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YUNMUN XXXVI

UNICEF Topic #1 - Unaccompanied Children in Migration Crises

Migration is happening worldwide, and children are among the most vulnerable. According to UNICEF, over 43 million children are displaced as of 2025, including 13 million refugees and 22 million internally displaced children.¹ Hundreds of thousands travel alone, separated from their family or caregivers, facing dangers that leave lasting trauma.

This issue spans continents. At the U.S.-Mexico border, 130,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in 2023, fleeing gang violence and poverty in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.² In Europe, the war in Ukraine displaced over 2 million children, with some separated from their families while fleeing to Poland, Germany, and other European nations.³ In Africa, conflicts in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Sahel displace tens of thousands of children, many traveling without adults.⁴ In Latin America, the Darien Gap, a dense jungle between Colombia and Panama, has become a dangerous route where children are robbed, assaulted, or abandoned.⁵

Journeys are often life-threatening. Children crossing the Central Mediterranean face overcrowded boats, while traveling by land puts them in danger of traffickers, smugglers, and armed groups.⁶ Beyond physical dangers, many suffer deep psychological trauma. Children often arrive in host countries without documents, guardians, or access to basic care; this often leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, forced labor, or sexual abuse.⁷ Overcrowded shelters struggle to provide healthcare, education, and various things. Many fall into child labor or enter criminal networks, while some disappear entirely.

¹ UNICEF, *Global Trends in Child Displacement 2025*.

² U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Unaccompanied Children at the Southwest Border: Annual Report 2023*.

³ UNHCR, *Ukraine Situation Update: Displacement of Children in Europe, 2024*.

⁴ UNHCR, *Africa Regional Refugee Report, 2024*.

⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Darien Gap Migration Trends, 2024*.

⁶ UNHCR, *Central Mediterranean Migration Routes Report, 2023*.

⁷ UNICEF, *Children on the Move: Risks and Protection Gaps, 2024*.

International laws, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention, aim to protect minors, but enforcement is inconsistent.⁸ Many countries prioritize border control over child safety; what that means is that policies often focus more on preventing entry or accelerating deportations than on ensuring that children are protected, identified, and cared for according to international standards.⁹ As a result, unaccompanied minors may be detained in unsafe facilities, separated from relatives, or denied asylum procedures designed to safeguard their rights. Climate-related displacement often leaves children without legal protection as well, since existing refugee laws rarely recognize climate as a valid cause for asylum. Even where support systems exist, limited funding, staff shortages, and poor coordination make stable care difficult, leaving children waiting weeks or months for help in unsafe conditions.

To guide your discussion, consider these questions:

- Should countries allow unaccompanied children to cross their borders without legal permission, or should immigration laws take priority?
- What safe alternatives to detention can protect children while respecting immigration law?
- How can the international community ensure unaccompanied children receive shelter, food, healthcare, and education while awaiting decisions?
- Should countries prioritize reuniting unaccompanied children with family members in their country of origin or focus on integrating them into the communities where they have arrived?
- How can governments help prevent unaccompanied children from taking dangerous migration routes while still following international law?
- Should countries be held accountable for failing to protect unaccompanied children within their borders, and what forms of accountability would be appropriate under international law?

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions as you work on this topic. It may seem complex at first, but with some research, I am sure you will find it interesting. Your

⁸ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989).

⁹ UNICEF, *Climate Change and Child Displacement*, 2,024.



position must reflect your country's stance, and it must be supported by credible sources. Please take into account that all submissions will be reviewed through Turnitin to ensure originality. Plagiarism and the use of AI-generated content without proper citation are strictly prohibited.

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Best of Luck

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