Topic 1: Establishing Access to STEM Education for Displaced Children

INTRODUCTION

Today, displaced persons are forced from their communities due to numerous factors, including but not limited to civil insurrection, war, ethnic conflict, and natural disasters[1]. By the end of 2021, 36.5 million children were displaced, with an estimated 22.8 million children displaced internally (within their own country) due to violent conflict[2]. Over the last 16 years the number of children refugees has more than doubled[3]. Many individuals flee to areas that may provide temporary refuge, and oftentimes these destinations lack the ability to provide education due to the dramatic increase in displaced children in recent years. Compounding this difficulty, children are especially vulnerable, as they are often at risk of being exploited through "forced labor, forced early marriage, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and recruitment into armed groups."[4] Needless to say, while enduring these struggles, children rarely have access to proper education, community dynamics, and adequate social and financial resources[5].

Figure 1. Icon conceptual education. Getty Images

A powerful way to help displaced children is by providing them with access to education. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) topics have become a cornerstone of modern education across the world. The classification of what a STEM education is and what it may focus on largely depends on the context of the group being discussed. For one, STEM can be classified as synonymous with math and science curriculum at the primary level, but also includes computer science, applied engineering, social sciences, and many more topics, which are often found in more advanced curriculum at the secondary level[6]. A STEM education has, over time, developed a reputation for being universalistic, meaning that it can stand on a more objective foundation compared to non-STEM fields[7]. Under this framework, a STEM education appears to be an opportunity for social mobility for displaced persons[8].

Education is of utmost importance for the empowerment of displaced children, and the prospects of a STEM-focused education can help displaced children establish a foundation for their future. This curriculum will provide children with legitimate avenues towards socio-economic growth and self-sustainability, which is the foundation for poverty elimination across the board.

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[1] Educate a Child, "Internally Displaced Persons"
[2] UNICEF, 2021, "Worldwide, More than 33 Million Children Have Been Forcibly Displaced at the End of 2020."
[3] Ibid
[4] Educate a Child, "Internally Displaced Persons"
[5] Ibid
[6] Xie, Shauman, and Fang, 2015, "Stem Education."
[7] Ibid
[8] Ibid

TOPIC HISTORY

The call for access to education for those who are displaced is not a newfound phenomenon. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees established the right to primary education for refugees, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is charged with the duty of protecting all refugees, including their right to an education[9]. Similarly, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have the right to education according to the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement[10].

As it stands, great barriers exist that prevent displaced persons from receiving proper education. Nearly four in every five refugees may remain displaced for most of their childhood (ages 5 to 18)[11]. Evidence of disparity in education access for IDPs is clear. For example, in Nord Kivu— a region with particularly high internal displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)— the rate of children with access to school is 34 percent, compared to the general national average of 52 percent[12]. This disparity is fueled by raging poverty, amplified discrimination based on gender and disabilities, the lack of law enforcement, and poor educational infrastructure[13]. Additionally, expanding access to quality education for displaced people often involves a multitude of entities: the United Nations, NGOs, offices of national leaders/coordinators, local officials at the community level, and implementors on the ground such as instructors. It takes a great deal of time and effort to coordinate with all these parties— time that these children do not have due to the incredibly unstable conditions in which they live[14].

Figure 2. Classroom in Syrian refugee camp, Brookings Institution.

Despite these difficulties, some progress is being made to expand education. Uganda, Chad, Kenya, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Mexico have all made significant advancements in allowing refugees access to education through expanding educational efforts and giving support to children[15]. With this said, temporary forms of education in learning centers that are independent of national systems do not qualify students with opportunities to advance into formal secondary education, a problem that perpetuates the gap in enrollment between displaced children and a country's national average[16]. One solution to this problem is through expanding national education systems, which was achieved in Pakistan through the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas Initiative which invested 45 million USD to over 730 local education development projects. Overall, 800,000 children reaped benefits which stretched beyond simple access to academic curriculum[17]. By strengthening the integrity of national educational infrastructure, students— and in turn the community at large— were brought together, nationals and refugees alike. This promotes social tolerance and community

[9] Dryden-Peterson, 2021, "Conflict, Education and Displacement."
[10] Ibid
[11] UNHCR, 2019, "Primary Education: Closing the Gap - Stepping up: Refugee Education in Crisis."
[12] Dryden-Peterson, 2021, "Conflict, Education and Displacement."
[13] Ibid
[14] Ibid
[15] UNHCR, 2019, "Primary Education: Closing the Gap - Stepping up: Refugee Education in Crisis."
[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid

cohesion which is crucial in properly integrating refugees into new societies in a healthy manner[18]. This initiative also greatly impacts local non-displaced children and promotes poverty alleviation among them.

Furthermore, the integration of and focus on STEM curriculum in particular has seen impressive results among vulnerable populations. In 2016 a project was launched in China to close the gap between rural and urban students' access to education in STEM[19]. Top Chinese high schools broadcasted their lectures allowing rural classrooms to access a level of education typically out of reach for their socio-economic status[20]. At least 88 students from the 248 participating rural schools were accepted to China's top two universities, which historically had a population from rural areas of only about 1 percent[21]. This change did not require extensive changes be made, except perhaps improved internet connection in the rural schools, yet yielded impressive results for the students. Initiatives such as this have the power to bring about powerful and sustainable poverty alleviation while stimulating young minds, leading to overall higher quality of life.

Current Situation

In 2015, the United Nations laid out the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which has been agreed upon by all United Nations Member States [22]. The fourth goal is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."[23]. By working to achieve this goal, policy makers are also working towards other SDGs, such as Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), and Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Education, and a STEM focused education in particular gives individuals the tools and opportunities to advance their lives, while also creating the next generation capable of solving other goals such as Goal 9 (Industry Innovation and Infrastructure) and Goal 13 (Climate Action)[24].

Figure 3. SDG Poster, United Nations

Countries, NGOs, and international partnerships are helping expand access to education through new projects, greater funding, and expanded resources. For instance, the Norwegian Refugee Council worked to reintegrate 12,000 out of school children within the formal education system in Cote d'Ivoire with the help of NGOs and local leaders [25]. Additionally, European countries such as Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia have integrated over half their displaced children's populations into the formal education system [26]. This has been done by increasing the trained staff, eliminating language barriers, and providing

[18] UNHCR, 2019, "Primary Education: Closing the Gap - Stepping up: Refugee Education in Crisis."
[19] Quallen, 2021, "STEM Education Can Reduce Poverty in Rural China"
[20] Ibid
[21] Ibid
[22] United Nations, 2022, "The 17 Goals"
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Educate a Child, "Internally Displaced Persons"
[26] UNHCR, 2019, "Primary Education: Closing the Gap - Stepping up: Refugee Education in Crisis."

transportation from asylum facilities, among other methods. Governments appear to understand the importance of integrating displaced children into formal school systems, now this must be expanded to include an emphasis on STEM education.

Currently, Africa is feeling the hurt brought on by a lack of STEM education. Due to short supply of those with educations required for necessary innovations in the region, many Africans are stuck as consumers rather than producers[27]. The Assistant Director-general of the Africa Department at UNESCO has made this need clear, demanding world leaders aid Africa in "embracing the advancement in technology and equipping the youth with relevant knowledge and skills the 21st century demands"[28]. While this was a general call to action, the high population of displaced children around Africa makes it a migrant and IDP issue. The benefits for these vulnerable populations are just as important as those reaped by non-displaced children and will provide countless positive externalities for the local communities overall.

Figure 4. Sylvia using a nanopore MinION sequencer, a next generation sequencing technology in the virology laboratory at Sokoine University of Agriculture, World Bank

Directive

In the discussion of this topic, the committee should focus on potential methods and solutions to problems pertaining to the expansion of STEM education for displaced children. This may take the form of partnerships between member nations, NGOs, private corporations, or other. Delegates are encouraged to consider ways this discussion could intersect in relation to class, gender, the Sustainable Development Goals, and other areas not mentioned in this document. This issue of STEM education and displaced children impacts each Delegate in some way. The committee may choose to consider how to address different causes of displacement or the importance of STEM education on an individual and societal level, or it may focus on particular challenges the committee views as the most significant. Nonetheless, this committee must work together in order to adequately and comprehensively address the issue of expanding STEM education to displaced children.

[27] Yusuf, 2018, "Lack of STEM Education is holding back growth and opportunities in Africa"
[28] Ibid

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Topic: Ethical Considerations for Inclusion of Children in Social Media

INTRODUCTION

As is well known, it is difficult to feel connected to society today without a social media presence, and this is especially the case for young people[1]. The digital realm connects them easily to their friends, family, idols, and a plethora of information and resources which they may use for their education and personal curiosities and entertainment. While there are many obvious benefits to this digital lifestyle, there are just as many, if not more, consequences. The internet is a vulnerable place for children and their data, and many of them have no idea of the dangers lurking behind their screens.

Figure 1. Enterprise Big Data Framework.

Given recent advances in data collection and analytics capabilities, general information is one of the most sought-after commodities. Private firms have the ability to collect enough information on children through their interactions online to analyze them in a way never possible until now. They can use this data to identify weaknesses and predict future actions, decisions, and struggles.[2] These predatory practices are going on usually completely unknown to the children and their parents or guardians. It is crucial that states and the international community step up and take action to protect the rights of children which extend beyond physical threats and into the digital sphere.

Somewhat shockingly, educational technology companies are some of the most notable perpetrators of this. Some of the most sophisticated of which collect up to 10 million unique pieces of data a day on a single child.[3] That is an amount that surpasses the practices of data moguls such as Netflix, Facebook, and Google.[4] Since these companies market themselves as contributing to children's education and development, it may be deemed that they are engaging in deception, violating the rights of young people. It is becoming increasingly critical to conduct ethical evaluations of these practices and draw a line between helpful and dangerous.

According to a general comment published by the United Nations, the technological environment which children today are growing up in is "crucial to shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and social development."[5] Due to the incredibly personal nature of these effects, it is also pertinent to evaluate who is responsible for regulating children's online presence and to what extent. Eleven-year-old Esmé McNeely wrote into Time for Kids (Time magazine's publication tailored for elementary school aged children) arguing that specific issues such as screen-time should not be up for government regulation and should instead be the jurisdiction of parents and guardians.[6] This introduces another point for consideration:

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[1] Children at Risk, 2021, "The Impact of Social Media on Children."
[2] Simon, 2014, "The big biz of spying on little kids."
[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid
[5] CRC/C/GC/25
[6] Mordechai, 2022, "Should Governments Regulate Screen Time?"

how much input should children themselves— aside from international entities, national governments, and loved ones— have in their digital rules and protections?

Topic History

Generally speaking, the United Nations has explicitly declared a multitude of rights children are guaranteed, with their overall safety and security being included in that.[7] This extends to their digital welfare. While threats to the physical safety of young people across the global may be more visible, threats to their mental and emotional well-being are just as deserving of attention. According to UNICEF, more than one-third of children surveyed in 30 countries report that they have suffered from being cyberbullied, and 20 percent of them of them admitted to skipping school because of it.[8] Even more gravely, nearly 80 percent of young people across 25 countries have expressed anxiety over feeling vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation online.[9]

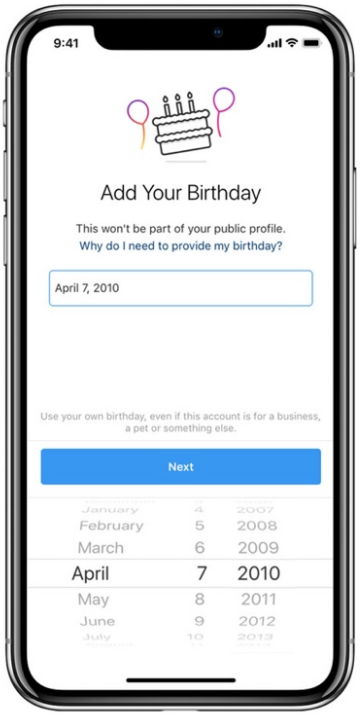

Figure 2. Instagram.

In the United States, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA) was passed in April 2000 but was more recently amended in 2013.[10] It atempts to protect kids' privacy (such as geo-location tracking and personal identifiers used to track individuals across sites and platforms) by requiring parental consent for anyone under 13 years of age.[11] However, this relies on children self-reporting their age, and many are not truthful with this information in order to circumnavigate these restrictions.

UNICEF has launched the Disrupting Harm project in conjunction with ECPAT International and INTERPOL to research and better understand the threats children face online.[12] It includes 14 countries across Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia where children are particularly susceptible to highly violent exploitation.[13]

Additionally, UNICEF partnered with the London School of Economics and the EU Kids Online network to create Global Kids Online, an initiative to develop a reliable research method to uncover evidence which can be brought to the world stage to be used in the creation of practical solutions and policy writing.[14] Findings from the various countries participating are continuously published as results are finalized.

These various research efforts are important in identifying problems in the current way we protect young people online. While it may seem ironic to collect large amounts of data when the problem itself is large amounts of data being collected, it is critical to be able to identify the precise vulnerabilities children face so we may effectively combat them. It is clear that one such threat is businesses which rely financially on

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[7] CRC/C/GC/25
[8] UNICEF, "Protecting children online."
[9] Ibid
[10] Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule, 2013
[11] Ibid
[12] UNICEF, "Disrupting harm."
[13] Ibid
[14] Global Kids Online, "About the project."

practices of collecting and processing personal data for the purposes of manipulating decisions when interacting with paid-for and revenue-generating content.[15] These enterprises often target children and "anticipate and guide [their] actions."[16] In an ethical consideration, it is clear that these intentions do not lie in the benefit of the child's welfare, but rather in the pursuit of constant profit generation.

In addition to the risks of children having access to social media, there are also sizable upsides. Online resources allow kids to expand and maximize their education and customize their information intake to pursue their interests. This opens up another debate and issue as to *who* is actually benefitting from these resources. Nearly 90 percent of children residing in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific do not have reliable internet access.[17] This means that while they are safer from the looming threats the internet poses, they also are being deprived of the seemingly endless opportunities it also holds. Additionally, these areas have high populations of migrant and displaced children, discriminating against these children who are already being forced to survive in highly unstable environments. Fortunately, NGOs such as Save the Children are working to implement programs which provide internet access to these vulnerable populations, allowing them better access to education, healthcare, and other social services.[18] As seen through evidence presented so far, these migrant and displaced children are still at risk of the dangers of social media— even more so than others. Since they are particularly vulnerable, Save the Children has enacted safeguarding practices in an effort to minimize these threats. This includes having strict policies and regulations surrounding their use of data concerning children as an organization. Special focus is placed on protecting this information from leaks which outside actors may use to prey on children receiving aid from humanitarian organizations.[19]

Figure 3. Save the Children, 2020.

Current Situation

The COVID-19 pandemic put a lot of pressure on parents and children to actively use social networking platforms to continue their education remotely. While the majority of schools are back meeting in person, it is true that many online innovations will hold over from their importance in the height of the pandemic. With this major influx of children using online platforms to compliment their educational experiences, it will be critical to hold these platforms accountable for safeguarding children from inappropriate content or contact with strangers, from collecting unnecessary data without their or their guardians' consent, and from monetizing that data in a way that violates the children and their privacy.

Additionally, the United Nations has expressed concern over with whom jurisdiction for guaranteeing these protections lies.[20] The UN recommends that national and local bodies

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[15] CRC/C/GC/25
[16] Ibid
[17] Morgan, 2020, "Safeguarding Migrant and Displaced Children in a Digital World."
[18] Ibid
[19] Ibid
[20] CRC/C/GC/25

work in conjunction to formulate such provisions, designating a central body to spearhead these efforts and coordinate with various levels of government for implementation and enforcement.[21] However, this begs the question of the rights of parents/guardians to intervene and decide what their child will or will not have access to, or rather, who/what will have access to their child's data. The UN recommends governments offer training and advice to parents on the effects of technology on children's cognitive growth as well as how to best protect them online.[22] As one may imagine, there is contention among caregivers and governments as to where to draw the line on state implemented restrictions.

Figure 4. Tweet from Greta Thunberg, 2021.

Another important point to consider is the protection of young people's freedom of expression. The UN urges governments and other parties to include children and their opinions in the legislation and program development processes.[23] Since the main purpose of these initiatives is to protect the rights of children, it would be futile to only consider certain rights. The right to freedom of expression guarantees young people's ability to "seek, receive and impart information ideas of all kinds, using any media of their choice."[24]

DIRECTIVE

In the discussion of this topic, this committee should keep in mind that it can only make suggestions to the General Assembly in order to address current issues surrounding ethical considerations for children in social media. Delegates are encouraged to consider both short term and long term needs of children and work collectively to produce potential solutions. Many aspects of this broad topic have been touched on in this guide, so delegates may elect to focus on just one or two targeted areas of interest or several. It will be important to keep in mind the various challenges being faced, including but not limited to: the COVID-19 pandemic, the balance between protecting children's privacy and infringing upon the rights to expression, the rights of guardians to make decisions for children under their care, unique and extreme cases faced by more vulnerable children such as migrants and those who are displaced, etc. We stand at a crucial point in history where action must be taken to mitigate the threats children face online and to provide them with healthy options which protect their cognitive development. Delegates are encouraged to maintain a forward-looking mindset, considering not only current issues at hand, but also account for likely dilemmas to arise in the future due to the unprecedented, fast-paced growth of the social networking sector and big data. Children are among the most vulnerable citizens of the world and are looking to you to protect them from the new dangers technology has created.

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[21] CRC/C/GC/25
[22] Ibid
[23] Ibid
[24] Ibid

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