

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

a) Violence inflicted upon Syrian children

The brutal civil war that began in 2011 has had a devastating effect on the beleaguered nation's children. Born in one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a child, millions of Syrian children have grown up facing the daily threat of violence.

“Children are dying before our eyes,” said the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF’s) Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore. “This can be stopped. It needs to stop now.”

Violence has ripped apart places that should be safe: schools, hospitals, playgrounds, parks and children's own houses, exposing children to both natural and man-made lethal threats.



“Freezing temperatures and harsh living conditions in Rukban, at the southwestern border of Syria with Jordan, are increasingly putting children’s lives at risk. In just one month, at least eight children - most of them under four months and the youngest only one hour old - have died,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF’s Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa. (2015)

UNICEF.(2018). Syrian Arab Republic. [online image]

According to UNICEF statistics, 2.6 million Syrian children are living as refugees or on the run in search of safety, helping to fuel a global migrant crisis. Syria is now the world's biggest producer of both internally displaced people and refugees. Many children have spent several bitter winters living in makeshift shelters. More than 1 million Syrian refugee children — over 40 percent — are also missing out on education.

On the other hand, a report by UNICEF found that 2017 was the worst year of the war for young Syrians, with 910 killed in a conflict that has spared them no mercy and has taken a vastly disproportionate toll on the country’s most vulnerable people.

The figures undermine claims that the war, which will soon enter its eighth year, is losing steam. Those most at risk face escalating threats of being permanently maimed by fighting, or emotionally scarred by a litany of abuses including forced labor, marriages, food scarcity and minimal access to health or education.



UNICEF.(2016). UNICEF: 2016 was the worst year yet for children in Syria. [online image]

“There are scars in children and there are scars on children that will never be erased,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF’s Director for the Middle East and North Africa. “The protection of children in all circumstances that was once universally embraced – at no moment has any of the parties accepted.”

More than 13 million people inside Syria need humanitarian assistance, more than half of whom are children, the UN says. Of the 6.1 million internally displaced, roughly half (2.8 million) are children. Figures for last year show an average of 6,550 people were displaced each day in Syria.

Guide questions

1. What has been the global response to this issue?
2. What are the basic needs of the Syrian children?
3. What happens with the refugees who have little or no financial resources?
4. How have neighboring countries helped and what is their stance?
5. What consequences do these conflicts/ traumatic events have on the development of Syrian children?
6. What impact is this issue having around the world?
7. Which countries have helped Syrian children the most?
8. How has the subject of migration been treated in previous years?
9. What are the agreements that countries must reach to solve this problem?
10. What are the different interests that must be respected in order to reach a solution?
11. What is UNICEF's role in safeguarding the rights of migrant children?

United Nations resolutions

1. The following report highlights the ongoing protection crisis in the country, caused by sporadic fighting between Government forces and armed groups. The report notes other grave violations, such as the killing of children, sexual violence, attacks on health centres and refugees.

United Nations. (2011). Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic. Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2011/241

2. The following report contains a series of recommendations to halt violations and increase the protection of children affected by the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

United Nations. (2014). Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/31

Definitions

- **Crisis:** A humanitarian crisis (or "humanitarian disaster") is defined as a singular event or a series of events that are threatening in terms of health, safety or well being of a community or large group of people.
- **Civil war:** Is a war between organized groups within the same state or country. The aim of one side may be to take control of the country or a region, to achieve independence for a region or to change government policies.
- **Refugees:** A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

- **Children:** The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines child as "a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".

References

Chulov, M. (2017). 2017 was the deadliest year of Syrian war for children, says Unicef. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/12/2017-deadliest-year-of-syrian-war-for-children-says-unicef-psychological-ruin>

UNICEF. (2015). Children in Syria need your help urgently. Send them food, water and health care now. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicefusa.org/mission/emergencies/child-refugees/syria-crisis>



b) Regulations to control the usage of technology in children

Technology has completely changed virtually every aspect of our society over the past few decades, from the way we work to the way we socialize and everything in between. One of the differences that have been most noticeable is the change in the way that children play and interact with each other from previous generations. Although technology does provide many positive benefits for learning, it also can have several negative effects on child development and quality of life.

A 2014 Kaiser Foundation (an American non-profit organization that focuses on major health care issues) study found that US youth spent more than seven and a half hours a day using media. In another study conducted that year by the Joan Ganz Cooney Centre, which specializes in children's media, two thirds of children aged four to seven had already used an iPhone. The Centre's own research suggests that most of the iPhones used by kids had been lent to them by a family member. As a recent Atlantic Monthly article put it: "The center's researchers labelled this the 'pass-back effect,' a name that captures well the reluctant zone between denying and giving."



Clinton, C.(2012). Is the internet hurting children?. [online image]

In 2000, a report was published by the Alliance for Childhood; a tax-exempt nonprofit research and advocacy organization to improve the lives of children (Cordes & Miller, 2000) entitled, Fool's Gold: A Critical Look at Computers in Childhood. This report argued that technology is physically, socially, and intellectually detrimental for children. Their argument asserted that childhood should not be hurried and what is appropriate for adults is not always appropriate for children. They contended that computers pose serious health risks including repetitive stress injuries, eyestrain, and obesity. The reduction of human interaction will impact children's social and emotional development as well as their language development.

Are children addicted to digital?

A mere 20 years after the Internet was founded, people do not yet know how the explosion in digital connectivity is shaping society. Looking back in history, the benefits of all the technologies have outweighed the problems they have caused. But



Taylor, J. (2012). How Technology is Changing the Way Children Think and Focus. [online image]

that does not mean digital addiction is an issue that should be dismissed. This month, the US Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association (main professional organization of psychiatrists and trainee psychiatrists in the United States), is set to classify Internet Use Disorder (IUD) as an area worthy of further study. There are plenty of stories detailing

how the internet and gaming have ruined people lives just like drugs, alcohol and gambling.

In addition, according to the Healthcare enthusiast Dhruvin Patel. (2017), not getting enough exercise, many kids do not experience the benefits of spending time outdoors when they are heavily reliant on technology for entertainment purposes. Spending time outdoors has a huge number of positive effects on the body—it provides you with exposure to sunlight, which supplies your body with Vitamin D. This helps to fight infections and keep your skin healthy. Additionally, regular exposure to sunlight helps to keep your sleep cycle regular by influencing the body's production of melatonin. Recent research has shown screens from devices such as tablets and smart phones emit harmful blue light that can cause headaches, eye strain and irritated eyes for children. Furthermore, sleep is also disturbed by harmful blue light when children are exposed to screen time in the evening due to the suppression of the hormone melatonin which regulates the sleep wake cycle. This makes it increasingly difficult for a child's body to effectively prepare to get ready for a goodnight's sleep.

Guide questions

1. What are the benefits of the use of technology on children?
2. What measures can companies take to regulate the use of their products?
3. What are the cognitive consequences in children who use technology?
4. What is the recommended time to play video games and use technology?
5. Which countries have regulations or laws to control the use of new technologies (videogames, cell phones, tablets)?
6. What alternatives does UNICEF offer to control the use of technologies in children?
7. Are there campaigns or institutions that raise awareness about the use of these technological devices?
8. Are there programs to regulate the use of technology in children, and if so, how do they work?
9. What kind of measures could be taken to regulate this problem that respect the physical and cognitive development of children?
10. To what extent can the State intervene in controlling the use of technology in children, without violating human rights?

Definitions

- **Digital consumption:** Is the sum of information and entertainment media taken in by an individual or group. It includes activities such as interacting with new media, reading books and magazines, watching television and film, and listening to radio.
- **Mental disorder:** Is a behavioral or mental pattern that causes significant distress or impairment of personal functioning. Mental disorders are usually defined by a combination of how a person behaves, feels, perceives, or thinks
 - **Virtual:** Not physically existing as such but made by software to appear to do so.
 - **Socialize:** Participate in social activities; mix socially with others.
 - **Addiction:** The fact or condition of being addicted to a particular substance, thing, or activity.

References

McCarrick, K., & Xiaoming, (2007). Buried treasure: The impact of computer use on young children's social, cognitive, language development and motivation, *AACE Journal*, 15(1), 73-95.

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