvation.²¹

On top of the violence and hunger, Sudan is facing a mass outbreak of cholera.²² Many refugee camps do not have access to safe drinking water and as the disease rampages through refugee camps already malnourished children are highly vulnerable to the deadly disease.²³

Even at UN run refugee camps aid does not always arrive as armed groups often target aid vehicles²⁴ As a result, internally displaced children in Sudan have extremely limited access to medical and health aid in addition to a lack of access to nourishing food. Children who cannot access medical care can often face life-threatening complications from treatable conditions.²⁵

A lack of food and medical care is already a dangerous position for any child to be in, but internally displaced Sudanese children—and other internally displaced children around the world—face an additional threat due to their displacement. Refugee camps in Sudan are often the target of raids and attacks by armed forces.²⁶ Already traumatised children are often revictimised during these attacks. The Sudanese paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has attacked refugee camps in Sudan a number of times, the violence in these attacks is indiscriminate and many of the children living in these camps can be seriously injured or killed during these attacks.

Internally displaced children in Sudan face significant dangers on many fronts. Not only do these children lose access to critical education and development when they flee, they are at extreme risk of famine and disease yet they have very limited access to lifesaving aid. On top of these threats to their education and well-being, the very fact that these children are living in camps for internally displaced peoples puts their lives at risk from attacks by RSF and other armed forces who often single camps out to send a message. These children are in desperate need of lifesaving aid, and the solution is not to turn them into external refugees.

Conclusion

Despite the scale of the crisis and the risks to aid workers UNICEF and other partners have been making progress to help internally displaced children. UNICEF and Microsoft have partnered to create the Learning Passport which is being employed to provide free and accessible schooling services to displaced children around the world.²⁷ Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) interventions are also being put in place to restore access to safe drinking water across Sudan and inside the camps. Aid workers are also trying to provide malnourished and injured children with nutritional food and medical services, but without secure humanitarian corridors

²¹ Ibid

²² English, Joe. "After 500 days under siege, children in Sudan's Al Fasher face starvation, mass displacement, and deadly violence." UNICEF. United Nations. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/after-500-days-under-siege-children-sudans-al-fasher-face-starvation-mass>.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ World Food Programme. "Famine in Sudan." WFP. United Nations. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/sudan>.

²⁵ United Nations Children's Fund. "Health: Supporting high impact interventions to save lives of mother and babies." UNICEF. United Nations. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/health>.

²⁶ Akinwotu, Emmanuel. "In Sudan, hundreds killed in attacks on famine-hit displacement camps." National Public Radio. Last modified April 14, 2025. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/14/nx-s1-5363700/in-sudan-hundreds-killed-in-attacks-on-famine-hit-displacement-camps#:~:text=Displaced%20Sudanese%2C%20who%20fled%20the,escalated%20for%20over%20a%20week>.

²⁷ United Nations Children's Fund. "Sudan Learning Passport." Learning Passport. Accessed October 31, 2025. <https://sudan.learningpassport.org/>.

there are extreme impediments to establishing these services. Internally displaced children around the world are in a very precarious position, but there is still hope. Every action is a step towards a better future, but actionable solutions are desperately needed.

Guiding Questions for Research

1. What policies has your country implemented in the past to expand displaced children's access to healthcare?
2. What strategies have proven most effective in preventing child trafficking, exploitation, and abuse in refugee and migrant populations?
3. How do displacement-related safety issues differ between urban refugee settings and traditional camp environments?
4. What data or evidence is most lacking in current global research about displaced children's safety?
5. What are the long-term developmental effects on children who experience prolonged insecurity during displacement?

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. To what extent should recipient nations be responsible for providing displaced children with access to healthcare?
2. How does climate-induced displacement create unique safety challenges compared to conflict-related displacement?
3. How much authority should international organizations have to intervene when host countries fail to protect displaced children?
4. How can countries provide safer and more sustainable solutions for displaced children without relying on refugee camps?