

World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP)
The Poverty Elimination and Community (PEACE) Foundation
The Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas

Fighting the War on Poverty with Early Childhood Education

In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Member States commit to “protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all refugee and migrant children, regardless of their status, and giving primary consideration...to the best interest of the child... and to comply with the obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

The Sustainable Development Goals contain numerous goals and targets relevant for the protection of children on the move, including #1, “End Poverty in all its forms everywhere”. Yet, poverty among these children constitutes an overlooked emergency.

The effects of poverty are well known and addressed to some extent in social policy. Less is known about the kinds of poverty affecting migrant and refugee populations in transit and destination countries. Because forced migrants and refugees often go uncounted in population censuses and poverty surveys, they are left out of policy development planning. They face harsh forms of poverty, resulting from deprivation during the years of displacement and relocation. Their poverty includes economic and psychosocial damages such as loss of home, safety and security, social role and status, culture and community. Relocated families’ inability to integrate socially in the host country relates directly to their extreme poverty.

Worldwide, 250 million -- 43 % of children under 5 years of age -- are at risk of poor development due to poverty and related social injustice. This staggering statistic does not include the millions of children who have migrated across borders or who are forcibly displaced. The lack of reliable disaggregated data about these children often relegates them to the fringes of migration and displacement debates and decisions. Migrant and refugee children are virtually invisible, as is the poverty that surrounds them.

They face too many losses, including parents, extended family members and friends; their homes, childhood normalcy; learning, school attendance; cultural identity, and social integration. Many times they even lose hope for the future.

Migrant and refugee children face too many obstacles: limited access to basic social services, especially nutrition, water, sanitation, shelter, education and information, social exclusion, discrimination and lack of protection – with devastating impact on their mental, physical and emotional development. They are at greater risk of exploitation, trafficking, and violence.

The poverty these children experience denies their basic rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Childhood poverty is closely and consistently associated with measurable disadvantages both for individuals and for the societies in which they live.

Particularly at risk are children 0-5 years of age. This period is critical for physical, cognitive, language and social development. Research clearly shows that early life experiences determine the capacity of the brain and functioning throughout the lifespan.

A child's overall well-being cannot be compartmentalized into sectors of health, education, emotional or psychological development. Analysis from a whole-child perspective requires a life-cycle approach respecting the universal needs of early childhood, primary childhood and adolescence.

An urgent need exists for effective policies to improve living conditions and promote long-term benefits for migrant and refugee children, as well as for their countries of origin, transit and destination. Monitoring and analyzing all levels of child poverty, its psychosocial and economic aspects, and its determinants, is crucial for designing and implementing these policies.

State priorities and investments determine to a large extent whether children, including migrant and refugee children, have access to quality basic services, safe environments for play and leisure, and education. Research by leading economists leaves no doubt that investing in children breaks the cycle of poverty, and enables our youngest citizens to develop to their full potential.

Along with UNICEF, The World Bank, and the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP), the Early Childhood Peace Consortium emphasizes that early childhood development (ECD) is among the most productive and cost-effective strategies for breaking cycles of generational poverty, violence, and underachievement. ECD incorporates all aspects of human development, including physical, language, intellectual, social, emotional and ethical domains, as well as early education in its various forms. ECD reduces the risks of developing mental health disorders and provides a sense of routine, stability, structure and hope for the future. High quality ECD is culturally sensitive and includes parents and families as significant players in children's wellbeing. Intra - and inter - family and community relationships also promote social cohesion and contribute to peacebuilding.

The civil society "Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts" underscores the need to respect and fulfill the rights of refugee and migrant children, including the right to early childhood development and education.

"The Ten Acts for the Global Compact" represents a civil society vision for a transformative agenda for human mobility, migration and development. It emphasizes the importance of access to basic services and support for developmental, education and care programs for children prior to school-entry age.

ECD centers that target the most disadvantaged children and bring communities together to foster child-wellbeing serve as a platform for reducing poverty-related risks and preventing conflict from escalating into violence. The following programs exemplify this point.

The iACT *Little Ripples* education program for Darfuri refugees implemented by the International Association of Counselors and Therapists and Jesuit Refugee Services:

trains and employs refugee women to support the socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children ages 3 to 5 through play-based learning; provides nutritional support, promotes parent involvement, and creates a foundation for peace and recovery for communities exposed to trauma and poverty.

The International Rescue Committee and Sesame Workshop collaborate on the *Early Childhood Development Humanitarian Response Initiative* to produce and deliver breakthrough programming for children affected by the Syrian crisis, to enhance caregiver-child interactions and improve children's learning and socio-economic outcomes.

In Syria, Bangladesh, Uganda, Myanmar and India, *Children on the Edge*, working in partnership with local communities, helps marginalized and forgotten children, who are living on the edge of their societies, by providing their basic needs, including education.

In Rwanda, the *ECD & Family Program*, supported by the Government, provides for the holistic development of children under six, through the provision of integrated health, nutrition, early learning and protection services for families and children.

In Lebanon, the *Arab Resource Collective* pilot project addresses the particular needs of young refugee children birth to five and their parents, utilizing early intervention to mitigate the negative effects associated with families' refugee situations, promoting communication and understanding between refugee parents and parents in host communities.

In Jordan, the *Collateral Repair Project*, with the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO) and other partners, assists refugees and victims of conflict: over 1,000 children can attend school-2017.

The *Childhood and Early Parenting Principles* provides a framework for multi-sector, multi-stakeholder engagement with governments at all levels to ensure that every child grows in a safe, nurturing environment. The goal is to break inter-generational cycles of poverty and adversity.

Recommendations:

- Implement the rights guaranteed to all children according to international and human rights and humanitarian law, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Collect disaggregated quantitative and qualitative poverty data on refugees and migrants, including children, to guide policy development, funding, and program implementation;
- Define child-specific indicators that represent multiphase and interrelated deprivations. A holistic approach in measuring child poverty is represented by the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis;

- Establish “Safe and Play Spaces” for pregnant women, mothers, caregivers and young children, for both forcibly displaced and host populations, where children’s developmental needs can be met communally to facilitate integration into the host culture;
- Provide ECD programs and train social service providers to assist migrant and refugee children age 0-5 years old;
- Maintain family and/or extended family integrity during all stages of the migration experience and promote family reunification;
- Promote close collaboration among humanitarian and development agencies, NGOs, like OMEP, and other international partners to transform humanitarian crises into development opportunities;
- Publicize existing efforts by Member States to address the needs of migrant and refugee children and their families.