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ARTICLE



Conflicts and Displacements in Syria: Exploring Life Trajectories of Separated Refugee Minors

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how unaccompanied refugee children from Syria made their way to destination countries and how they become unaccompanied and the consequences of being unaccompanied. This paper is based on interviews with Syrian child refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan, and aid workers of international organizations who provide support with child refugees. The long-standing conflict has caused Syrian children to suffer immensely, both physically and psychologically. Data show that majority of the children became conflict orphan and left Syria. Some reported that they became separated or unaccompanied from their parents or relatives while crossing the border in the mass exodus. Some parents were arrested and killed in Syria by both the government and combatants. Some children were left alone by their relatives on the border in order to avoid violence in Syria, and some were smuggled into the destinations countries.

KEYWORDS

Conflict; child refugee; Syria; civil war; unaccompanied minors

Introduction

In 10 years (1990–1999) at least 118 armed conflicts (at varying degrees of severity and for myriad of reasons ranging from political to religious) occurred worldwide, involving 80 states and two para-state regions resulting in the death of approximately six million people.¹ Of the 118 armed conflicts, at least 10 were inter-state conflicts (Smith, 2004). Conflict of different forms and scales is on the increase.²

Minors have been known to escape wars and conflicts by travelling unaccompanied, sometimes being left in the hands of smugglers with an aim of seeking asylum in new and safer countries. Some of these children traverse many countries with the journeys being long and hazardous. Such is the case of unaccompanied refugee

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¹S. Da, 'Trends and causes of armed conflict', Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management – Edited version, August 2004.

²B. Kenneth, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), p. 4.3; O. Roderick, 'Conflict theory', in L. Kurtz, ed., *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*. Vol. 1 (London: Academic Press, 1999), p. 402.

minors.³ Wars and conflicts have for many generations driven people out of their home countries and unfortunately, minors and young people are the most affected.⁴ There are many historic examples of groups of children and youngsters who have more or less willingly or by force been made to migrate by themselves in order to escape famine and extreme poverty, war and political turmoil.⁵ Humanitarian contexts such as conflict, population displacement, and natural disasters can often lead to the separation of children from their caregivers. Children may become separated from their families during crises for a variety of reasons: accidentally during the chaos in a disaster; abduction or recruitment into armed forces or armed groups; or when families send children to live with relatives for their own safety, place them in institutional care as a means of accessing resources, or send them to work to supplement household income.⁶

One of the most important contributors to about 60 million refugee volume in the world is conflict of varying scales. Just a decade ago, the number of refugees was about 37 million. Since 2011, the Syrian conflict contributed substantially to this elevated number.⁷ People from all walks of life become victims of conflicts at different levels. Minors are no exception. They in fact are the most brutal victims of the conflicts. About half of the entire refugees around the world are children.⁸ More telling is that over the last decade more than two million children have been killed in conflicts, with a further six million wounded and one million orphaned.⁹

In 2015 alone, 88,245 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in the European countries alone. In May 2016 alone, 3,133 unaccompanied minors migrated to Italy. Many children do not even reach the shores of the European countries and at least 137 children have drowned in the Mediterranean since the start of 2016.¹⁰ Apparently, the global trends for unaccompanied asylum seeking minors sound stable in the past few years. About 17,700 unaccompanied minors sought asylum in 69 different countries as opposed to 15,600 who lodged asylum application in 2010.¹¹ This might

³C. Lodwick, 'Transition from care to independent living: A qualitative study of unaccompanied refugee minors leaving care', Oslo and Akershus: University College of Applied Sciences, 2013.

⁴Ibid.

⁵L. Stretmo, 'Governing the unaccompanied child – media, policy and practice', Doctoral dissertation at the Department of Sociology and Work Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2014.

⁶A. Hepburn, J. Williamson and T. Wolfram, 'Separated Children: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies, Save the Children', 2004.

⁷UNHCR, 'Syria regional refugee response. Inter-agency information sharing portal', Ankara: UNHCR, 2015.

⁸UNHCR, 'Findings from the inter-agency child protection and gender-based violence assessment in the Za'atari refugee camp', Amman: UNHCR, 2013; UNHCR, 'Inter-agency regional response for Syrian refugees: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey', Amman: UNHCR, 2013; UNHCR, 'World refugee day: Global forced displacement tops 50 million for first time in post-world war II era: the global trends 2013 report', Geneva: UNHCR, 2014; UNHCR, 'Syria regional refugee response. Inter-agency information sharing portal', Ankara: UNHCR, 2015; T. Kristina, 'Unaccompanied minors: Rights and protection', *International Journal of Refugee Law* 19(4), (2007), pp. 779–782.

⁹M. Fazel and A. Stein, 'The mental health of refugee children', *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 87, (2002), pp. 366–370; A. Ullah, 'Forced or development induced displacement? Occupied Palestinian territories and international conscience', *Journal of Internal Displacement* 1(1), (2011), pp. 5–17; A. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa: Human Rights, Safety and Identity* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); A. Ullah, 'The price of migration from Bangladesh to distant lands: Narratives of recent tragedies', *Asian Profile* 36(6), (2008), pp. 639–646. UNICEF, 'Syria refugee crisis requires urgent funding to scale up response for children', Geneva: UNICEF, 2012.

¹⁰EUC, 'Children in crisis: unaccompanied migrant children in the EU. House of Lords. 2nd Report of Session 2016–17', HL paper 34, 2016.

¹¹UNHCR, 'UNHCR global trends 2011', available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4fd6f87f9.html>.

however reflect the fact that many of them were not able to get to the point of seeking asylum hence is the lower number than the real.

Syrian conflict – one of the protracted ones the region has witnessed in recent times – is a continuation of the so-called “Arab uprising” which started in 2010 in Tunisia to put an end to authoritarian rule and corruption and to demand liberty, dignity and social justice. The demands turned into violent protests which transcended the borders in the region. These protests generated outcomes ranging from devastating upheavals in the ruling regimes to disgraceful toppling of regimes.¹² While conflict in other countries in the region has quelled to some extent, Syrian conflict continued to accelerate. As a result, as of mid-2016, two-thirds of Syrians have fled Syria. About one-third of the population still remain in Syria as internally displaced (IDPs).¹³

About one-third of the Syrian refugees living outside Syria consist of children which is about 2.5 million. Anecdotes suggest that, so far, amongst these thousands who have sought refuge, more than 20,000 children have crossed into neighboring countries – mostly in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq – without parents or adult relatives¹⁴ i.e. unaccompanied. In order to receive protection afforded by child-specific provisions and international law, minors must be recognized as unaccompanied ones. However, many children arrive in the destination countries without any official documentation. In some cases, their documents get lost or destroyed in the course of their journey; in some other cases, such documentations are not common in their countries of origin.¹⁵

Their vulnerabilities result, in part, from their dependence on adults. Since they are physically and psychologically weaker than adults, they count on adults for care and protection.¹⁶ Vulnerability has got a gender dimension e.g. refugee girls are more vulnerable than refugee boys. This originates from the cultural and social contexts in the region where girls are less valued than boys. As a result, girls are more often subject to neglect and abuse including sexual abuse, assault and exploitation.¹⁷ Violent conflicts around the world involve around 300,000 children, both boys and girls, under the age of 18.¹⁸ Emerging empirical evidences on the micro-level effects of violent conflict have found that in general civil wars have a negative impact on educational attainments of children, if even given an opportunity. The recruitment of child soldiers is another tactic used widely by armies and rebel groups in order to spread fear and

¹²H. Darwisheh, ‘Syria and the Arab Spring: Unraveling the road to Syria’s protracted conflict’, Issue Brief 44, Institute of Developing Economies. Tokyo: Japan External Trade Organization, 2013; A. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa: Human Rights, Safety and Identity* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹³Lets look a bit about the genesis of conflict Syria has been facing. Since the last six decades, Syria underwent a number of coups. The president Bashar Al-Assad’s father Hafez al-Assad joined the Ba’ath party as a student and later became a lieutenant in the Syrian Air Force. After the 1963 coup in Syria, which established Ba’athist, Hafez al-Assad was put in charge in the Syrian Air Force. In 1966, after yet another coup, he became minister of defense and in 1970 he became Prime Minister, and in 1971 he was elected president. Hafez Al Assad was killed about 40,000 civilians in the Hama Massacre in 1982. As Hafez al Assad died in 2000.

¹⁴UNICEF, ‘Syria’s Children: A lost generation? crisis report March 2011–March 2013’, UNICEF: Amman, 2013.

¹⁵S. Kvale and S. Brinkmann, *Inter Views* (2nd ed.) (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

¹⁶A. Ullah, ‘The price of migration from Bangladesh to distant lands: Narratives of recent tragedies’, *Asian Profile* 36(6), (2008), pp. 639–646; A. Enenajor, ‘Rethinking vulnerability: European asylum policy harmonization and unaccompanied asylum seeking minors, report’, Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008.

¹⁷K. Koser, ‘Asylum policies, trafficking and vulnerability’, *International Migration*, Special Issue 1, (2000), pp. 91–111; UNHCR, ‘Refugee children: Guidelines on protection and care’, Geneva: UNHCR, 1994.

¹⁸C. Blattman and J. Annan. 2007. ‘The consequences of child soldiering’, HiCN Working Paper 22, (2007), *Households in Conflict Network; World Bank Report, ‘Reshaping the future- Education and post-conflict reconstruction’, World Bank: Washington, 2005.*

reduce resistance amongst local populations. Children in armies are used as fighters, porters, messengers, cooks and are often forced to provide sexual services.¹⁹

A heartbreaking picture of an unaccompanied four-year-old boy fleeing Syria was found crossing the desert alone received wide media coverage. Surprisingly, the boy made his way across the border into Jordan with a plastic bag. However, all potential refugees from Syria did not find the doors of their neighbors open. Border relationship depends on management of ties with neighboring countries. This again depends on how foreign policy is shaped by respective government with their neighbors, hence political and diplomatic relationship determine whether or not doors will be open for people in need of humanitarian assistance.²⁰

The assumption that all children should be accompanied by adults has not been the case for thousands of Syrian children. Chances have been very high that they would be slipped into traffickers easily in the crowd of many flocking to the border to cross. Hence there remains some important questions to explore: who are the unaccompanied minors and why and how they become unaccompanied? What basic protections are they entitled to by law? What would be the long-term consequence of being unaccompanied? What responses receiving governments should have to address this issue? Why child refugees are more vulnerable than other refugees? It is relevant to look at the map of Syria to understand the level of struggle the minors go through to get the borders. Syria shares border with five countries (Iraq, 599 km; Israel, 83 km, Jordan, 379; Lebanon, 403 and Turkey, 899 km). All the countries on the border has spill over effect of Syrian conflict except Israel. As the conflict in Syria enters its 7th year, Israel remains Syria's only neighbor not accepting a single refugee fleeing the conflict in Syria.²¹

Objectives and Methodology

The ongoing conflict in Syria has triggered massive outflows of refugees, predominantly to neighboring countries. Media and research attention has been accorded primarily on the scale of the violence and warring factions. However, way less attention has been accorded to the plight of the minors than it deserves. Each of these children has witnessed, or been a victim of horrific levels of violence in Syria. This paper aims at exploring the ways how unaccompanied refugee minors made their way to destination countries and how they become unaccompanied. This as well delves into the consequences of being unaccompanied after they crossed the border of Syria.

In view of the nature of the aim of the research, interviews were chosen. A research interview is an attempt to "understand, the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. Interviews have also been done with people working with these children

¹⁹USAID, 'Role of Education and the Demobilization of Child Soldiers', Issue Paper #1. Washington, DC: US Agency for International Development, 2007.

²⁰A. Ullah and S.N.H. Alkaff, 'Biological remittance among migrant workers: Social ramifications in the Philippines and Indonesia', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53(1), (2018), pp. 1–21.

²¹B. White, 'Israel keeps making, not taking, more refugees', *Middle East Eye*, (2015), available at: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/israel-s-ethnocracy-closes-door-syrian-refugees-408109104> (accessed 12 June 2017).

(UNHCR, IOM, and International humanitarian NGOs such as MSF, ICRC) since their perspectives gives a holistic picture of unaccompanied minors.

These organizations have been working on the ground in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. We interviewed 34 (12 in Egypt; eight in Lebanon (from Shatila camp); seven in Turkey (Osmaniye camp); seven in Jordan (Jaatari camp) separated children and a total of 12 officials and aid workers from MSF, IOM, UNHCR. I relied on snow-ball and convenient sampling technique for selecting the respondents. In order to administer interview a well-designed checklist was used. A field test of the checklist was conducted to check if there was any redundant question. Some six interviews with officials were conducted in person and some were on telephone. The author personally conducted the interviews in Egypt, and recruited research assistants in other fields for interviews. Most answers from unaccompanied minors came in Arabic. They were later transcribed into English.

Since researching on unaccompanied minors is a sensitive issue, the informants has received a copy of their answers from the interview, to make sure that the correct answers would be used in the research. As secondary data source, I used relevant information, reports, studies, statistics etc. about the topic on different organization websites, such as, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) websites.

The study went through ethical review because this involves human subjects. Ethical considerations are very important in doing any research work. Before conducting the interviews, every effort was made in ensuring that the prospective interviewees fully understood what they were getting into. The interviewees were informed that they could stop the interview altogether or that they could choose not to answer any question that they deemed uncomfortable. During the actual interview they were asked whether they understood what the interview was about and they were also encouraged to ask questions when there was something that they did not understand. The participants were also assured confidentiality in the whole process.

Theoretical Underpinning of Conflict, Displacement and Unaccompanied Minors

Conflict does not arise in a vacuum, but in a context, local, regional, or international, a context that may be changing over time. Conflicts that started in Arab region have taken a devastating shape in Syria. The scale of it has today transcended regional boundary and reached to international scale. Political and social geographers, political scientists, conflict researchers, and scholars contend that understanding of space is important in order to reflect the conditions, dynamics, and effects of conflict more precisely.²² A few researches conducted research on the causes of armed conflict focused on international conflict before 1990.²³ This is remarkable, because, since at least 1945, civil or internal conflicts have been more common than international or

²²S. Chojnacki and B. Engels, 'Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethno Political Conflicts', SFB-Governance Working Paper Series, No. 55, Collaborative Research Center 700, Berlin, 2013.

²³T.D. Gurr, 'Minorities at risk: a global view of ethno political conflicts', (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003); D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); A. Rapoport, *The Origins of Violence: Approaches to the Study of Conflict* (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1989).

inter-state conflicts.²⁴ Since 1990, however, there has been an impressive growth in the scope of scholarly research and literature on the causes of armed conflicts that are not between two or more established states.²⁵ War or conflict is possible as soon as weapons are available with which to fight it and as long as there is a dispute between two or more parties.²⁶

Conflict can take place anytime between persons, groups, organizations and nations due to myriad of reasons of disagreements. The last century survived in two Great World War and many regional wars. Unfortunately, the new millennium started with many acts of terrorism and wars. Latest in this row was Syrian conflicts, Iraq and Afghanistan wars. A classic understanding of conflict is a dynamic phenomenon, one actor is reacting to what another actor is doing, which leads to further action.²⁷ Contexts of conflicts in different countries and times are different as well. Conflicts in general between opposing parties are differences of opinion and interest. Relative deprivation, dissatisfaction of basic needs, failure of organizational functions, asymmetric power relations and dominant social structures are as well seen as factors generating conflict.²⁸ Each conflict has its own peculiarities and their qualities are different. The intention is not to demonstrate different types of conflicts (individual conflict; class conflict; social conflict; religious conflict; ethnic conflict; political conflict; international conflict and economic conflict).

Conflict theory is about explaining the general contours of conflict scientifically in society e.g. how conflict starts and varies, and the impact it brings in the short and long run. The central concerns of conflict theory are the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power.²⁹ Class conflict is the tension or antagonism which exists in society due to competing socioeconomic interests and desires between people of different classes. The basis of this argument is that capitalism would produce its own gravediggers by creating the conditions under which class consciousness and a failing economy would come into existence.³⁰ From an opposing view, conflict does not involve the economy much, but that the state and economy together set up conditions for conflict.³¹ A conflict is a kind of system whose complexity stems from many different and sometimes unrelated elements. On the one side, there are the parties involved in the conflict.³² Two major factors may contribute to violent conflict: emotional involvement and transcendent goals. My analysis, however, does not take this path. Available literature demonstrates various factors for violence, mass killings, genocide and terrorism. Evidences suggest that under particular circumstances most people

²⁴D. Singer, 'Armed conflict in the former colonial regions: From classification to explanation', 1996.

²⁵J.A. Vasquez, 'The steps to war: Toward a scientific explanation of correlates of war findings', *World Politics* 40(1), (1987), pp. 108–145.

²⁶D. Welch, *Justice and the Genesis of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁷K. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963).

²⁸H. Jeong, 'Theories of conflict', in L. Kurtz, ed., *Encyclopedia of Violence Peace and Conflict*. Vol. 3 (London: Academic Press, 1999).

²⁹D.P. Barash and C.P. Webel, *Peace and Conflict Studies* (New Delhi: Sage Publication India Pvt. Ltd, 2002).

³⁰C. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

³¹M. Hugh, R. Oliver and W. Tom, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (USA: Black Well Publishing Inc. and Polity Press, 1999).

³²G. Gallo, 'Conflict theory, complexity and systems approach', *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 30(2), (2012), pp. 156–175.

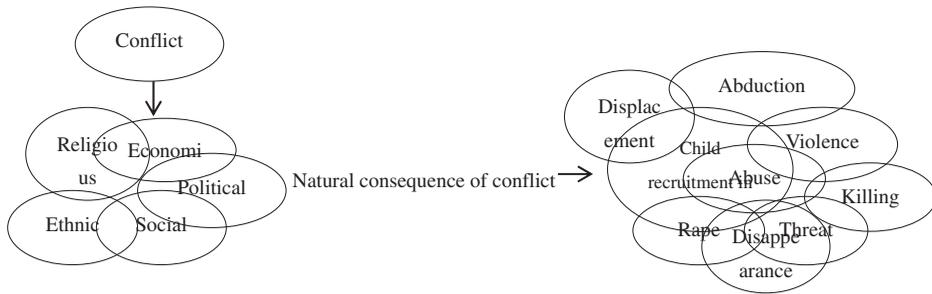


Figure 1. Interplay between conflict and displacement.

have the capacity to engage in extreme violence and destruction of human life.³³ As nations or societies were attacked or threatened they tend to take defensive measures.³⁴

Violent conflict is the most significant challenge for peace facing the world today. The economic, political and social consequences of civil wars are enormous.³⁵ Conflict results in displacement of population, destruction of capital and infrastructure, disruption of schooling, damages to the social fabric, civil liberties endangered, and creation of health and famine crises. The fear that is created by conflict plays an important part in explaining the displacement of children from their own soil. In contexts of violent conflict, rape and other sexual violence have become a common weapon amongst rival groups.³⁶

Without a doubt, since the WWII armed conflicts within states have been on the increase, and they surged after the end of the cold war,³⁷ undertaken by organized armed groups against their governments or other groups with guerrilla tactics, bombings, hostage taking, and population expulsion.³⁸ Political conflict is perhaps too broad of an issue, too complex of a problem, and too far beyond our capacity to comprehend and handle. Yet, given our current state of knowledge, I make effort demarcate conceptual domains in order to identify the factors responsible for political conflicts.³⁹

³³C. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); S. Atran, 'The surprises of suicide terrorism', *Discover* 24(10), (2003); E. Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); M. Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³⁴R. Hinde, *The Psychological Bases of War*. Condensed version of a paper presented at the TISS-sponsored Study of War Conference in June 1997 at (Wheaton, IL, 1997), available at: http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/AD_Issues/amdipl_7/hinde.html

³⁵L. Harbom and W. Peter, 'Armed conflicts 1946-2008', *Journal of Peace Research* 46(4), (2009), pp. 577-587.

³⁶Integrated regional information networks (IRIN), *Our bodies, their battleground: Gender-based violence in conflict zones*, IRIN Web Special on violence against women and girls during armed conflict, 2004.

³⁷J. Hewitt, J. Joseph, W. Jonathan and R. Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2008* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2008).

³⁸M. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); J. Balencie and G. Arnaud, *Les Nouveaux Mondes Rebelles, Conflits, Terrorismes et Contestations* (Paris: Michalon, 2005).

³⁹M. Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); P. Collier, V.L. Elliott, H. Hegre, A. Hoeffler, M. Reynal-Querol and N. Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap, Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2003); J. Hewitt, J. Joseph, W. Jonathan and R. Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2008* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2008); J. Fearon, *Why do some Civil Wars Last Longer than Others?* (Political Science Dept, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, 2003); D. McAdam, T. Sidney and T. Charles, *The Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); C. Tilly and T. Sidney, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder CO: Paradigm, 2007); S. Tarrow, *Power in Movements: Social Movements and Contemporary Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).



Figure 2. Vulnerability of child refugees.

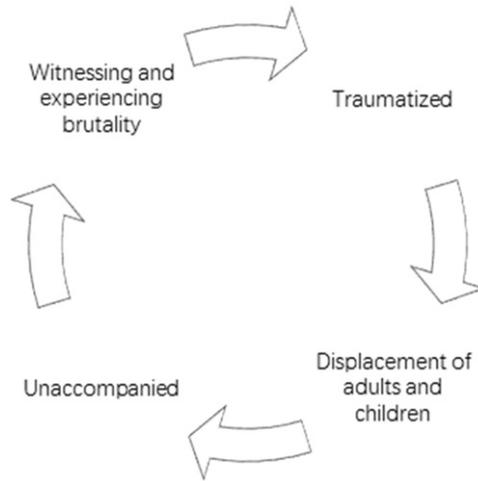


Figure 3. Trauma and displacement.

Consequential facts of conflict are displacement (acute, anticipatory refugees or IDPs). Every single citizen is affected by conflict. In case the government is involved in conflict, the people on government side is less affected as they enjoy state protection. Children become the primary victims and girl children are the most targeted among the victims.

Globally, the scale of displacement is staggering. Displacement involves physical eviction from a dwelling and the expropriation of productive land and other assets to make possible an alternative use.⁴⁰ Hyndmann offered a deeper explanation that displacement is forced and involuntary involving some form of de-territorialization which is a result of multiple factors such as natural and human-made disasters, ethnic or

⁴⁰T. Downing, *Avoiding New Poverty: Mining-Induced Displacement And Resettlement* (London: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), 2002); A.K.M.A. Ullah, *Refugee Politics In The Middle East And North Africa: Human Rights, Safety and Identity* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Table 1. Gender and age distribution of child refugees.

Destination countries	Male (% of the total)	Female (% of the total)
Egypt	9 (26)	3 (9)
Lebanon	5 (15)	3 (9)
Turkey	5 (15)	2 (6)
Jordan	4 (12)	3 (9)
Total	23	11
Age	f	%
7–10	7	21
11–14	18	53
15–18	9	26

Source: Field data, 2013–14.

religious persecution, development, and conflict.⁴¹ Macro factors are more dominant than meso ones in forced displacements and the levels of which usually corresponds to the level of violence and conflict in the country of origin.⁴² Any kind of displacement involves stressful and painful experience. The most stressful period is the early phases – the period leading up to the relocation, the transfer itself and the first few years of adjustment. They flee their home countries that were overtaken by violent conflict and are forced to settle where they are generally unwanted and have often been left to fend for themselves.

These displacees could be divided into three distinct groups, according to Kunz.⁴³ “Those refugees whose opposition to political and social events at home is shared by their compatriots, both refugees and those who remain in home areas, are called majority identified refugees. Refugees who have left their home areas because of active discrimination against the group to which they belong, frequently retain little interest in what occurs in their former homes once they have left. These refugees, who feel irreconcilably alienated from their fellow citizens, they are events related refugees. A third type of refugee includes people who decided to leave their home country for a variety of individual reasons. These self-alienated refugees feel alienated from their society not by any active policy of that society, but rather by some personal philosophy.” These categories imply that the level of trauma is contingent on in part who these displacees are.

In their traumatic experiences model, Fazel and Stein⁴⁴ mentioned three stages in the whole process of migration of a refugee and the degree of trauma at different levels (a) in their country of origin they experienced considerable trauma of varied kinds and levels which forced them to flee their homes, and exposure to war or combat and hence witnessed violence, torture, and losses of close family and friends; (b) during the flight to safety meaning on the way to destinations whereon they can face further

⁴¹A.K.M.A. Ullah, ‘Rohingya refugee to Bangladesh: Historical exclusions and contemporary marginalization’, *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee studies* 9(2), (2010), pp. 139–168; K. Koser, *Asylum Policies, Trafficking and Vulnerability*. *International Migration* 1, (2000), pp. 91–111.

⁴²T. Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴³E. Kunz, ‘Exile and resettlement: Refugee theory’, *International Migration Review* 15, (1981), pp. 42–51.

⁴⁴M. Fazel and A. Stein, *The mental health of refugee children*, *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 87, (2002), pp. 366–370.

Table 2. Routes taken (multiple responses).

Routes	Means	Approximate time taken	% (n = 34)
Syria to Turkey			
Idlib-Hatay	Vehicle, walk	1–5 days	2.9
Manbij-Gaziantep	Vehicle, walk	1–6 days	2.9
Al-Qamishli-Sanliurfa	Vehicle, walk	1–5 days	2.9
Idlib-Mediterranean sea-Adana	Vehicle, boat, walk	2–15 days	2.9
Idlib-Mediterranean sea-Silifke	Vehicle, boat, walk	2–16 days	2.9
Jabalah-Mediterranean sea-Anamur	Vehicle, boat, walk	2–10 days	2.9
Latakia-Mediterranean sea-Anamur	Vehicle, boat, walk	2–12 days	2.9
Syria to Jordan			
As-Suwayda-Jordan	Vehicle, walk	1–5 days	5.8
Dara- Jordan	Vehicle, walk	1–10 days	2.9
As-Salihyah-Jordan	Vehicle, walk	1–8 days	5.8
Imtan-Jordan	Vehicle, walk	2–7 days	5.8
Syria to Egypt			
Dara-Jordan-Red Sea-Egypt	Vehicle, Boat, walk	2–15 days	8.82
Imtan-Jordan-Red Sea-Egypt	Vehicle, Boat, walk	1–15 days	17.65
Masayaf-Mediterranean Sea-Egypt	Vehicle, Boat, walk	1–8 days	8.82
Syria to Lebanon			
Hims-Lebanon	Vehicle, walk	1–7 days	2.9
Tartuz-Lebanon	Vehicle, walk	1–10 days	2.9
An-nabk- Lebanon	Vehicle, walk	2–6 days	2.9
Damascus-Lebanon	Vehicle, walk	2–5 days	5.8
Dara-Lebanon	Vehicle, walk	2–4 days	2.9
Tartuz-(through boat in Mediterranean Sea)- Lebanon	Vehicle, boat, walk	2–11 days	5.8

Source: Survey 2014.

vulnerabilities. It can take many months and expose the refugees to more life-threatening dangers. Refugee minors at these times experience separation from parents, either by accident or as a strategy to ensure their safety; and (c) at the last stage which is in the resettling country where they face additional difficulties such as proving their asylum claims and integration in the new environment (⁴⁵; see also ⁴⁶).

Figure 2 provides a framework for conceptualizing these risk factors. Most of the children were still anxious, saddened, and physically weak. Moreover, consistent research findings show that as the number of risk factors accumulates for children, the likelihood that they would develop psychological disturbance dramatically.⁴⁷ Beiser and Wickrama's⁴⁸ argument that nostalgia is linked to depression in forced migrants, self-discrepancy theory⁴⁹ offers an explanation that are relevant to the cases of refugee minors.

Unaccompanied minors: The UNHCR defines unaccompanied minors as “those who are separated from both parents, and are not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom is responsible to do so”.⁵⁰ Therefore, as earlier defined, unaccompanied

⁴⁵A.K.M.A. Ullah, *Refugee Politics In The Middle East and North Africa: Human Rights, Safety and Identity* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁴⁶Amnesty International, *Children at Risk of Torture, Death in Custody and 'Disappearance'* (London: Amnesty International, 1996).

⁴⁷M. Fazel and A. Stein, The mental health of refugee children, *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 87, (2002), pp. 366–370.

⁴⁸M. Beiser and K.A.S. Wickrama, Trauma, time and mental health: a study of temporal reintegration and depressive disorder among Southeast Asian refugees, *Psychological Medicine*, 34, (2004), pp. 899–910.

⁴⁹P.J. Higgins, ed., *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, Vol. 4 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁰UNHCR, *Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care* (Geneva: UNHCR, 1994).

refugee minors are “persons below 18 years, not accompanied by their parents, who have applied for asylum and granted residence in resettlement countries based on this application”. These two definitions offer more of legal description rather than experiential i.e. they explain who the unaccompanied refugee minors are in a legal sense rather than their individual experiences as refugees.⁵¹

All such children are separated and entitled to international protection under a broad range of international and regional instruments. Separated minors may be seeking asylum because of fear of persecution or the lack of protection due to human rights violations, armed conflict or disturbances in their own country. They may be the victims of trafficking for sexual or other exploitation, or they may have travelled to other countries to escape conditions of serious deprivation.⁵² How they migrate unaccompanied from one country to another without the assistance of someone? In this circumstance, smugglers work transnationally in an organized network for the minors to help cross the borders.⁵³ Over the years, this definition has been tailored, especially with the creation of the Separated Children in Europe Program (SCEP), in order to encompass the unaccompanied minors in Europe.⁵⁴ In this study, I used child definition of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): “every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless, under the law applicable to that child, the majority is attained earlier” (Article 1, UNCRC).⁵⁵

Factors of Un-accompaniment and Making it to the Destinations

Syrian children have been exposed to grave human rights violation including sexual violence, maiming, killing, torture, arbitrary detention, and force recruitment in armed groups since the beginning of conflicts inflicted in Syria.⁵⁶ These minors are already defenseless and their vulnerability worsens in unaccompanied conditions. Why these minors had to leave without their parents or relatives to unknown destinations? Amongst the major reasons, the death of their caregivers – parents or any responsible adult – through the ongoing violent clashes was the most cited one. One important factor why they left their country on their own was that their well-wishers facilitated them to leave to avoid being recruited by armed groups in Syria. Some children left as their parents who were deployed in armed conflicts, wanted them to leave the country in anyway as their future became extremely dangerous. In their research,⁵⁷

⁵¹K. Halvorsen, *Alone and far from home: Are separated refugee children adequately protected?* Human Rights Review 7(1), (2005), pp. 76–91; T. Kinch, ‘Linking invisibility and vulnerability: Protecting refugee children from Bhutan to Nepal’, in A.K.M.A. Ullah and A. Ragsag, eds., *Listening to Asia from the Atlantic: Migrants, Trafficked and Refugee Populations* (Bonn: VDM Publications, 2008), pp. 63–72.

⁵²T. Smith, *Separated Children in Europe: Policies and Practices in European Union Member States – A Comparative Analysis*, Refugee Studies Centre, Save the Children, 2003.

⁵³UNHCR, ‘UNHCR global trends 2011’, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4fd6f87f9.html>.

⁵⁴A. Anderson, ‘Resilience’, Chapter 4, in R. Hamilton and D. Moore, eds., *Educational Interventions for Refugee Children: Theoretical Perspectives and Implementing Best Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁵UNHCR, *A Framework for the Protection of Children*, (Geneva: UNCHR, 2012). Accessed on 14 January 2015 available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/50f6cf0b9.html>

⁵⁶UNICEF, ‘Syria refugee crisis requires urgent funding to scale up response for children’, Geneva: UNICEF, 2012.

⁵⁷J. Boyden and J. Hart, ‘The statelessness of the world’s children, introduction to the special issue of children & society: Asylum seeking and refugee children: Local and global perspectives’, *Children and Society* 21(4), (2007), pp. 237–248.

found similar findings that some parents asked their children to follow the people leaving the country. They just said 'leave the country as you can to save your life'.

Every single the separated child did not necessarily leave the country unaccompanied. In most cases, the minors became unaccompanied after or when they crossed the borders. Some of the minors told us that they made the 'decision' to leave Syria on their own and some left with the help of traffickers (either voluntarily or under duress). Many of the minors migrated with relatives and neighbors and some with aid workers. Some of them said that they were walking along the people moving toward borders in groups and they merged in the group at some point and crossed the border. Most groups were headed by parents or adults bringing several children and all their possessions out of Syrian border. Thousands of the refugees flock at the gates of certain borders and wait for the gates to open. When the gates open, there is always a crush as desperate refugees surge forward. Thus, every day, children get slipped out of their parents or guardians. This is an important point where they get separated.

The orphans and children of economically poor families became the target of the combatants to recruit in armed groups, though some minors volunteered to join for survival. They were used in support duties, such as cooks, porters, messengers and spies of armed groups. At some point of time, some of them managed to flee.

In conflict situation, traffickers, gangs and other illegal agents become active to take advantage of. I revealed during our research that two of the respondents claimed that they were trapped by smugglers and got rid of them at some point of their journey with the help of some aid workers and compatriots. Many of them arrived at the destinations with the help of traffickers or paid smugglers. A few of the minors said to us that they have attempted to migrate through immigration checkpoints. In his research,⁵⁸ found similar situation that some children presented false documents (prepared for them either by relatives or smugglers) to border officials, or arrive in desperation with no documents at all.

Journeys to destination countries could be categorized into three types: most dangerous, dangerous and moderately dangerous. They journeyed on foot to seek safety across the border in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. We knew from the aid workers (from UNHCR, MSF, IOM) that on the way to destinations, many of the minors were slipped into the hands of smugglers and traffickers. Most of those who were trafficked were unaware of where they were going to end up, while some others managed to end up in refugee camps with the help of volunteers and aid workers. This study revealed that soldiers, militiamen and unscrupulous people often stole their belongings which made their journey even more dangerous *en route*.

Many of the minors left Syria as their homes were entirely damaged, and parents and or relatives were killed or they left the country beforehand. Some parents (who were still alive) wanted their children to leave the country by any means. One of the important reasons for this was that they did not want their children to be militarized. In some other cases, children risked travelling alone because they hoped that they could reunite with their family members in the destination countries. Some families returned to Syria leaving their children abroad to their relatives. Seven (21 per cent) of

⁵⁸A. Levinson, *Unaccompanied Immigrant Children: A Growing Phenomenon with Few Easy solutions*, Feature (Washington: MPI, Migration Policy Institute, 2011).

the minors got separated from their families at the border when they altogether tried to cross the border and the minors got lost in the crowd. In five (15 per cent) cases, they got separated as children and parents tried to cross the border and they were not allowed in at the same time. Some others escaped because they used to live in orphanages in Syria or in hostels of schools or were in child labor. Eight of the children left the country after their parents went missing or got killed, and with the help of relatives, neighbors or aid worker. Two of them feared that they would be forced recruited in armed groups because some of their relatives were recruited in armed groups by force. Some children feared being arrested for having family members fighting with either the armed opposition groups or with the Syrian regime. The following table provides an idea about the routes and time they took to get to their destinations. We assumed from their narratives that the children were not so sure about the routes they took.

Consequences

Research suggests that asylum-seeking and refugee minors are at an increased risk of adverse developmental outcomes including academic underachievement, externalizing and internalizing social, emotional and behavioural problems.⁵⁹ For many unaccompanied minors "vulnerability arises through coming face to face with traumatic events."⁶⁰ Unaccompanied minors are the most vulnerable group within the refugee population due to the fact that they experience these risk factors without the emotional and physical support of parents.⁶¹ Lack of parents or primary caregiver is a significant risk factor for heightened experience of stress and anxiety.

The displacements of the minors have taken a tremendous toll on them. Particularly because they had to move out suddenly to save their life. Most children we met and talked appeared very tensed due to the fact that they were not sure if they would ever be able to be reunited with their parents. They were already psychologically traumatized because of what they witnessed: killing, violence and being uprooted. This has long standing impact on the mental state of the minors.⁶² Some children became 2nd and 3rd time displaced as they used to live in refugee camps in Syria, who were mostly Palestinians⁶³ and left for Jordan and Turkey again. This study revealed that most of the children, apart from separation anxiety, still felt unsafe in the countries of destinations. This is primarily because the memories of the gruesome experiences still haunt them. The fear has become that powerful that they become

⁵⁹A. Anderson, 'Resilience', Chapter 4, in R. Hamilton and D. Moore, eds., *Educational Interventions for Refugee Children: Theoretical Perspectives and Implementing Best Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁶⁰R. Kohli and R. Mather, 'Promoting psychosocial well-being in unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in the UK', *Child and Family Social Work* 8, (2003), pp. 201–212.

⁶¹P. Hopkins and M. Hill, 'The needs and strengths of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people in Scotland', *Child and Family Social Work* 15, (2010), pp. 399–408; J. Rutter, *Supporting Refugee Children in 21st Century Britain* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2001).

⁶²D. Ajdukovic and M. Ajdukovic, 'Psychological well-being of refugee children', *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 17, (1993), pp. 843–854.

⁶³A. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa: Human Rights, Safety and Identity* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

scared when they see any police or armed forces or unknown people. They get startled when they hear any sound and when they meet any new face.

Of the respondents interviewed in the Lebanese camp, one of them was diagnosed with the autistic syndrome. She was 11 years old. Minors with this syndrome are in need of their parents more than anyone else. She was indifferent in expressing her demand and need. It was good at least, she could not remember the ordeals she went through in her country. She was totally dependent on others for her mobility, food, bathing, clothing, and for her personal safety. She did not go anywhere, visited anyone nor did she talk to anyone since she arrived. People around her stay away as they were afraid that she might hurt others.

Two of the respondents who were single and in their teens were pregnant. It was understandable that they were raped while in Syria. As many as 19 (56 per cent) of the children had no idea what happened to the fate of their parents; eight of them (24 per cent) said their mothers might be still alive and the rest were not sure. These children have suffered 'multiple burden' as a result of conflict and loss of or separation from their parents. Many children were captured by some group of people (may be armed groups). They did not have any idea who they were. As they were captured they went through solitary confinement while naked and blindfolded. They routinely experienced beatings, electric shocks, and hosing with cold water. Also, in countries of destinations, discrimination and harassment in the streets and schools; lack of safe spaces to gather and play; child labour/exploitation; education related protection risks; food, nutrition and health related were common problems.

One respondent (about 13 years) from Jaatari refugee camp in Jordan was tearing as he remembered what he experienced in Syria and en route to destination. He was left alone for two days on debris of their damaged house after his father was killed and mother missing. "I thought I was dying. I wanted to shout but was scared of shouting. I guess I fainted. I discovered myself in a kiosk where one person offered me a piece of bread and water. I followed them. They helped me a lot. I am here. I am not sure where my mother is"

Another respondent (14) in Egypt shared how she was injured when their home was destroyed by bombings. She raised her pajama to show the scar on her leg. She was staying with a family that was as well from Syria. But they did not know each other before. The woman who was taking care of her whispered with anxiety to the interviewer that she was pregnant. Her pregnancy was the reason for headache. She (the woman) realized that the girl was raped in Syria.

One boy of 11 years old who arrived a couple of weeks ago to Jaatari camp in Jordan was still crying for his parents. In his sleep, he calls his friends. He did not eat anything for a couple of days except some water. He has been very weak. He has been starving since he left the border. He was given some cookies in the last 20 hours and some water.

Unaccompanied minors can of course access to food, basic support,⁶⁴ shelter and psychosocial support⁶⁵ as soon as they get to refugee camps. During the interview

⁶⁴S. Kidane, *Food, Shelter and Half a Chance: Assessing the Needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children* (London: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, 2001).

⁶⁵UNICEF, 'Syria's Children: A lost Generation? Crisis Report March 2011–March 2013, UNICEF: Amman, 2013.

[taken after two months of his arrival] he looked very blank and pale. He perhaps thought we were there to take him back to his parents. He started crying as we left after the interview was over. "Where are my parents? My younger brother ...?"

Among the respondents in Egypt, two of them who left Syria were brothers. They were fortunate to be leaving together from Syria. They ended up in Egypt with the help of aid workers and being taken care of by an international NGO. They have already started their schooling though they lost one year while in Syria. They lived in a kind of safe home. They go to school every morning, but only if their caretaker doesn't need them for household chores.

One respondent (11 years) in Turkey mentioned that he never thought that he would survive. He was in his school in Syria. Suddenly, the school compound rocked and became very dark, dusty and smoky. People were running in every direction. He was run over in stampede and discovered himself in a local hospital. His parents did not come to see him though some school teachers did. The day before he was released from the hospital, his relatives told him that his parents were no more.

"... I wanted to kill myself. I fled my relative's house and hovered around for a couple of days. I cried and shed tears on the streets. Realized many people were leaving the country. I joined them. On the way so many times we were intercepted by armed people. We were released though. I knew that the trip would be dangerous and that I might die on the way, but if I stayed home, I was certain to die ..."

There are many instances of adolescent girls being conscripted into armies to look after the troops in more ways than just cooking and cleaning. Rape as a crime of war is not restricted to adult women. One of the respondents in Lebanon (girl of 12 years old) still shivers when she is reminded of her past days in Syria. She was abducted and forced to join a combatant group. During her training, she was raped many times. She was still suffering trauma. Girls are ideal for the purpose because they require little training to be able to discharge the ubiquitous lightweight assault rifle.

"... I used to be beaten up routinely and mercilessly. I cried and cried. I cried to go to my parents. I was released at some point and I rushed to the direction of our home. But I was unable to locate anything. Then some people brought me here ..."

Refugee children suffer both from the effects of coming from a conflict zone and of adjusting to an unfamiliar culture. There are evidences that refugee children are at significant risk of developing psychological disturbance as they are subject to a number of risk factors. They were supposed to have their normal life. They were forced to endure hunger, psychological distress, horrific violence and fear.

"... I was having fever. I was given a few cookies, a banana and a bottle of water. I was not sure about the location where I was. I asked for medicine but none paid heed to me. They were talking to themselves that I had temperature because I was scared. I had a few sips of water and fell sleep. Around midnight, I was raped. The day after I was raped. While training was going on, rape happened on regular basis. A few months I was kind of captive. One day the house we were staying was captured by military (perhaps government). Most combatants were killed and I was rescued. I pleaded them that they help return to my home. They did not listen to me. They left me on the side of a street. Far way from the place I was rescued. I followed the people walking toward somewhere! Here I am now"

One aid worker who rescued an unaccompanied boy (10) was sharing his experience with the boy. The boy was lamenting as he remembered his lost sister. He managed to escape the strife but somehow his sister got lost. Though he was physically well, eating well but he could not forget about his sister. He was found to talk on his own about his sister. Clearly, he could not attend to his school until he could forget about his sister.

“... I am not sure where my sister is. She was only 5 years old in 2013. We used to play together. I do not know ...”

“When we picked her she was hungry, dehydrated and exhausted. She was not talking but looking in the blank. I rushed her to a doctor who suspected that she was raped. That traumatized her. Doctor checked and confirmed that she was raped. She was shy of disclosing the fact. She needed medical treatment, psychological support and at the same time we had to ensure her that we were her close ones. I tried to make her understand that she needed treatment for that. She began to cry. As time passes, she was getting better but still out of her mind.”

“... we are really not sure how they are going to cope with what they experienced in their such a young age. If they ever meet their parents, hope they can forget the scar they had in their mind and heart ...”.

Family is what the minors miss the most. Being away from their families is one of the things that they express to be the hardest when we asked them about their life, in general. The future seems to be what keeps them going, the thoughts of a better tomorrow is seen as a stronghold in their lives. However, some of them had a retrospective way of defining their current life situation by comparing with the life that they had before. This comparison of how things were before and their current situation is very significant to understanding the group of minors in this study. One of them made a comparison with the kind of life in their home country.

Conclusions

There is no precise figure about the number of minors who have left without any parent or adult relatives and how many of these minors were orphaned or have finally reunited at some point of time with their families. Separations continue to occur as conflicts continue in Syria. Separation from family brings devastating consequence to children. These separated children are from a range of socioeconomic background with different religious and cultural orientations. They carry multiple psychological and physical burdens such as anxiety from separation from family members; traumatic experience they suffered in their country and enroute. Those who left unaccompanied endured life threatening pains and risk on their journey. They have been experiencing psychosocial stress as a result of the conflicts, and many face persistent threats of varied kinds of diseases.⁶⁶

⁶⁶UNICEF, Silent Threat Emerging among Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon, Report (Lebanon: UNICEF, 2014).

There is no denying that Syrian children are in an urgent humanitarian situation which has ignited a vigorous debate between advocates for refugees and humanitarian organizations and the receiving governments. While there can be multiple reasons that a child leaves his or her country, children from Syria consistently cite life threatening violence as a prime motivation for migrating followed by poverty and family reunification.

The camps are generally considered a safer place for the refugees than living outside. An overwhelming majority of Syrians live outside the camps in all destinations. In Egypt, however, all Syrians live outside of refugee camps because there are no refugee camps in Egypt. For other destinations such as Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, some well-off anticipatory refugees rented houses and some others were staying with relatives and many landed in slums. Those who started schooling (especially in Egypt and Jordan) are performing poorly as a result of their anxiety. In refugee camps, at least there are health services, schools and psychological rehabilitation services. However, in Egypt there are no refugee camps. Unaccompanied minors were taken care of by some Syrians. They are not in a position to provide those services.

These children of course are entitled to international protection under a range of international human rights laws, international refugee laws, international humanitarian laws and various regional and domestic instruments.⁶⁷ A lot of efforts are being made by UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, and other INGOs such as ICRC, MSF as well as national agencies to address the protection needs of separated and unaccompanied minors in and from Syria. It is still quite insufficient.

The haunting image of little Aylan Kurdi sleeping peacefully on the beach in Bodrum just hours after he drowned and washed up on the shore while trying to reach Europe from Syria with his family has made many to shed tears. The news on a four-year-old Syrian girl who surrendered to a photographer when she mistook the man's camera for a gun bled heart of many. A picture was taken at the Atmen refugee camp on Syria's border with Turkey in December 2014, that shows the young girl was frozen in fear with her arms raised and her lips tightly pursed. These children are distressed, shocked, tired, hungry, wounded and uncertain about what to do.

The picture is complicated which implies that addressing this population is also complicated. Some of the children reported to have been tortured and raped, some children got pregnant as a result of being raped. Some children became conflict orphan and left Syria. Some became separated or unaccompanied from their parents or relatives while crossing the border in the mass exodus. Some parents were arrested in Syria by the government. Some children were left alone by their relatives on the border in order to avoid violence, and some were smuggled into destination country. These facts demand that NGOs, aid workers and UNHCR take all these facts into consideration to better address the cause of the children. As conflict becomes longstanding one, they should be well equipped accordingly to rescue unaccompanied minors from further dangers.

They demand specialized protection which may include psychological rehabilitation; health and other basic needs, education and food security and safety. It is like they

⁶⁷K. Halvorsen, 'Alone and far from home: Are separated refugee children adequately protected?' Human Rights Review 7(1), (2005), pp. 76–91.

fell from one kind of vulnerability in their own country to another kind in destination country. Identification and registration of children including follow up and referral services for medical, psychosocial care and school enrolment are conducted by UNHCR, UNICEF, MSF and IRC. They keep on trying to reunite with families or finding out a foster family, as a last option they try to resettle them.⁶⁸

Child's best interest should receive the top priority when it comes to refugee children and all neighboring countries irrespective of their political interest and disinterest should share the responsibility of children to who politics is immaterial. A child without family protection is at greater risk of being exploited, abused and may find it hard to cope. Therefore, organizations working for these population should concentrate their efforts on the purpose of reunifying the unaccompanied and separated children with their parents, where possible, and to providing protection and alternative care in the meantime. The plight of separated children has emerged as one of the most pressing issues in the current humanitarian crisis, more than ever. Some children may have been with their families and become separated at some stage, so it is also relevant to look at the protection needs of children within families. Family reunification process seems poorly implemented, pushing unaccompanied migrant children into the arms of smugglers or traffickers in order to re-join their families. A better responsive support system for unaccompanied minors should be enacted in all countries.

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⁶⁸R.K.S. Kohli, *Social Work with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).