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2020 ORPHAN REPORT

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2020 Orphan Report

Research
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INTRODUCTION

Although there are now many government and non-government institutions for children who are deprived of parental care, it is known that there are hundreds of thousands of children who are waiting for help.

One child dies every three seconds as a result of poverty, hunger or similar causes, which makes an average of 10,000 children mortalities every day.

The number of orphans and abandoned children in the world is increasing day by day due to natural or man-made causes. While it is not possible to prevent children from becoming orphans and vulnerable, so much can be done to reduce factors causing orphanhood. To limit the impact of circumstances that increase the number of orphans in the world, preventive measures should be

developed, particularly to anticipate disasters and crises. It is also of great importance to end conflicts that lead to a large number of children becoming orphans.

For the future of societies, it is vital that orphans, who may suffer irreparable losses if left at the mercy of the wrong people, are looked after. Although there are now many government and non-government institutions for children who are deprived of parental care, it is known that there are hundreds of thousands of children who are waiting for help.

To allow efficient and extensive work on orphans, it is essential that all related government and non-government institutions cooperate more closely.

The current study is designed to draw attention to the plight of orphans and unprotected children that make up the most fragile members of society, and to shed a light on the global situation of orphans from different perspectives.

ORPHAN AND ORPHANHOOD

Childhood refers to the period of childhood and adolescence. The task of parents is to satisfy both the physiological and psychosocial needs of the child, give him a good education and prepare him for life's challenges. Every child who goes through this most critical phase of life without enjoying parental care is considered an orphan.

Today's social and economic problems create new definitions of orphanhood. If the necessary precautions are not taken with regard to the most fragile members of the society, it seems inevitable that the problem will turn into a much more devastating crisis. Although it may show variations, one definition of *orphan* all cultures agree on is a pre-adolescent child who has lost either of his parents or both. In the Islamic tradition, a paternal orphan is a child who has lost a father while a maternal orphan is a child who has lost a mother. There is also the concept of the *social orphanhood*, referring to children with at least one parent alive who fails to fulfil his/her parental obligations.

The first 18 years of human life are not only a period of physical development; but also definable as a period of sociological interactions with psychological effects. So, circumstances a child faces early in life, determines not just his prospects in adult life, but also has serious implications for the mental health of a society as a whole.

Although today's social and economic problems create new definitions of orphanhood, one definition of orphan all cultures agree on is a pre-adolescent child who has lost either of his parents or both.

According to UNICEF, almost 10,000 children become orphans every day. According to internationally accepted figures, there are at least 140 million orphans in the world. Given the fact that there is so much compelling evidence showing that there are millions of more orphans not included in official statistics, there is no doubt that this number is actually much higher.

When a child loses either of his parents or both, he faces so many economic and mental issues down the line. For example, one child dies every three seconds as a result of poverty, hunger or similar causes, which makes an average of 10,000 children mortalities every day. Most of





them are orphans and abandoned children. The available data show that most of the countries where the situation is most worrying are in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.¹

Without a doubt, one of the most common reasons leading to children becoming orphans is natural disasters. Almost 750,000 people have died in natural disasters in the last 20 years, and as a result, hundreds of thousands of children became orphans or left without parental support. 79% of these deaths occurred in poor Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia,

India and the Philippines, which are the countries with the highest number of orphans.

Another common cause is chronic illness or disease outbreaks. Poor health services or a pandemic can lead to a significant number of loss of lives. While 68% of all deaths worldwide are caused by non-contagious diseases, 22.5% are caused by contagious ones.

Poor health infrastructure is one of the most frequent causes of death for parents in economically underdeveloped countries. It is not known exactly how



many children become orphans each year due to these mortalities.

Figures show that between 2000 and 2014 there were about 15 doctors and 33 nurses per 10,000 people worldwide. It is reported that in Islamic countries there are 8 doctors and 18 nurses per 10,000 people. Somalia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Chad and Afghanistan are believed to be the countries in the worst situation in terms of deaths due to poor health services. The following shows number of doctors and nurses per 10,000 people in these countries: Somalia (1:5), Niger (1:6), Sierra Leone

According to UNICEF, almost 10,000 children become orphans every day. According to internationally accepted figures, there are at least 140 million orphans in the world.

(1:9), Chad (2:3) and Afghanistan (2:7).

Today, about 140 out of every 1,000 women worldwide between the ages of 18 and 60 die due to infectious or non-infectious diseases. This means a large number of children who need looking after are left behind.

Wars or conflicts are among the leading causes of orphanhood. For example, in 2018 alone almost 100,000 people died in armed clashes, and tens of thousands of children became orphans or were deprived of parental care in the process. 80% of these deaths occurred in Islamic countries.² Due to the civil war in Syria, which is considered the biggest humanitarian crisis since the World War II, 9,200,000 children under the age of 18 lost their homes or families.³ Although the actual figures for Syrian orphans are not known due to the continuous relocation of refugees, it is estimated that almost 1 million children became orphans due to the war.

When a child loses either or both of his parents or when parents fail to fulfill their parental duties, this leaves the child exposed to myriad of dangers. Orphans or abandoned children become vulnerable and defenseless; whereas children under the care of their parents are relatively better protected in the cases of war, nat-

When a child loses either or both of his parents or when parents fail to fulfill their parental duties, this leaves the child exposed to myriad of dangers.

ural disasters, poverty or disease. At this point, it must be stressed that the problems of orphans are not isolated cases. For it should be remembered that children without access to safe and healthy environments grow up to become problematic adults, leading to other serious social problems.

Orphans and abandoned children are barely able to maintain a decent standard of living, leaving them exposed to risks and dangers. Such children can easily fall into the clutches of criminal gangs in exchange for basic needs such as shelter and food or to satisfy emotional needs, like a sense of belonging.

Big migration movements caused by war, poverty etc. result in tens of thousands of children being relocated unaccompanied by their parents or unprotected. It is noted that today in many European countries, thousands of children are on the list of

missing children and thousands are not included in any list because they have no birth certificates. Orphans are targeted by various criminal organizations involved in human trafficking, either in their country of origin or during migration to other places. It is reported that the number of children who came to Europe as refugees after the war in Syria is around 200,000 and that more than 10,000 children have gone missing in European countries in the last five years.⁴

Intensive missionary activities in places of poverty and famine, especially in the countries of the African continent, are among the major threats to orphans. For example, children are taken to orphanages established by western missionary organizations and brainwashed to change their religion; exploiting their economic disadvantage.

SOCIAL ORPHANHOOD

While the definition of orphan is traditionally used for children who lost their father before reaching adolescence, its modern definition is children who are younger than 18 and who have lost either or both of their parents. In today's

world, however, it is known that there are millions of children neglected by their parents even though they are alive. The concept of social orphanhood was coined in relation to children suffering from parental negligence. This defini-

tion is used to describe the deprivation endured by the child due to parents' failure to perform their duties. The absence of the family, and therefore the absence of the parent, which is the first and most basic component with a child's identity formation, causes serious trauma to the child; creating a feeling of forlornness in terms of being loved, respected, protected and supported. Amounting to a state of parental destitution, the condition is referred to as social orphanhood.

Social orphanhood might occur due to irresponsible parents, social and family problems, extra-marital births, early or unwanted motherhood and many other factors...⁵ Mental health problems, domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, physical and mental disability, poverty, heavy work conditions, working away from the family, socializing outside the home, internet and social media addiction can also lead to a deterioration of family ties and children becoming isolated. Nothing can justify abandoning a child when at least one of the parents is alive. Abandonment causes trauma, and this has a negative effect on the child's physical and mental health.

Statistics show that 90% of the 2.7 million children living in orphanages around the world are social orphans.⁶ While the number of children living on the streets is not exactly known. Although many children have their basic needs like food, drink and shelter met, they suffer severe disadvantages in terms of receiving regular education appropriate to their needs and age, and



the love, care and support they need to become healthy adults in the future.⁷

While social orphanhood can be as severe as orphanhood from loss of parents, it may cause some other serious psychological consequences. Children in this category, who are generally vic-

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Big migration movements caused by war, poverty etc. result in tens of thousands of children being relocated unaccompanied by their parents or unprotected.



tims of physical and sexual abuse, can develop various physical and mental disorders due to the negative experiences they have had. When a child is rejected or deprived of a warm family environment despite both parents being alive, this may cause life-long traumas, causing a mental regression, a feeling of worthlessness, unloved and loneliness. For people who experience such

emotional trauma, they will be more exposed to the risk of socializing with the wrong kind of people, drug and alcohol addiction, prostitution, being kidnapped etc. In addition, these children, who have problems developing a sense of belonging, often experience anger and aggression, poor social adaptability and criminal intentions. Of course, one cannot say that all orphans and social orphans live in poor conditions. So much work is being done to improve the conditions of these children, who are guarded and protected by official institutions. It is vital that all institutions entrusted with these children do their share of work properly, as it is crucial for the future of the country and the world to identify and rehabilitate potential groups that could turn into a social anomie in the future. In summary, for the well-being and development of societies, all children should be raised in a nurturing environment and receive a good education.

In view of its causes and effects, it can be argued that the issue of social orphanhood affects the entire society with political, social and religious implications requiring a holistic approach. At this point, it is not enough to deal only with orphanhood, which is merely a consequence. It is also important to identify and eliminate the causes that lead to this social phenomenon. To this end, government and non-governmental organizations can get their weight behind more awareness-raising projects and support measures to raise individual awareness. Serious social

The number of orphans in the world today is estimated at over 140 million.

and psychological measures should be taken on this issue, which should be a top priority for societies. In this context,

it will be an important step to establish financial and moral support centers that all people can easily access.

ORPHANS IN THE WORLD

The number of orphans in the world is increasing due to problems such as wars and conflicts, natural disasters, epidemics, poverty and mass migration. Children, who make up 2.2 billion of the estimated 7.7 billion of the world's population, remain at risk and exposed every day for various reasons. If a child between 0 and 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents is considered an orphan, the number of orphans in the world today is estimated at over 140 million.⁸ It is estimated that a total of approximately 15.1 million out of 61 million who live in Asia, 52 million in Africa, 10 million in Latin America and 7.3 million in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, have lost both parents.⁹

In addition to all these official data, it is known that many children around the world are not registered as "orphans" for various reasons. There are many orphans, i.e. "invisible children", who have never been registered, or those who have not been identified as orphans because their relatives took care of them after their parents died, or those who have not been registered due to technical difficulties and negligence.

Considering all these cases, the actual number of orphans around the world is estimated at 400 million.¹⁰

Today, it is clear that wars and internal conflicts are the main causes for an ever increasing number of orphans. With regard to countries such as Syria, Iraq, East Turkestan, Somalia, Mali, Sudan, Palestine, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Yemen, Myanmar and Algeria has a large number of orphans, these are either regions of conflict or are ruled by oppressive regimes with most of them scenes of large conflicts in recent history. The number of orphans in these countries corresponds to almost one third of all orphans worldwide.

Humanitarian crises resulting from natural disasters are foremost among the reasons for children losing their parents. About 500,000 people lose their lives and millions of people suffer great financial losses every year due to disasters. One of the most devastating consequences of these disasters is without doubt the thousands of vulnerable children left behind. Natural disasters vary in size and severity, caus-



soldiers in more than 30 countries,¹¹ there are at least 218 million child workers aged between 5 and 17, and that at least 73 million of them are employed in hazardous occupations.¹² A major part of these children are either orphans or abandoned children. The number of missing children that went into the records in the 20 years from 1987 to 2007 is 1 million. It is estimated that most of these children are abducted by criminal organizations.¹³

ing different amounts of damage. For example, earthquakes cause children to become orphans in countries like Indonesia, Iran and Nepal while in African countries it is usually drought and famine. Whereas social orphans are more common in relatively developed and western countries.

Since the risks and threats that children without parents face apply to all children who are unprotected for some reason, it is important to provide protection for all these children. Heavy labor, being recruited as child soldiers, being trapped by the organ and prostitution mafia and various other criminal organizations are the most common dangers to which these children are exposed. For example, it is reported that there are about 300,000 child

One of the most serious problems faced by orphans are social exclusion and isolation, which is not easy to notice at first sight. Psychological destruction through the loss of one or both parents can lead to a withdrawal, while discriminatory treatment by relatives, peers or the society can lead to self-isolation.

A study by the World Health Organization shows that suicide-related deaths for children between the ages of 10 and 19 have increased since 2002.¹⁴ These figures clearly show that the traumas of childhood and adolescence, words which are not supposed to be used side by side with the word suicide, are not temporary, contrary to assumptions.

Becoming a refugee or being placed in the care of foster parents in other

There are about 300,000 child soldiers in more than 30 countries, there are at least 218 million child workers aged between 5 and 17, and that at least 73 million of them are employed in hazardous occupations.

countries is one of the most serious problems faced by orphans. In particular, orphans or abandoned children who are also refugees may face threats such as abuse, ill-treatment or discrimination based on religion or race. Even if the above-cited threats to children in this category are tackled, assimilation policies in destination countries for migrants represent another lifelong risk for these children.

Education is one of the most problematic areas for orphans and abandoned children. Many studies today clearly show that there is a direct link between parental absence and academic performance. Studies have shown that the academic success of abandoned children or children raised by a single parent is lower than that of children who grow up with both of their parents. When orphanhood in warzones are brought into the equation, the schooling rate of these children and their academic success are significantly reduced. Today there are 263 million children with no access to school or regular education.¹⁵

An analysis of the common characteristics of countries with the lowest levels of education reveals that these are poverty and war zones. Since these countries are the least developed in the world, lack of resources/means to

provide basic services like education creates severe consequences that linger for generations. In Syria that has 11 million inhabitants, 3 million out of 8 million school-age children do not attend school.¹⁶ Although the war in Afghanistan that has gone on for years has ended, 42% of the country's school-age children are still unable to go to school. And most of these children are female. In Somalia, 49% of school-age children cannot go to school.¹⁷ In Yemen, there are 2 million children with no access to school.¹⁸

According to the report of the United Nations Development Programme, the percentage of those who receive only basic education or learn to read and write in a non-educational setting are as follows: Southern Sudan and Mali 27%, Afghanistan 28%, Ethiopia 49%, Haiti 52%, Pakistan 55%, Bangladesh 57%.¹⁹ The figures and percentages given here refer to literacy rates rather than continuous education, which could mean that the quality of education in these countries is actually much worse. It is also estimated that the majority of children deprived of education are either orphans or abandoned by their parents.²⁰

The protection of children, especially orphans, is one of the most fundamen-

Studies have shown that the academic success of abandoned children or children raised by a single parent is lower than that of children who grow up with both of their parents.

tal tasks of societies. In this context, it is very important for governments to develop effective social policies to protect the legal rights of children and enable them to grow in a healthy and safe environment. Yet, most countries are way off achieving that. 61 million orphans on the Asian continent that has the worst track record of protecting children's rights, are at risk of leading a totally vulnerable life. India, particularly, needs to take urgent action in this regard as the official figures put the number of orphans at 31 million. In India, only 41% of births are registered, with diseases and outbreaks caused by social inequality, poverty and other social problems that arise due to the strict caste system being considered the primary reason for the high population of orphans in the country. It is estimated that there are 4.9 million orphans in Bangladesh²¹ and 4.4 million orphans in Pakistan,²² which are also countries on the Asian continent. As these countries have no policy of birth registration, it is estimated that the actual number of orphans that are referred to as "invisible children" is much higher than the projected figures.

On the African continent, Nigeria is one of the worst affected countries with 17.5 million orphans.²³ It is reported

that 2.5 million children in this country became orphans due to HIV.²⁴ In Ethiopia, another country on the continent, there are 6 million orphans.²⁵ In the country, more than 44% of children under the age of 14 are orphans due to HIV.²⁶ It is also reported that 2.9 million children in Uganda and 310,000 in Sierra Leone were orphaned by the same disease.²⁷ It was found that 74% of orphans in Zimbabwe and 63% of orphans in South Africa were also orphaned by the HIV disease.²⁸ One third of the children in Kenya, where there are almost 3 million orphans, were orphaned because of this disease.²⁹ Many children throughout Africa also died from this virus, transmitted by their parents. For instance, in Ethiopia that has 6 million orphans, it is estimated that at least 85,000 of these are HIV carriers.³⁰ It is estimated that more than 13 million children worldwide were orphaned by this virus.³¹

What countries with a high number of orphans have in common is that they belong to the category of the most underdeveloped countries. At least half the population of these countries lives below the poverty line. It is children that are most severely affected by the chronic poverty in these countries. The current circumstances threaten children's rights to life.

The number of child soldiers involved in global conflicts has increased by 159% in five years and that since 2012 at least 300,000 children have been actively fighting in more than 30 countries.

ORPHANS AS VICTIMS OF WAR

Wartime conditions are challenging for everyone, especially more so for orphans and abandoned children. While orphans are exposed to the dangers of the war environment, they have serious problems in accessing basic needs, especially food, shelter, health, security and education; while at the same time facing various social, economic and psychological challenges. Children struggling with problems such as illness, hunger, disability or abduction are exposed to all kinds of abuse under wartime conditions.

One of the most serious problems faced by orphans trying to survive alone in warzones is their inability to access adequate and necessary health care. The lack or absence of medical facilities further exacerbates the grievances of children in such vulnerable situations. Thousands of children who lose their lives are registered as civilian victims, while hundreds of thousands try to stay alive, one way or another. In the past year, 764 children in Yemen, 438 in Iraq, 361 in Syria, 178 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and 75 in Sudan were disabled due to conflict.

Orphans who survive on hot conflict zones face even greater challenges afterwards; much riskier prospects come into question for these children, exposed

to new threats on refugee camps or migration routes. It is estimated that at least one tenth of the refugee children in the world are orphans.

One of the most devastating consequences of war for children is the issue of child soldiers. It is reported that the number of child soldiers involved in global conflicts has increased by 159%³² in five years and that since 2012 at least 300,000³³ children have been actively fighting in more than 30 countries.

Children are used as warriors and suicide bombers on the fields in conflicts and



Research has shown that 40 million children under the age of 15 are victims of abuse and neglect in war zones and that these children need regular health and social care.

wars and also as couriers, spies, human shields and etc. at checkpoints.

The destruction of educational facilities in warzones has a long-term effect on the lives of the children, taking away their chances for a good future. Targeting schools in wars and conflicts costs the lives of thousands of children and educational staff. According to a United Nations report on 2016-2018, 657 schools in Mali, 396 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 161 in Iraq, 68 in Afghanistan, 67 in Syria, 64 in Somalia, 52 in Southern Sudan, and 28 schools in the African Republic were attacked.³⁴

Educational activities are mostly carried out in houses and tents in warzones, and these are not enough for children to build a good future. These children have their chance of a decent life taken away from them, either ending up in armed groups or having to work as child laborers under extremely difficult conditions.

Cases of child abuse are even more common in warzones. Research has shown that 40 million children under the age of 15 are victims of abuse and neglect in war zones and that these children need regular health and social care.³⁵ For example, it is reported that 1,500

children are sexually abused every year in Afghanistan, a country ravaged by civil war and foreign occupation, with those responsible being protected for various reasons.³⁶

Moreover, children and orphans who are victims of war are targeted by human traffickers, organ mafias and other malicious organizations operating on border lines with a huge flow of refugees. Research shows that about 1.2 million children are trafficked every year.³⁷ A majority of these children are orphans. Orphans and abandoned children, targeted by many criminal organizations such as organ traffickers, human traffickers, etc. are also sent to different countries for adoption or forced into prostitution or begging. No one knows yet what happened to the 10,000 children that migrated to Europe in the last 5 years, most of whom were orphans, raising serious questions about the fortunes of these orphans.³⁸

As girls are mostly deployed away from the front lines, it is generally assumed that they do not take part in conflicts. However, this is not an accurate observation. For example, 30-40% of child soldiers in Africa are girls. Girls are also heavily exposed to sexual violence. Studies show that such abuses increase by 40% in wartime environments.³⁹

This shows that humanitarian aid organizations working in crisis regions should focus not only on orphans' shelter and nutritional needs, but they should also provide these orphans with protection, psychological support, treatment and rehabilitation. Developing personalized care approaches that take into account the orphans' conditions is of great importance for the return to normal life of children who have experienced wars.

DISABLED ORPHANS

There are approximately 100 million disabled children in the world.⁴⁰ One in 20 children aged 14 and under has a moderate to severe disability. In view of the fact that these figures are included in reports drawn up before the ongoing Syrian and Yemeni civil wars, it is estimated that the current figures are much higher.

Disabilities can be congenital, or caused by accidents, diseases or natural disasters and wars. Today, in war-torn regions of the world, millions of children lose at least one limb in bombardments and need lifelong care. Moreover, unexploded land mines laid during previous wars and conflicts still pose a serious danger today. Although years have passed since the civil war and the US occupation of Afghanistan, hundreds of children die or lose a limb each year due to the explosion of mines laid all over the country during the war.

It is a grave violation of humanitarian values by the states that disregard the sanctity of human life to further their imperialist ambitions causing children who need love and compassion to be abused, to be forced to fight in wars, work in harsh conditions and commit acts of tyranny due to natural disasters, war, migration and poverty etc. This will produce ruthless and hostile generations in the future, causing so many new problems for societies.

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Today, in war-torn regions of the world, millions of children lose at least one limb in bombardments and need lifelong care.





In the last 10 years more than 2 million children have been killed in armed conflicts, more than 1 million orphaned, and more than 6 million children seriously injured or disabled due to conflicts. It is also known that more than 15 million children around the world have become refugees and that almost 10 million children suffer severe trauma as a consequence.⁴¹

It is also known that there are inadequate support mechanisms in place for children with disabilities in these countries, where almost all infrastructure has been destroyed and economic and social devastation has occurred. In these crisis regions, where the orphan population is high and the necessary rehabilitation and educational facilities

are not available, orphans and disabled children have no access to adequate healthcare, education and nutrition, and also face social exclusion. All these setbacks magnify the severity of trauma in children. Another dimension of social exclusion is some locally held beliefs and superstitious ideas. Especially in certain underdeveloped societies, children with disabilities face a higher risk of being killed, exposed to violence, and abused.

Children with disabilities are in a totally disadvantaged situation being exposed to many dangers. Discrimination and exclusion to which these children are exposed make them more vulnerable to violence, neglect and abuse. Research shows that children with disabilities are four or five times more likely to suffer physical and sexual abuse than their peers. To prevent violence against children with disabilities, health, educational and rehabilitation programs should be developed to improve their quality of life. First and foremost; however, the gravity of the problem must be understood by all sections of society.

National strategies should be determined by focusing on the rights of orphans with disabilities and concrete action for their protection. Social collaboration for rehab work will have a lasting effect on children and therefore contribute to reducing cases of social exclusion and violence.

Functioning mechanisms and the actors are analyzed, there are serious claims that this process of adoption of children in poor countries in Africa and Asia has become a new instrument of Westernization by certain associations, orphanages, churches and aid organizations operating in these countries.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION PROGRAMS (BABYLIFT)

The concept of *babylift*, which emerged in 1975 during the Vietnam War, originally refers to the Americanization of Asian children. During the "Baby Rescue Operation" called "Operation Baby Lift", at least 2,000 babies and children were brought to the US, and 1,300 to Canada, Australia and to Europe, totaling 3,300⁴² according to official figures. Although the United States announced that these children brought from South Vietnam were taken away because of war conditions, orphanhood and neglect, it was later understood that not all of these children were orphans. Vietnamese children were taken away from orphanages and even their families with all their ties severed from their countries and roots.

A decision by certain western groups who had been working with orphans in this country for more than 20 years during the Vietnam War to urgently evacuate children from South Vietnam underlies the Baby Rescue Operation. With the collaboration of organizations including the International Children's Services (Holt), the Travelers Aid International Social Service of

America (TAISSA), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the World Vision Relief Organization (WVRO), Friends of the Children of Vietnam (FCVN) and the Pearl S. Buck Foundation (PBF), the necessary procedures were carried out and planes evacuated children from the warzone.⁴³

It is stated that with the launch of the operation the number of applications for adoption in the US and other western countries increased. It was established that more than 91% of the adopted children were younger than eight, that 51% were younger than two, that 57% of the children were boys, 43% girls and 20% mixed race. The truth is that the relocation of these children was planned within the framework of an international adoption program implemented between 1970 and 1975.⁴⁴

Today, the term *babylift* is a concept used to describe international adoption programs. It is essentially defined as the adoption of children from other countries by certain wealthy families in the West. However, it has been clearly understood on several occasions that these child transfers, carried out for ostensi-



bly humanitarian purposes, are not as innocent as they appear. When the idea behind it, its functioning mechanisms and the actors are analyzed, there are serious claims that this process of adoption of children in poor countries in Africa and Asia has become a new instrument of Westernization by certain associations, orphanages, churches and aid organizations operating in these countries. For it is well known that many missionary institutions operating in poverty-stricken regions exploit orphans to spread Christianity in these societies under the pretext of humanitarian aid.⁴⁵

Publications on the sacredness of adopting children, the travels of world-famous artists and actresses to Africa and Asia who adopt children themselves during these travels coupled with the media promote the adoption of foreign children. Facilitating such child transfers through symbolic names encouraged many Orthodox Christian

families in the West to take similar steps, and thousands of African children were given to western families in this way. It is reported that missionary organizations, whose numbers are increasing day by day, are leading this initiative, increasing their scope of impact thanks to the aid they provide in poor regions, and operating comfortably by gaining the trust of the local population. The activities of these organizations, which collect data on the population in the regions, show that the work is done systematically within a specific framework and program. All this clearly shows that one must be careful about missionaries or organizations that wish to change the beliefs and cultures of orphans via foster family system.

A lack of official figures on international child transfers today raises serious questions about the scale of the whole operation. It is known that today, orphans from many countries are being

Many missionary institutions operating in poverty-stricken regions exploit orphans to spread Christianity in these societies under the pretext of humanitarian aid.

targeted by western countries, like in 2008 when a French organization (*L'Arche de Zoã*) was caught kidnapping more than 100 young children outside Chad.

Today, adoption from overseas is considered an industry, leading to the kidnapping of children, under false pretenses, from countries such as Ethiopia, Cambodia, Somali, Chad, Afghanistan,

China, and the Philippines. It is common knowledge that such kidnapped children are sold for cash all around the globe, including in many countries in Europe and the Americas.⁴⁶ Practically turning into an instrument to increase the population in western countries, the adoption policy can have devastating consequences for children, if we leave aside for a moment the benefits these countries may derive from doing so.

MISSING CHILD REFUGEES

According to 2016 data, the number of refugee children under 18 years of age is 28 million; this figure is estimated to have increased by at least 50% in 2020. And it remains a total mystery what happened to these 7 million children.⁴⁸ Because there is great uncertainty over in what country, under what conditions and under whose control these children lost on migration routes are held. While this does not mean that all the children in question have gone missing, irregular record-keeping has made it impossible to keep track of these children.

Among these there is another group of children who are at real risk. Today thousands of children are in European countries without their families or le-

gal guardians. According to Europol (European Police Office), around 10,000⁴⁹ unaccompanied refugee children were reported missing in 2016. Increased migration due to the ongoing war in Syria, particularly in the last four years, has led to an increase in these figures.

In 2017, asylum was granted to 538,000 registered asylum seekers throughout Europe.⁵⁰ 31,400 of them were registered as unaccompanied minors. A majority of these unaccompanied minors registered were boys (89%). While the percentage of children with an average age of 16 to 17 years was 77% (24,200), the percentage of children with an average age of 14 to 15 years was 16% (5,000). The



percentage of children under 14 years of age was 6% (2,000).⁵¹

According to 2017 data, Italy is the country with the highest number of underage asylum seekers. 32% (over 10,000) of the unaccompanied children registered in Europe seek refuge in this country. Italy is followed by Germany with 29% (9,100), Greece with 8% (2,500), United Kingdom with 7% (2,200), Austria with 4% (1,400), Sweden with 4% (1,300) and Netherlands with 4% (1,200). These figures for the seven countries of the European Union (EU) represent 90% of registered child asylum seekers throughout Europe.⁵²

It is not possible to determine the net figures for missing unaccompanied children in EU countries due to the lack of thorough registration procedures and comparative data. In short, due to missing or multiple registrations, registration in more than one country and city, lack of personal information and identification, no real information on the missing children population is available.⁵³

The fact that institutions in some EU countries, particularly Italy and Greece, were not prepared for large-scale refugee flows has led to unaccompanied refugee children being overlooked and denied access to adequate protection,



housing and asylum procedures. With no identification possible, entrusting these children to the care of a legal guardian does not come into question, either.⁵⁴

The European Commission estimates that the majority of unaccompanied refugee children disappeared before their asylum application or during the asylum procedure. It was found that most of the children disappeared before submitting applications within a few days of entry. This can be explained by children fearing their applications might be rejected and so being prompted to travel to another country for fear of deportation.⁵⁵ It is estimated that another group travels to

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different countries to search for family members within the EU borders. There is no information on the whereabouts of some unaccompanied minors.

There are still gaps in the asylum legislation of EU countries in terms of presenting information, legal representation, family reunification and protection of children's rights. It is certain, however, that unaccompanied children who, due to their separation from their families, need to be registered and accepted duly, need special protection, special care and support. For this reason, these children need to be appointed legal representatives, given information on the asylum procedure and provided with accommodation in suitable places immediately after registration. In the asylum process it is very important to give priority to children through "child-friendly treatment" procedures, and their swift identification and registration by trained personnel.

All children have basic rights in terms of the provision of necessary conditions for protection, survival and development. In EU countries where there are many institutions responsible for unaccompanied refugee children, these institutions play an important role in meeting the basic

These children are therefore exposed to the risk of falling into the snare of malicious organizations that seek to exploit children for purposes of prostitution, drug trafficking or organ trafficking.

needs of children and in planning and implementing the work necessary for social adjustment. Non-governmental organizations also provide social and psychological support services for unaccompanied refugee children. Despite all well-intended efforts, however, some of these children are at a high risk of becoming victims of exploitation, abuse and violence.⁵⁶

It is well known that there are many criminal networks throughout Europe that exploit minors. These children are therefore exposed to the risk of falling into the snare of malicious organizations that seek to exploit children for purposes of prostitution, drug trafficking or organ trafficking.⁵⁷ Unaccompanied children who need human traffickers

to cross European borders fall into the hands of these people and other criminal networks and are exposed to all kinds of exploitation because they cannot afford the high fees they are charged. It is known that these criminal organizations also resort to violence and abuse to get their payments. In some cases, parents are forced to pay large sums of money for the release of their children taken hostage by smugglers on migration routes.⁵⁸ It is at this point that urgent action must be taken to prevent traffickers rather than preventing the flow of refugees. Irrespective of their refugee status, the enforcement of human rights and children's rights conventions is of great importance for the protection of unaccompanied children.

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

According to the United Nations, 263 million children and young people worldwide cannot attend school or receive education.⁵⁹ 53% of the 61 million children of primary school age (6-11 years) who cannot attend school are girls. While one fourth of children who cannot go to school live in countries hit by various crises,⁶⁰ it is estimated

that a significant proportion of children who are deprived of education are orphans.⁶¹

Between 2010 and 2018, global schooling rates increased by 20.4% for pre-school education, 6% for primary school, 10.5% for secondary school and 3.1% for higher education⁶² In this

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It is accepted that there is a direct link between the absence of parents and academic success.

process, it was noted that the share countries allocate from their domestic income for education increased along with a more positive approach to education in general. During the same period, the global literacy rate was 82.5%. In Islamic countries, this rate remained at 73%.⁶³ Indeed, various campaigns and awareness-raising efforts in Islamic countries have produced positive results, and between 2010 and 2018, enrolment in pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education has increased. The figures for the member countries of the

Organization of Islamic Cooperation went up from 24.9% to 45.3% for pre-school education, from 98.2% to 104.4% for primary education and from 58.4% to 68.9% for secondary education. However, these figures are currently below the world average.⁶⁴

It is accepted that there is a direct link between the absence of parents and academic success. When poverty, disability and orphanhood in warzones are brought into the equation, the schooling rate of these children and their academic success are significant-



It will be much more useful to design and implement a holistic educational system model for all children, and not just orphans or abandoned children.

Holistic education makes a serious contribution to the child in terms of socialization, positive character development and recovery from trauma.

ly reduced. However, it will be much more useful to design and implement a holistic educational system model for all children, and not just orphans or abandoned children. Because holistic education makes a serious contribution to the child in terms of socialization, positive character development and recovery from trauma. Furthermore, it is crucial for orphans and their families to increase the number of educational institutions, especially in warzones, and to provide the essential elements for quality education and employ specialized psychologists in these institutions. Setting an example in this regard, Turkey strives to provide education to thousands of Syrian children and youth. More than 610,000 refugee children receive education in Turkey, both at schools operated by the Ministry of Education, and at establishments established by Syrian educators.⁶⁵

The education of children with disabilities requires special planning and professionalism, but the education of orphans who are also disabled requires much more care and attention. At this point, it is of

great importance to increase the number of special education establishments and well-trained qualified teachers, to make the physical conditions of the schools suitable for the disabled and to provide adequate materials and medical support. Investments in this area have produced positive results and the majority of the disabled population has reached a secondary education level, a step up from primary school. National strategies require that the rights of orphan children with disabilities should be respected and that the focus must be on measurable results.⁶⁶

Social collaboration for rehabilitating children will have a lasting effect, and consequently, cases of social exclusion and violence will also be significantly reduced. It should be noted at this point that it is not enough to only support children's education. Threats faced by children, especially orphans, should be eliminated and more work should be done to increase social awareness.

It should be remembered that there are many notable figures in world history that did not have a mother or a father who served humanity in leading positions, like politicians and scientists. To ensure the safety of all children, especially orphans and abandoned children, governments should initiate awareness-raising campaigns supported by the work of non-governmental organizations that reach out to individuals; while aid organizations that rely on a volunteering workforce should enhance their scope of impact by setting themselves up more strategically on larger territories.

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