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Asylum and Immigration Processes for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees in African Countries: A Conceptual-Comparative Study

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family. Without their patience, understanding, support, and, most of all, love, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

This thesis, aims to explore and analyze the asylum and immigration processes affecting unaccompanied refugees' minors across various African countries. Through a conceptual and comparative approach, the study examines the legal frameworks, policies, and practical challenges encountered by unaccompanied minor refugees in their quest for safety and stability. The research begins with a comprehensive background and context, defining key terms and situating the study within relevant theoretical frameworks and historical trends. It then delves into the international standards and conventions that guide national policies, followed by an in-depth analysis of the national legal frameworks of selected countries, including Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Canada and US. A comparative analysis highlights differences and similarities in asylum procedures, protection measures, and long-term integration strategies. The research further includes detailed case studies that illustrate the successes and challenges unique to each country, providing a nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. Common challenges are identified, along with gaps in protection and support systems. Best practices are highlighted to offer insights into effective approaches that could be adopted more widely. The thesis concludes with policy recommendations aimed at improving the asylum and immigration processes for unaccompanied minors, emphasizing the need for child-centered approaches and better alignment with international standards. The study also outlines future research directions and stresses the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UMRs   Unaccompanied Minor Refugees

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNCRC   United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

IDP   Internally Displaced Person

UNICEF   United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

CRC   Convention of Rights of the Child

CEAS   Convention of European Asylum System

SAPs   Structural Adjustments Programs

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CHAPTER ONE

Overview

This thesis aims to explore a broad understanding of the challenges and the experiences of unaccompanied minor refugees throughout the resettlement and immigration process in Africa and will analyze the existing knowledge regarding the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and the way social workers approach them. Settlement in a new country can present significant challenges for refugees, especially unaccompanied minors. These minors must adapt to new laws, customs, education systems, and cultural norms without the support of parents or extended family (Kohli, 2011; Skårdalsmo & Harnischfeger, 2017).

This study will also look at the conventions and treaties that African countries are obliged to follow in terms of children rights and refugees, which make it a binding on the countries to follow the protocol. The challenges faced by these vulnerable minors are numerous, including the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. It is essential to carefully assess their situation to take immediate action to meet their needs. Immigrant and refugee youth may undergo an identity crisis as they navigate the cultural expectations of their parents and peers (McBrien, 2005).

There are situations where parents living with their children suddenly separate, creating an unfortunate situation of unaccompanied refugee children. Families separate in situations that can occur accidentally when families flee danger, or deliberately when children are abandoned (usually an act done in the desperate hope that they will have a better chance of survival). Children deprived of parental care are at high risk of violence and exploitation and are in urgent need of care. Refugee children face various challenges as they adapt to their new environment. Some children become refugees when they flee war and cross a border. Others could be born with refugee status.

Children born with refugee status are those whose parents fled conflict and gave birth in the country where they found refuge. They often lack birth documents. Additionally, birth data among refugee populations is frequently unavailable, incomplete, or poorly recorded in national administrative systems. Unaccompanied minor girls are less visible in research on unaccompanied refugee minors and it is important to ascertain whether gender differences influence the settlement to provide appropriate support and services, as the focus is primarily on the experiences of unaccompanied minor boys, because they are hot (Herz & Lalander, 2017).

Background of the Problem

The challenges faced by vulnerable unaccompanied minor refugees, especially minor girls, in a poor country are manifold. Young girls can be targets of gender-based violence, exploitation abuse or trafficking. They need to learn the language of their host country, overcome interrupted schooling, and adjust to a new education system. Additionally, they need to communicate with others, feel a sense of belonging, develop a strong personal identity, and cope with loss, separation, and trauma to feel safe (Ranta, M., 2023).

The causes of forced migration are traumatic enough for anyone. But they hit children especially hard because they are still developing emotionally and mentally and don't have the same tools that adults often have to overcome trauma. Children as refugees have rights and those rights are those stipulated in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), and more specifically, article 3 of the Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with unaccompanied children, seeking asylum (UNHCR, 1997:121), which emphasizes the importance of the obligations placed on all public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities and legislative bodies to ensure that the principle of the "best interests of the child" remains a priority.

When children grow up in armed conflict, their deep mental scars are often overlooked. Prolonged exposure to violence, fear, and uncertainty can have a catastrophic impact on children's learning, behavior, and emotional and social development for many years.

Displacement can further affect children's mental health, forcing them to develop several unhealthy coping mechanisms in response to their increased vulnerability. Even if a conflict ends and they can return home, these experiences may stay with them for the rest of their lives. Many of the factors above can affect a refugee child's sense of "at home" in their host community. However, beyond these challenges, xenophobia and discrimination play a significant role in the isolation of asylum seekers.

Statement of the Problem

Many refugee children spend their entire childhoods away from home, sometimes separated from their families. In situations of forced displacement, children are at risk of various forms of abuse, separation from their careers, violence, trafficking and recruitment by armed groups. Being forced to flee war and relocate to a new country can also severely affect their health, education and psychological wellbeing. Many children are born into refugee status, meaning that their parents fled and became refugees before they were born. These children face specific challenges. Their parents might have difficulties registering their births, making it harder to receive assistance or rendering them stateless. Refugee children around the world encounter significant challenges when trying to access education. They often face discrimination and struggle to find schools while escaping conflict or persecution. In particular, refugee girls are disproportionately affected, as they are frequently forced into domestic work, lack access to proper sanitation, and fear for their safety at school. These barriers must be addressed to ensure that all refugee children have the opportunity to receive an education.

A. Research Question

This study aims to explore the experiences of unaccompanied or forcibly displaced refugee minors as they adjust to life in African countries. The focus is on understanding the vulnerability of refugee boys and girls while examining the social and structural factors that contribute to this vulnerability. In-depth knowledge on the topic will be obtained using the research questions that follow:

- To what extent are unaccompanied or forcibly displaced minor refugee girls more vulnerable than their male counterparts during resettlement and immigration processes, and what urgent reforms are needed?

- Unaccompanied refugee minors face many challenges during resettlement. What approach do social workers use to support them through the challenges associated with the complexity of resettlement?

B. Significance of the Research Question

The research questions focus on the experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and explore in depth how these children are treated and the risks they face. It also aims to highlight the specific challenges faced by unaccompanied minor refugee girls. Furthermore, the research question aims to comprehensively understand the impact of the asylum procedure on their lives and the support provided by social workers. Additionally, these research questions attempt to understand the conventions and treaties that African countries must follow to ensure the protection of the rights of children and refugees. The understanding sought in the research question is also to find out how the governments of African countries manage the situation of these children, the resulting side effects, and whether the system complies with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in the articles 2, which describes non-discrimination and 12, which specifically describes participation rights).

Definition of Terms

In order to clarify the concepts discussed in this study, it is crucial to define certain key terms. The definition of a term can greatly influence how it is perceived. The following passage provides the definitions of the concepts that will be referred to in this thesis.

- **<u>Refugees</u>:** Someone who cannot or will not return to their home country due to a justifiable fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political beliefs (Refugee convention, UNHCR 1951)

- **<u>Unaccompanied Minor seeking asylum</u>:** is a person under the age of eighteen, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is reached earlier and who is "separated from both parents and who is not cared by an adult who, by law or custom, has the responsibility to do so (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR, 1997) seeking asylum.

- **<u>Child</u>:** A child is defined as any human being who has not yet reached the age of eighteen years, except in cases where the law considers a person to have reached the age of majority earlier. It can also refer to a human being who is between the developmental stages of birth and puberty. Additionally, it may encompass an unborn human being. Generally, the legal definition of a child pertains to a minor, which means a person who is under the age of majority (Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights & Rädda barnen (Society: Sweden). (2007)

- **<u>Asylum seeker</u>:** An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from human rights violation and persecution in another country, but who hasn't been yet recognized as an refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. This means that everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum (Kalt, A., Hossain, M., Kiss, L., & Zimmerman, C. (2013).

- **Human Right:** Human Rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity language, religion or another status. Human rights include the rights to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights without discrimination

- **Social work profession:** Social worker is practice based professional and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principle of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing

- **Welfare state:** A social system based on the assumption by a political state of primary responsibility for the individual and social welfare of its citizens

Nature of the Study

Many researchers have conducted studies on the topic of refugees, but very few have focused on the abuse of unaccompanied refugee minors. This research aims to study the context of unaccompanied refugee children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children using data extracted from various texts available on the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. By analyzing the concordances of the terms "Unaccompanied Refugee Minors" and "Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Minors", the study will highlight the problems and challenges faced by these vulnerable groups that the community must urgently seek to resolve.

Focus on Specific Countries

The research will also focus on specific groups or countries that have significant numbers of unaccompanied minors or unique challenges. For instance:

African and Syrian Refugees in Europe: Analyzing the experiences of African and Syrian unaccompanied minors in various European countries to understand the impact of different asylum policies and integration practices.

Central American Minors in the United States: Studying the journey and reception of unaccompanied minors from Central America to the U.S., including the role of border policies and family reunification efforts.

African Minors in Various Host Countries in Africa: Comparing the situations of unaccompanied minors from African countries in different host nations in Africa, such as those in refugee camps in neighboring countries versus those in more distant countries with different support structures.

Relevance and Significance of the Study

Over the past decade, international migration has undergone a significant transformation. Not only have migration flows increased and origins/destinations multiplied, but it has also become increasingly difficult to distinguish between migrants (who move for economic reasons) and refugees (who flee persecution and violence).

This study focuses on the legal and procedural aspects of asylum and immigration for unaccompanied minor refugees (UMRs) in selected African countries. The aim is to compare the asylum processes for UMRs in various African countries, analyze the legal frameworks and policies in place to protect UMRs, and identify gaps and challenges in the current systems. The study will also propose recommendations for improving the protection and integration of UMRs.

This study is unique in its focus on both migration and refugee studies, with a particular emphasis on unaccompanied minor children across the African continents. The research is both theoretical and empirical and will complement the work of social workers who receive children, as well as inform the governance of migration by African states and the integration of migrants/refugees and related policies and practices.

The research aims to understand the international and comparative perspectives of unaccompanied minor refugees, focusing on their experiences, challenges, and well-being. Unaccompanied minors, who migrate without the presence of a legal guardian or parent, face unique and often severe difficulties. This research seeks to identify these challenges across different countries and cultural contexts, providing a comprehensive view of the systemic issues these children face globally.

Evidence That the Problem Exists

Global Statistics: According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are tens of thousands of unaccompanied and separated children worldwide. These minors often endure harsh conditions, lack of protection, and limited access to essential services such as education and healthcare.

Research Findings: Studies have consistently shown that unaccompanied minors are more exposed to the risk of exploitation, abuse, and mental health issues compared to accompanied children. For example, a UNHCR (2014) study highlighted the vulnerability of unaccompanied minors to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

Legal and Social Challenges: Unaccompanied minors often face legal and bureaucratic hurdles in seeking asylum or refugee status. They may lack proper documentation, face language barriers, and have limited understanding of the asylum processes, which can lead to prolonged uncertainty and psychological distress.

Unaccompanied Minor Refugees: The primary group affected by this problem is unaccompanied minor refugees themselves. They face a range of issues including physical insecurity, psychological trauma, and social isolation.

Host Countries: The countries that receive these minors are also impacted. They must find ways to provide adequate care, protection, and integration services for these vulnerable children, often with limited resources and varying levels of infrastructure.

Global Community: The broader international community is affected as the plight of unaccompanied minors is a humanitarian issue that calls for collective action and policy responses.

Conflict and Persecution: Many unaccompanied minors flee their home countries due to conflict, persecution, or severe economic hardship. These conditions often force families to make the difficult decision to send their children away in search of safety.

Lack of Legal Pathways: There are insufficient legal pathways for safe migration, forcing many minors to undertake perilous journeys alone. The absence of legal migration routes contributes to the prevalence of unaccompanied minors in refugee flows.

Inadequate Protection Systems: Both in transit and host countries, there are often inadequate protection systems to support unaccompanied minors. This includes a lack of appropriate shelters, legal assistance, and psychological support.

Economic Disparities: In many cases, families are unable to migrate together due to financial constraints, leading to children being sent ahead in hopes of a better future and the potential to reunite later.

Policy Gaps: Many countries lack comprehensive policies to address the specific needs of unaccompanied minors. This includes insufficient legal frameworks, protection measures, and integration programs.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP): An IDP is someone who has been forced to flee their home but remains within their country's borders. They have not crossed an international boundary and are often in need of humanitarian assistance.

Trafficking in Persons: This term refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through threats, the use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, or the abuse of power, with the intent to exploit them. Unaccompanied minors are particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

Family Reunification: The process of reuniting a refugee or asylum seeker with their family members who are in another country. This is a critical aspect of protecting the well-being of unaccompanied minors, who often have family members in different locations.

Transit Country: A country that refugees pass through on their way to their final destination. Transit countries can play a significant role in the safety and well-being of unaccompanied minors, as these countries often lack the resources and infrastructure to provide adequate support.

Resettlement: The process of relocating refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement. Resettlement is an important durable solution for unaccompanied minors who cannot return home or remain in the host country.

Humanitarian Protection: This refers to the various forms of protection and assistance provided to individuals in need, including unaccompanied minors. This can include shelter, food, medical care, psychological support, and legal assistance.

Psychosocial Support: Interventions aimed at addressing the psychological and social needs of individuals affected by displacement and trauma. For unaccompanied minors, psychosocial support is crucial in helping them cope with their experiences and integrate into new environments.

Child Protection Services: Services and systems designed to safeguard children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. This includes legal frameworks, social services, and community-based interventions that ensure the safety and well-being of unaccompanied minors.

Best Interests of the Child: The "Best Interests of the Child" is a fundamental principle in international law, particularly highlighted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This principle is meant to ensure that in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the primary consideration must be the child's best interests.

The principle of the best interests of the child is a cornerstone of child protection and welfare practices. It requires a holistic approach that considers the various dimensions of a child's well-being, ensuring that their needs and rights are at the forefront of all decisions affecting them. This principle is especially critical for vulnerable populations such as unaccompanied minor refugees, who require tailored interventions to support their safety, development, and integration into new communities.

Guardianship: The legal responsibility for the care and protection of a minor. For unaccompanied minors, guardianship arrangements are crucial to ensure that a responsible adult is looking after their needs and interests.

Migration Policy: The set of laws, regulations, and policies that govern the movement of people across borders. Migration policies can significantly impact the experiences and outcomes of unaccompanied minors seeking refuge or asylum.

Defining an unaccompanied minor refugee is essential to identify gaps in current policies and practices. It helps identify areas where protection and support systems for these vulnerable children may be lacking or inadequate.

It is also true that by defining an unaccompanied minor refugee and understanding their specific needs, policymakers and practitioners can better identify these gaps and work towards creating more effective and comprehensive protection and support systems. This involves developing targeted policies, allocating resources appropriately, and ensuring that the specific vulnerabilities of unaccompanied minors are addressed at every stage of their journey.

Organization of the Study

The inclusion of this component in the thesis is paramount. Its illuminating nature serves as a beacon for readers, guiding them effortlessly through the research and its results. The design of this element is such that readers can easily imbibe the content of the thesis, using it as a roadmap to gain a better understanding of the research. This fascinating study is divided into five chapters that delve deeper into the complex context of refugee rights. All of these subdivisions are suitable for a research thesis related to my subject and will be detailed as follows:

In Chapter one, the challenges faced by unaccompanied minor refugees are presented to the readers. This presentation is intended to provoke thought and lead the public to a crucial research question that will result in significant knowledge in this important area. By presenting the issues, a research question was formulated.

Chapter two provides background information on asylum seekers and the different categories they fall into, including unaccompanied children. It explains the situation of unaccompanied children seeking asylum and how the asylum procedure works. The chapter also includes research on how social workers care for these children and the risks they face.

Chapter three discusses the methodology used in the study, including ethical considerations, limitations, and difficulties encountered during the research process.

Chapter Four examines the international legal frameworks and instruments established to protect refugees and asylum seekers, with a particular emphasis on the rights of children. This chapter explores the various treaties, conventions, and laws that are designed to safeguard the well-being of refugee children and ensure their access to essential services and protection. It also includes a discussion on human rights and children's rights, as well as the challenges in accessing these rights due to territorialism.

In Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, the study will summarize the key findings, discuss their implications for both theory and practice, and suggest avenues for future research. This chapter will revisit the introduction, readdress the research questions, and offer a concise reflection on the study's significance in the context of unaccompanied minor refugees. By emphasizing the best interests of the child and ensuring that their unique needs are met, the international community can better protect these vulnerable populations and provide them with the opportunity to lead safe and fulfilling lives.

This chapter analyses whether there are any faults and failures to comply with the standards of the articles, specifically in the case of unaccompanied children seeking asylum and how social workers treat them. The analysis of the texts will be used as evidence to answer the first and second questions of the thesis. The chapter also emphasizes the philosophical and ethical views of the thesis.

General Overview of the Five Chapters

The main objective of these chapters is to illustrate how individuals, regardless of whether they are adults or children, are deprived of their fundamental rights when they find themselves in a state of statelessness. Statelessness strips individuals of the legal recognition that would ordinarily afford them protection, access to basic services, and the ability to exercise their rights. This situation is particularly dire for children, who are among the most vulnerable populations. Without legal status, children are often denied access to education, healthcare, and social services, which are essential for their development and well-being.

Furthermore, these chapters explore the specific rights of children under international law, emphasizing the unique protections that should be afforded to them as minors. This includes the right to identity, nationality, education, and protection from exploitation and abuse.

In addition to the legal aspects, these chapters also examine the crucial role of social workers in supporting refugee children. Social workers serve as frontline defenders of children's rights, providing essential services and advocating for their protection. They help navigate the complex processes of resettlement and integration, ensuring that refugee children receive the care and support they need. Social workers also play a vital role in addressing the psychological and social challenges that refugee children face, helping them to overcome trauma and build a sense of stability in their new environments.

By highlighting both the legal frameworks and the practical efforts of social workers, these chapters aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the plight of stateless individuals, particularly children, and the efforts needed to restore their rights and dignity. This comprehensive approach involves synthesizing information from a variety of sources to build a thorough understanding of the subject matter. Previous studies provide a foundation of existing knowledge and highlight key issues and trends. Interviews with individuals who have firsthand experience or specialized knowledge offer personal perspectives and contextual understanding. Scholarly research contributes theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, while input from United Nations experts ensures that the findings are informed by authoritative international standards and practices.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This thesis section aims to shed light on the growing number of refugees from third-world countries. By examining existing research, reports, and publications on UMRs and asylum processes in African countries, it becomes evident and crucial to understand this phenomenon, along with other forms of immigration. (Andersson, H, Ascher, H, Björnberg, U, Eastmond, M and Mellander, L, 2005).

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, nearly half of the world's forcibly displaced individuals are children, accompanied or unaccompanied, many of whom spend their childhoods far from their homes. Whether they are refugees, internally displaced, seeking asylum, or stateless, children are at high risk of facing abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking, or forced military recruitment (UN Refugee Agency, 2017).

In this literature review, it's great to see that these conventions and articles establish equality among all human beings, regardless of their race, condition, religion, or sex. It's important to note that education is recognized as a universal right without any discrimination. The right to education is guaranteed for every child, including free primary education for all. Moreover, these conventions also address the rights of women, migrant workers, and refugees, ensuring that they too have access to education. These international legal instruments recognize that every human being has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and that the fundamental rights and freedoms inherent to all human beings are inalienable and equally applicable to all.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the intersection of child rights and refugee protection. Key concepts include:

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (articles 13 and 14) is of particular importance in the United Nations (UN) legal framework relating to the right to education. It recognizes the universal right to education without any discrimination and establishes a framework for obtaining the full exercise of this right (United Nations, 1966).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child Understanding UMRs within the context of international child rights conventions, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Articles 28 and 29 apply to children under 18 years of age and recognizes the right of every child to education on the basis of equality of opportunity, compulsory and free primary education for all; the gradual establishment of free secondary education which must be open and accessible to all and access to higher education according to each person's abilities (United Nations, 1989).

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (article 10) establishes an international charter of women's rights and guarantees them the right to education. It promotes gender equality, guaranteeing every woman equal rights to men in education, from preschool to higher technical education (United Nations, 1979).

The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families: This convention examine the application of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, along with the African Union's Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Articles 12(4), 30, 43, 45) aim to prevent and eliminate the

exploitation of migrant workers throughout the migration process providing a set of binding international standards relating to the treatment, welfare and human rights of migrants – documented and undocumented; it also lists the obligations and responsibilities of sending and receiving States (United Nations, 1990).

The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (article 22) guarantees the right of refugees to education (United Nations, 1951).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 18) guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion in education and recognizes the freedom of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in accordance with their own beliefs (United Nations, 1966).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (article 26) is the first international legal instrument that recognizes education as a right and the right to equality of human beings. It is a non-binding legal instrument but has great political and moral force. It represents the universal recognition that the fundamental rights and freedoms inherent to all human beings are inalienable and equally applicable to all. It is at the heart of the United Nations system and has inspired all human rights treaties (United Nations, 1948).

The United Nations system has played a pivotal role in shaping and advancing human rights globally, serving as the foundation for numerous international treaties and conventions. Established in the aftermath of World War II, the UN was tasked with fostering international cooperation and promoting peace, which quickly extended to the protection of human rights. One of the cornerstone documents of this effort is the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR), adopted in 1948, which laid the groundwork for subsequent human rights treaties.

Research topic in the Literature Review

This research will delve into five important themes that require urgent attention: unaccompanied refugee minors, Refugee children 'rights, children born with refugee status, unaccompanied refugee minor girls, and social workers' approach to resettlement.

Refugee Children's Rights encompass the protections and entitlements for children fleeing conflict or persecution, ensuring their safety, education, and health care. This includes children born to refugee parents, who inherit refugee status and face unique challenges related to nationality and access to services. Social workers play a crucial role by employing strategies to help these refugees

By exploring these themes in depth, the study will gain a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by refugees, particularly children. This knowledge develops effective policies that can help improve the lives of these vulnerable individuals and ensure they receive the support they need to thrive. The selected themes are interrelated and will be discussed in the context of creating a conceptual framework that addresses the topics mentioned above.

In recent years, a large number of unaccompanied minors have arrived in different countries across Africa, Europe, and America. This has created a dilemma, as these minors present themselves at borders without any adults or parents, making their situation very fragile and unprotected (Manzano & Agugliaro, 2018).

Many organizations are involved in the lives of children, whether they are refugees or non-refugees. UNHCR has stated that not all children who arrive without legal guardians or parents are unaccompanied minors; some may be separated from their parents and live with traffickers or smugglers, friends, or siblings ((Manzano, Agugliaro Esther & Francisco, 2018).

Countries have an obligation to respect all the conventions adopted by the United Nations on the rights of children, refugees, and humanitarian protocols. Despite these laws and conventions, it is the responsibility of each state to ensure that international laws and obligations on paper correspond to practices on the ground related to unaccompanied minors (Manzano & Agugliaro, 2018).

First: Literature Review on Unaccompanied Refugee Minors.

The immigration process of unaccompanied minors in most African countries lacks scientific work on the strategies adopted by migration actors to welcome asylum-seeking children in host countries. This is a critical issue that needs to be resolved urgently. Unaccompanied minors face immense challenges upon arrival in safe shelters, including unfamiliar laws, customs, education systems and cultural codes. It can be overwhelming, especially since they don't have the support of their parents or extended family.

Additionally, delays and poor quality of care during the asylum procedure can lead to poorer health and well-being outcomes. It is essential to prioritize the settlement of unaccompanied minors in host countries, ensuring that they receive the necessary resources and support to integrate into their new environment. The reception structure in African countries poses a challenge compared to European countries, which have better qualified reception structures for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

To establish reception facilities in Africa for unaccompanied children and all other categories of refugees, it is essential to develop effective strategies and resources that prioritize their safety and well-being. These measures should be based on the experiences of European countries.

All African countries like Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Congo Brazzaville to only speak of a few cases, all are the same without governmental reception structures. In times of conflict or war, unaccompanied minor refugee children as well as refugee parents seek refuge in neighboring African countries in the sub-region, often due to resemblance on the basis of historical colonization or geographical links (Traoré, 1994).

Settling in a new country can be a difficult process for refugees in general, and for unaccompanied minors in particular. Minors are faced with new laws, customs, educational systems, cultural codes, etc., all without the support of parents or extended family (Kohli, 2011, Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger, 2017).

After fleeing their home country and enduring difficult and traumatic experiences, once they arrive at safe havens, their relief may be short-lived as they begin to struggle with the realities of settling into unfamiliar environments. Unaccompanied refugee minors face a multitude of challenges when settling in host countries, but few have focused on the strategies to use and resources to draw on to welcome children unaccompanied (Wernesjö, 2012).

The focus of this study is on the experiences of unaccompanied minor boys who are visible and overrepresented in this category of unaccompanied children, while the cases of unaccompanied minor girls will be explored in the following module (Herz & Lalander, 2017).

Delays and poor quality of care during the asylum procedure can lead to poorer health and well-being outcomes. Unaccompanied minors are a diverse group of children from diverse backgrounds with different experiences and needs and this must be taken into account during their settlement (Horgan & Ni Raghallaigh, 2017; Kauhanen & Kaukko, 2020).

Most unaccompanied minors under the age of 17 have their asylum applications approved; the only problem that arises is that of the reception structure in African countries. Unlike European countries which have a very good asylum policy despite this increasingly restrictive policy, which results in a decrease in positively approved asylum applications (Bufdir, 2017, Lidén et al., 2017).

Second: Literature Review on Unaccompanied Female Refugee Minors.

The care and welfare of unaccompanied refugee minors has garnered significant attention from both political and social spheres. Despite extensive research conducted on the experiences and situations of unaccompanied minors, the issue of gender has been largely neglected. Particularly, the situation of unaccompanied minor girls is often overlooked, while the experiences of unaccompanied minor boys are frequently emphasized. This gender disparity may be attributed to certain cultural norms that view boys as being more resilient and adaptable to new environments when traveling alone (Bhabha and Crock, 2007, Øien, 2010).

It is important to acknowledge the fact that unaccompanied minor girls are often overlooked in searches for unaccompanied minors. It is crucial to be gender sensitive during refugee settlement to ensure that adequate services and support are provided. Sexual violence against unaccompanied minors is a global problem, and it affects most refugee women in Africa who suffer from it in silence. In the immigration process, girls are often less visible than boys, which is concerning as they may require additional support and services.

Unaccompanied and forcibly displaced minor refugees face significant challenges during resettlement and immigration processes. Among these minors, girls are often more vulnerable than boys due to gender-specific risks and societal norms. This section of the thesis explores the extent of this vulnerability and identifies urgent reforms needed to address the disparities and

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improve the protection and support for minor refugee girls. Girls may be seen as more vulnerable to abuse and in need of protection. Furthermore, boys are more often directly involved in conflict situations linked to conditions triggering migration at the macro level; for example, military service and participation in armed conflicts and while girls often flee due to conditions triggering micro-migration, such as fear of early marriage and/or sexual abuse (Øien, 2010).

It is important to note that refugee children are overrepresented in the entire refugee population, with 60% of them being unaccompanied minor girls and 40% being boys. Girls who represent 60% are often ignored. This disparity highlights the vulnerability of unaccompanied refugee girls in situations of forced displacement. The study will extend to analyzing the loss of support systems of many refugee children and possible abuse and exploitation, including disruption of education. Many refugee children have lost their traditional support systems, including extended family, neighbors and teachers. This loss makes them particularly vulnerable to various forms of harm, including abuse, violence, exploitation and ongoing trauma.

Without the protection networks provided by their support systems, unaccompanied refugee children are more likely to be exploited and abused, including trafficking, child labor and sexual exploitation. These risks are compounded by the chaotic and often dangerous environments in which many refugees find themselves.

The schooling of refugee children is frequently disrupted due to displacement, with many forced to suspend their studies for years. This disruption not only deprives children of their right to education, but also hinders their long-term development and future prospects. The community as a whole must come together to address these challenges which require comprehensive and coordinated efforts from governments, humanitarian organizations, communities and other

stakeholders. Providing access to safe and supportive environments, including education and psychosocial support, is essential to ensure the well-being and future prospects of refugee children. Additionally, efforts to address the root causes of forced displacement and conflict are essential to preventing further harm to children and their families.

Emerging literature on the mental health of unaccompanied refugies minors reveals a worrying proportion of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, borderline pathology and transient acute psychoses. Sexual violence against refugees is a global problem. But in Africa, this violence is not counted and is invisible even though it constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights, making victims already deeply affected by their exile living in fear.

Sexual violence against unaccompanied minors is a phenomenon that affects most refugee women in Africa and who suffer from it in silence. This phenomenon is accentuated by the lack of reception structure and social workers are poorly trained or do not have the means to apply the reception policy learned. All of these girls are at the mercy of many people and, in each case, the resulting physical and psychological trauma can only increase the grievance of displacement and the bitterness of exile.

Comparative Vulnerabilities of Girls and Boys

Exposure to Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Girls are at a higher risk of sexual exploitation, trafficking, and abuse both during their journey and in refugee camps or host communities. Studies show that unaccompanied girls are more likely to experience GBV compared to boys, who might face different forms of violence such as forced recruitment into armed groups.

Access to Education: Cultural norms and economic pressures often prioritize boys' education over girls', leading to lower school enrollment and higher dropout rates among refugee girls. Lack of education limits future opportunities and increases vulnerability to exploitation and poverty.

Healthcare and Psychosocial Support: Girls often face barriers in accessing reproductive healthcare and may suffer from malnutrition or untreated injuries more frequently than boys. The trauma from gender-based violence and discrimination can have long-lasting psychological effects, necessitating specialized mental health support which is often inadequate.

Legal and Asylum Procedures: Girls may lack proper identification documents, making it harder to navigate asylum procedures or access legal aid. Legal frameworks often fail to address the specific needs of girls, such as safe accommodation and gender-sensitive legal assistance.

Third: Literature Review on the Rights of Refugee Children.

This literature review draws on the available evidence regarding effective support for refugee and asylum-seeking children in education, exploring examples of good practice and identifying areas for improvement. All children, including refugee and asylum-seeking children, have the legal right to education under Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which guarantees compulsory and free primary education for all. Millions of children continue to find themselves as refugees and asylum seekers at state borders, seeking entry and protection.

Many are turned away and many others are treated as invisible or suspicious petitioners, as fakes or accusers. For the sake of these children and for the sake of all humanity, there is an urgent need to reposition refugee children in the international and national discourse on protection and rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly identifies refugee children as rights holders, but many countries do not effectively implement these rights.

Article 22 guarantees the substantive application of all Convention rights to the particular situation of asylum-seeking and refugee children, and also guarantees them protection and assistance in asserting their applications for immigration and residence status and to overcome the obstacles posed by international migration routes, notably due to process guarantees. The rights of refugee and asylum-seeking children can be analyzed against four key attributes (Whalen, C., 2022).

First, Article 22 emphasizes appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. Refugee children do not benefit from a special status within the meaning of the Convention, but they do not benefit from a lesser status. They must be treated first and foremost as children and not as migrants per se, in the sense that national immigration policy cannot override children's rights. The fundamental rights of these children to education, health and child protection must be protected to the same extent and as much as possible, as children who are nationals of the host country.

The second attribute preserves the rights of refugee children not only under the Convention but under all other international human rights treaties and humanitarian instruments binding on the States parties concerned. These may include, for many governments, the Refugee Convention of 1951, the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the Geneva Conventions and the Hague Convention for the Protection of Minors, 1961, among others .

A third attribute of Article 22 emphasizes the duty to protect and assist refugee children. This involves a clear obligation to guarantee children's due process rights throughout their asylum and refugee procedures, including the child's right to be heard and participate in all proceedings determining their residence or immigration status, their admission at the border, their expulsion, their repatriation, their detention, alternative measures or placement, including best interests determination processes.

The fourth and final attribute of Article 22 affirms that two fundamental principles must guide any activity with the refugee child: the best interests of the child and the principle of family unity.

To identify a refugee child, he must be recognized above all as a human being who has rights. The concepts of "child" and "refugee" are not consistently defined across disciplines, although both concepts are essential structural markers for positioning this doubly vulnerable group as children distinct from adults and distinct refugee citizens. How the rights of refugee children are recognized and implemented in the legal and immigration systems depends largely on how refugee children are defined as children and refugees.

There is no generic or typical child. Children differ from each other in many ways, including the defining characteristic of being a child distinct from an adult. The adult/child distinction may seem simple: children and adults are distinguished by age, with age being a rough marker of different periods of the life cycle. The entire community must protect children and deal with the after-effects of the trauma of life as a child. Past events and relationships resurface in the present, for example in the way past experiences of abuse or trauma are reiterated in current unpleasant events of refugee children (Kronick et al. 2018).

Fourth: Literature Review on Children Born with Refugee Status.

Many children are born with refugee status, meaning their parents fled and became refugees before they were born. These children face specific challenges. Their parents may have difficulty registering their birth, making it more difficult to obtain assistance or rendering them stateless. Registering the birth of each child in a civil registry is essential because it provides children with proof of their legal identity, a prerequisite for the ability to exercise their rights and access services. The Sustainable Development Goals have recognized the relevance of birth registration. However, despite significant global progress in birth registration, UNICEF has estimated that one in four five-year-olds under the age of 4 - some 166 million - are still not registered at the end of 2019.

Registering children born to refugees can be even more complex, but particularly important to ensure they receive adequate protection and assistance. The number of registered births is often unavailable, not reported by governments, or not properly recorded in national administrative systems. In many cases, this is because the births of refugee children cannot or will not be recorded in the civil registration and vital statistics systems of host States or it may be difficult to determine, among all the children registered by the authorities, how many are refugees. Even where UNHCR is operational and maintains refugee family composition figures to enable its work, it is difficult to get a complete picture.

Under international law, the enjoyment of human rights is, in most cases, not linked to the possession of a specific nationality. Despite this progressive "denationalization" of human rights, nationality still seems crucial for the effective enjoyment of human rights and access to protection mechanisms in the event of rights violations. The definition of a stateless person in international law reads as "a person who is not considered a national by any State under its law".

There is broad consensus that statelessness must be avoided, a principle confirmed by a wide range of international treaties and recommendations. Refugee children born in exile are particularly at risk of statelessness. While most of them in principle inherit their parents' nationality, many do not, for example, due to gender discrimination in the nationality law of the country of origin parents. Many refugee children automatically acquire their parents' nationality at birth, but this nationality often only exists in theory, with parents unable to register their child with the authorities of the country of origin.

Fifth: Literature Review on Social Workers' Approaches to Resettlement

In this review of the literature on social workers' approach to resettlement, much of the literature refers to refugees in general rather than asylum seekers in particular. In several African countries, it is difficult to talk about assistance to refugees because the state system is deeply disorganized. It is the UNHCR service that takes care of the reception of asylum seekers and their temporary installation these asylum seekers do not benefit from anything at all unless they are placed in refugee camps but for those who stay in town, they only benefit from a work permit and will have to find accommodation and food themselves

Once refugees arrive in a country, they present themselves to UNHCR and become asylum seekers. Their cases may take two years or more to be recognized as refugees under the United Nations Refugee Convention. Once their status is recognized, refugees can benefit from monitoring or a third of a bag of rice each month and they are encouraged to find work and integrate like nationals.

Since our topic is about resettlement in Africa, there is no resettlement program for refugees or asylum seekers in Africa. In principle, social workers should have a welcoming attitude towards strangers in times of war.

After more than five years of living in a country, refugees will be chosen who have emblematic cases and who can no longer return to their country of origin, such as the case of single-parent refugee women with many unemployed children or survivors of poverty, torture, and other specific cases, such as those who continue to fear for their safety due to proximity to borders, could be recommended by UNHCR for resettlement.

Review of refugee resettlement applications under the UN Refugee Convention is carried out through UNHCR, but excludes asylum seekers whose applications have not yet been reviewed. To obtain refugee status, individuals typically fall into one of seven categories under the convention:

- Legal and physical protection needs
- Medical needs
- Survivors of violence and torture
- Women at risk
- Family reunification
- Children and adolescents
- Elderly refugees.

The literature confirms that pre-planning of refugees upon arrival is necessary for good quality resettlement. Unfortunately in no African country is there a refugee resettlement program given the reception conditions of the native population who have difficulty finding food, housing or finding employment.

Comparative Analysis

This comparative study aims to compare a sample representing the least advanced African countries and those more advanced, as well as Western countries including the United States of America, Canada, and Norway. African countries caring for asylum seekers or refugees share similarities and Western countries have, as well, certain resemblances. Therefore, a non-exhaustive list will be created to analyze the services available in these countries.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly through national laws and international commitments. Despite this, the authorities have regularly violated this right, especially during the political deadlock following the failure to hold presidential elections in 2016. They have employed various tactics to suppress this right, including prohibiting gatherings, harassing protest organizers, using excessive force by police during protests, making arbitrary arrests, and imposing fines and prison sentences after unfair trials. While the authorities have allowed meetings and rallies by their supporters, dissenting voices such as opposition members, civil society activists, human rights defenders, and journalists covering protests have been consistently targeted.

This commentary evaluates the inadequacy of legislation and policies to enforce the provisions of the DRC Constitution regarding the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in line with international standards. It also discusses how this legislative gap impacts other human rights in the country. Additionally, it covers the asylum process for Undocumented Migrants and Refugees (UMRs), specific challenges they face, such as delays and lack of legal representation, and successful strategies and programs supporting UMRs.

Republic of Kenya

The Republic of Kenya guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly through national laws and international commitments, but there were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Kenya during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and censorship; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, female genital mutilation/cutting, and other forms of such violence; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, although there were no reports of the law being enforced; and the existence of the worst forms of child labor. Governments can take credible actions for human rights through several mechanisms and strategies that demonstrate their commitment to protecting and promoting these rights.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses, but impunity was a problem at all levels of government (US Department of States, 2023)

Legal Framework and Asylum Process: Providing an overview of the national laws and international commitments. Outlining the steps involved in seeking asylum for UMRs. Challenges: Highlighting specific issues faced by UMRs, such as delays and lack of legal representation. Best Practices: Showcasing successful strategies and programs supporting UMRs.

Republic of South Africa

The five democratic principles applicable in South Africa are well-known as non-racialism and non-sexism, supremacy of the Constitution, universal adult suffrage, a national common voters' roll, regular elections and a multiparty system of democratic government to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness. The Bill of Rights is the cornerstone of South Africa's democracy. It enshrines the rights of all people in South Africa and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. While every person is entitled to these rights, they also have a responsibility to respect these rights

Legal Framework: Presenting the national legislation and international obligations. Asylum Process: Describing the procedures for UMRs seeking asylum. Challenges: Discussing problems like xenophobia, legal hurdles, and detention. Best Practices: Illustrating effective approaches to UMR protection and integration.

Republic of Uganda
In the Republic of Uganda, the human rights-based approach involves empowering people to know and claim their rights and increasing the capacity and accountability of individuals and institutions responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling their rights. The authorities have a dictatorial tendency and the redistribution of goods and services is selective

Legal Framework and Asylum Process: Highlighting relevant laws and adherence to international conventions. Detailing the steps and mechanisms in place for UMRs. Challenges: Noting issues including resource constraints and integration difficulties. Best Practices: Describing community-based initiatives and support systems

Canada, the United States, or European Union countries, Great Britain

Countries like Canada, the United States, and those in the European Union, including Great Britain, have established themselves as leaders in the global commitment to human rights. These nations implement comprehensive strategies to uphold and advance human rights through legislative frameworks, international treaties, and active engagement with global human rights mechanisms. They enforce robust legal protections, support human rights institutions, and foster collaborations with civil society to ensure the rights and freedoms of individuals are safeguarded. Their dedication to these principles reflects a commitment to creating a more just and equitable world.

For refugees arriving in countries like Canada, the United States, or European Union countries including Great Britain, there are reception structures managed by states and NGOs that facilitate reintegration of these refugees in the host country. There is a planned strategy whereby the central government has an important role in facilitating the reception of resettled refugees, including settlement by municipalities or local authorities.

A clear division of labor should be established and preparatory meetings, seminars and training should be organized to prepare and motivate those involved in welcoming resettled refugees.

In conclusion, here are the steps and how professional social workers in developed countries like Europe, America, and Canada countries provide refugees, especially unaccompanied minor children, with the necessary psychological, physical, and other support until their integration into their new community, in comparison to their African colleagues deprived of any suitable reception system.

Professional social workers play a crucial role in providing comprehensive support to refugees and unaccompanied refugee minor children as they navigate the challenges of resettlement and integration into their new communities. Here's how they typically provide assistance:

● **Assessment and Case Management:** Social workers conduct thorough assessments to understand the individual needs and circumstances of each refugee and unaccompanied minor. They develop personalized care plans and provide ongoing case management to ensure access to necessary services.

● **Psychological Support**: Many refugees have experienced trauma, including war, persecution, and displacement. Social workers offer trauma-informed care, counseling, and mental health support to address psychological issues such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

● **Cultural and Linguistic Mediation:** Social workers often bridge cultural and linguistic gaps between refugees and service providers. They help refugees understand their rights, navigate the healthcare and educational systems, and access community resources.

● **Basic Needs Assistance:** Social workers help refugees secure housing, food, clothing, and other essentials for daily living. They may also assist with applications for government benefits and social services.

● **Education and Employment Support**: Social workers help refugees access educational opportunities, including language classes and job training programs. They assist with resume writing, job searches, and vocational counseling to promote self-sufficiency and economic stability.

● **Family Reunification:** For unaccompanied minor refugees, social workers work to locate and reunite them with family members when possible. They also provide ongoing support to ensure the well-being of children who are separated from their families.

● **Community Integration:** Social workers facilitate refugees' integration into their new communities by connecting them with local cultural and social organizations, volunteering opportunities, and community events. They promote social inclusion and help refugees build supportive networks.

● **Advocacy and Empowerment**: Social workers advocate for the rights and interests of refugees within the host community and at the policy level. They empower refugees to advocate for themselves, navigate legal processes, and access justice.

● **Trafficking Prevention:** Social workers are vigilant in identifying and preventing human trafficking among vulnerable refugee populations, especially unaccompanied minors. They provide education on trafficking risks and help refugees develop safety plans.

● **Long-Term Support:** Social workers provide ongoing support to refugees beyond the initial resettlement period, recognizing that integration is a gradual process. They offer follow-up services, monitoring, and referrals as needed to promote sustained well-being and success.

Challenges of Social Work Practice in Africa

Social work is a professional approach aimed at addressing social problems. It is commonly regarded as a field that employs trained professionals to assist people in dealing with their social challenges. However, in developing countries, social work is a relatively new profession that was shaped by colonialism during its early stages. In Africa, social work was heavily influenced by the practices of the colonial powers such as Britain, France, and Portugal (Mupedziswa, 2005).

In many African countries, social work initially focused on addressing social problems after they had already emerged. The colonial authorities believed that unaddressed social ills could threaten stability and order. Consequently, social work was primarily viewed as a tool for social control and did not effectively tackle the underlying causes of social problems.

Mupedziswa (2005) points out a major concern that the remedial approach in social work in Africa has tended to overlook developmental issues such as unemployment, inadequate shelter, homelessness, illiteracy, disease, and ignorance while focusing on individual pathologies. This has led some critics and scholars to argue that social work practice in its current form is largely ineffective (Gray, Coates & Bird, 2008).

Although social work is a relatively young profession in Africa, it has grown into a viable profession integrated into various government departments of social welfare, hospitals, correctional services, police, and defense forces where the casework method is predominantly used. Social workers employed in NGOs are commendable for utilizing the community work method, which aligns with the social development paradigm. However, the profession of social work in Africa faces several urgent problems that need to be addressed in order to effectively deliver social services to the majority of people who are mainly poverty-stricken. Some of these problems include a lack of resources (both material and financial), low wages and salaries for social work professionals, poor conditions of service, and a lack of proper professional recognition of social workers in Africa.

These issues will be briefly explained below.

Firstly, most social workers in Africa lack both material and financial resources to carry out their duties. This is a result of insufficient allocations of budget funds for social services. There has been a general decline in social welfare budgets throughout Africa in the last few years, yet there are more social problems that need to be tackled. Social workers often lack basic items such as offices, telephones, and computers, as well as transport to carry out home visits. This completely compromises their effectiveness in delivering services.

Secondly, there remains a considerable wage and salary gap between social workers and those employed in other sectors in Africa. Furthermore, their working conditions are not very attractive. They work long hours and carry heavy caseloads. Because of these reasons, highly qualified social workers in Africa have left the profession altogether, while some have left the continent to work in countries like Britain, the USA, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia where salaries and conditions are comparatively better.

There is a lack of professional recognition of social workers in Africa. Many people don't understand what social work is, including some government officials. As a result, in some countries, people with no training in sociology or political science are employed as "social workers". In conclusion, Africa has great developmental potential but is still plagued by numerous social problems that require social work intervention. Social workers in Africa need to be proactive rather than reactive when dealing with these problems. While the curative or remedial approach is still necessary, social workers need to adopt the social development paradigm to effectively address the continent's various challenges. Social development leads to an improvement in people's quality of life. Once people see real changes in their lives because of social work intervention, they will ultimately respect the profession and value social work services.

Recognizing the Importance of Social Work

Social work plays a crucial role in upholding the social fabric of any nation and safeguarding vulnerable members of the community. However, in Africa, the profession remains relatively unknown and less popular due to a lack of clarity about the duties of social workers. This has led to untrained individuals taking on welfare roles, posing as social workers, when in reality; it should be a profession for those with proper training. In addition, African countries face a lack of resources compared to developed nations, which hinders the development of the profession.

Therefore, there is a need to adapt the profession to better suit local needs and conditions. Perhaps the obscurity of social work in the region is due to its remedial approach, which may not be compatible with the local context.

It's important to address the multifaceted needs of refugees and unaccompanied refugee minors with compassion, cultural sensitivity, and expertise, professional social workers play a vital role in facilitating their successful integration into new communities. This will increase the likelihood that refugees will integrate into a welcoming society.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumes that when talking about refugees and unaccompanied minor refugee children, particularly those in Africa, it should be recognized crucial to take into account several assumptions and limitations encountered by beneficiaries and providers of assistance. This means that these refugees, who are supposed to benefit from the full protection of international and national laws, unfortunately find it difficult to benefit these privileges (Whalen, C., 2022).

This part of the study seeks to understand the limits linked to the non-protection of refugee and unaccompanied refugee children. The study raises several hypotheses that it assumes:

Regarding legal and ethical obligations, many scholars assume that countries have legal and ethical obligations to provide protection and assistance to refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, under international law, including the Convention on Refugees of 1951 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1951).

These obligations arise from the fact that these unaccompanied refugee minor children suffered trauma while they were vulnerable. Refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, have often experienced traumatic events such as violence, loss or displacement, which can have lasting psychological consequences and make them vulnerable.

These refugees and unaccompanied minor refugee children require special protection. It is commonly recognized that unaccompanied refugee minors are particularly in need of protection due to their age, lack of family support and increased vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking and abuse. The integration of refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, into new societies is expected to pose significant challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences and access to education and health care.

Due to all these difficulties, it is often assumed that providing support to refugees, is not only a humanitarian imperative, but also beneficial to host communities in terms of cultural diversity, replenishment of the hand -work and economic growth.

In underdeveloped countries like those in Africa, they often face resource constraints and limitations in their ability to provide adequate support and services to refugees, including unaccompanied minors, due to resource constraints such as financial, infrastructure and limited staff. These constraints are the same on a legal level. Often, legal frameworks and policies can create barriers for refugees, including unaccompanied minors, to access protection, asylum and essential services in some African countries, leading to their marginalization and vulnerability. This marginalization becomes stigmatization and discrimination. Thus, refugees, including unaccompanied minors, may face stigma, discrimination and xenophobia within host communities, which hinders their integration and well-being.

However, there are data gaps in these African countries. Systems for tracking data regarding the demographics and needs of refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, are limited, which hamper policy development and the effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

The complexity of trauma should be recognized by the scholars because many refugees, including unaccompanied minors, have experienced trauma that may affect them in long-term, which requires personalized psychosocial support and complete. This is why interinstitutional coordination is necessary between government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations to be involved in the refugee response, including the protection of unaccompanied minors, which is often lacking, leading to gaps and duplication of efforts. Recognizing these assumptions and limitations is essential to designing comprehensive and effective policies and interventions to support refugees and unaccompanied refugee minor children.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies a resource-based approach using resilience and acculturation as a theoretical framework. Combining resilience and acculturation helps this research to be understood the outcomes from an individual, social and structural perspective. The study will use various theoretical and methodological frameworks to analyze complex cases (Santoro, N., 2014).

It is essential to adopt a specific perspective when conducting research in order to examine the data effectively. Relying on a single theory to encompass all aspects is not feasible, given the numerous concepts explored in this thesis. It is important to include minor children, who make up the most significant group, in research and to integrate them into studies, especially on topics targeting them. Unaccompanied minors are rarely involved in research conducted on them, and their participation is minimal (Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

Terminology plays a crucial role in providing direction to the research. Furthermore, the analysis of the empirical data involved the use of various theories and concepts. Prior to entering the analysis phase, it is imperative to discuss relevant theories related to the analysis themes, as this significantly improves the overall clarity and coherence of the thesis.

This theoretical framework focuses on the majority of research conducted on unaccompanied refugee minors who have been affected by armed conflict. However, this study will rely on a more in-depth analysis of theories emerging from developed Western countries and, in particular, from African and underdeveloped countries lacking any reception structure for refugees and unaccompanied children. This approach will enable us to demonstrate a more holistic appreciation of the complex realities of these vulnerable children, whether during or after an armed conflict (Bilotta and Denov, 2018).

Many researchers often theorize the unaccompanied refugee minor's population by looking through a trauma or victimization framework or a lens of resilience, which creates a distinct dichotomy. These theoretical perspectives provide important insights into understanding the experiences of unaccompanied refugee children, particularly certain aspects of their lives where they are vulnerable. This research's theoretical framework will be based on the approaches developed in the literature on unaccompanied minor refugees. It will integrate key perspectives on the vulnerabilities and needs of these minors, drawing from established theories on acculturation, trauma, and resilience. Additionally, the framework will examine how various social, psychological, and legal factors influence the experiences and outcomes of unaccompanied refugee minors in their resettlement processes.

This multi-theoretical framework will provide a lens through which the study will analyze the data and interpret the results using the following approaches:

- Human rights approach

- Psychological perspective

- Social and cultural contexts

- Legal and policy frameworks

- Educational and developmental perspectives

- Ethical considerations

- Victimization theories

- Trauma-centered theories

- Resilience theory

- Acculturation theory

Particularity of this theoretical framework

Unaccompanied minor children can be classified into two categories - unaccompanied refugee minor girls and unaccompanied refugee minor boys. Although both categories are vulnerable, unaccompanied minor refugee girls are especially fragile due to their femininity. It is important to note that refugee children are overrepresented in the entire refugee population, with 60% of them being unaccompanied minor girls and 40% being boys. Girls who represent 60% are often invisibles. This disparity highlights the vulnerability of unaccompanied refugee girls in situations of forced displacement.

Discussion on various theoretical frameworks

Multiple theoretical perspectives help provide the comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by unaccompanied refugee children. By integrating these multiple perspectives, policymakers, practitioners and communities can develop holistic approaches that address the complex needs of unaccompanied refugee children. This involves providing comprehensive support systems, advocating for their rights, promoting cultural understanding, and fostering inclusive environments that facilitate their integration and well-being. These considered perspectives contribute in the ways described above:

Human rights approach: focuses on the rights of refugees and unaccompanied minors, emphasizing the principles of dignity, equality and non-discrimination. Viewing the situation through a human rights lens emphasizes the rights and protections afforded to unaccompanied refugee children under international law. This perspective highlights the importance of safeguarding their rights to education, healthcare, and protection from violence, and family reunification. All these Human rights approach regarding refugees and unaccompanied minors have been cited previously in the articles of the convention and the protocols related to human rights, the rights of refugees, and the rights of children (Ashford, E., 2015 ; Beitz, C., 2015; Bunch, C., 2006; Cruft, R., 2012; Morsink, J., 1999)

The human rights perspective encompasses all areas, whether it is children's rights, women's rights, the rights of persons with disabilities, minority rights and any other aspect of rights. In short, all these legal aspects are represented in the academic declaration of human rights, which constitutes the basis of all commonly recognized rights.

Legal Perspective: Examines the legal frameworks and policies governing the rights and protection of refugees and unaccompanied minors, including international conventions and national laws. This legal perspective highlights the importance of the application of the human rights convention, legal enforcement governing the rights and protection of refugees and child protection policies, as highlighted in the researchers Bayucca, S. (2020) and Erunke, J. (2020), who also present that the declaration of rights without enforcement is wrong or a violation of rights.

- *International Human Rights Law*: Review the legal protections afforded to unaccompanied minors under international treaties and conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- *Refugee Law*: Examine the legal frameworks governing the rights and protections of refugees, including unaccompanied minors, within the host country's asylum system.

- *Child Protection Policies*: Assess the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of unaccompanied minors, both during the migration process and after resettlement.

Psychological Perspective: Understanding the psychological trauma experienced by unaccompanied refugee children is crucial. Trauma theory helps in comprehending how these children may have been exposed to violence, loss, and displacement, which can lead to mental health issues such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Psychosocial support and therapy interventions can be tailored based on this understanding to address their emotional needs (Bamford, J., Fletcher, M., & Leavey, G., 2021).

• *Attachment Theory*: Explore how separation from caregivers impacts the emotional and psychological well-being of unaccompanied minors.

• *Trauma Theory:* Examine the traumatic experiences that unaccompanied minors may face before and during migration, and how these experiences affect their mental health.

• *Resilience Theory:* Investigate factors that contribute to resilience in unaccompanied minors, such as social support networks, coping strategies, and personal strengths.

Sociological Perspective and cultural contexts: Analyzes the social structures and processes that shape the experiences of refugees and unaccompanied minors, including issues of identity, integration, and social support. Examining also the social structures and systems that impact the lives of unaccompanied refugee children is vital. This perspective considers factors such as social exclusion, discrimination, and access to resources like education and healthcare. Sociological theories help in understanding how societal norms and policies can either support or hinder their integration and well-being (Akua-Sakyiwah, B., 2020).

Acculturation Theory

The cultural distance between Nordic welfare states and the countries of origin of refugees is vast (Yijälä & Luoma, 2019). This significant gap means that unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) must absorb a large amount of information to adapt to a new culture. Acculturation is a complex phenomenon involving interactions between different cultural groups and their individual members. This interaction results in cultural and psychological changes, ultimately leading to various forms of adaptation (Berry & Sam, 2016).

Berry (1997) developed four acculturation strategies based on two factors of intercultural contact: the extent to which individuals wish to maintain their original culture and the extent to which they wish to engage with the new culture. Different combinations of these factors result in the following acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997).

Separation occurs when individuals choose not to adapt to the host society but instead maintain their own culture and traditions.

Assimilation happens when individuals adopt the host culture and reject their own.

Marginalization refers to individuals who neither wish to maintain their own culture nor engage with the host culture, or who may not have the opportunity to do so.

Integration involves developing an intercultural identity by adapting to the majority culture while retaining one's own cultural identity (Sam & Berry, 2016).

The formulation of acculturation strategies suggests that individuals have some degree of choice in how they interact with their host societies. However, power differentials between majority and minority groups often limit the freedom of minority groups to choose their acculturation strategies. The acculturation strategy of a minority group is influenced by the attitudes and integration policies of the host society (Berry & Sam, 2016).

The extent to which the host society accepts immigrants retaining their cultural heritage while adapting to the majority culture significantly impacts the acculturation process (Berry & Sam, 2016; Bourhis et al., 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010). The majority group can implicitly or explicitly impose certain societal conditions for acculturation. Berry and Sam (2016) describe societies that expect minority groups to assimilate as "melting pots," while multiculturalism is seen as a prerequisite for minority groups to adopt integration strategies.

Berry and Ward (2016) discuss the complexity of defining multiculturalism, noting that it can be understood in demographic, ideological, or political terms, although these elements are not mutually exclusive. For example, a society may be diverse demographically, but to be considered truly multicultural, it must also embrace cultural pluralism ideologically and implement policies that support and promote diversity (Berry & Ward, 2016).

- *Social Capital Theory*: Analyze the role of social networks, both within the refugee community and in the host country, in providing support and resources to unaccompanied minors.

- *Acculturation Theory*: Study how unaccompanied minors navigate the process of adapting to a new cultural environment while maintaining aspects of their own cultural identity.

- *Intersectionality:* Consider how factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and age intersect to shape the experiences of unaccompanied minors within the refugee population.

Educational and developmental perspectives: Understanding the developmental stages and needs of children is essential in providing appropriate care and support. Developmental theories inform interventions that promote healthy growth and resilience, considering factors such as age-appropriate education, nurturing relationships, and stability (Catron, C.E. & Allen, J., 2008: Johnson, R., & Thompson, L., 2019).

- *Child Development Theories:* Explore how migration and displacement impact the cognitive, emotional, and social development of unaccompanied minors at different stages of childhood and adolescence.

- *Educational Access and Equity*: Investigate barriers to education faced by unaccompanied minors, including language barriers, discrimination, and limited access to schooling in host countries.

- *Empowerment and Agency*: Consider how empowering unaccompanied minors to participate in decision-making processes regarding their own lives can enhance their sense of agency and well-being.

Cultural Perspective: Recognizing the diverse cultural backgrounds of unaccompanied refugee children is essential for providing culturally sensitive support. Cultural theories help in understanding their unique experiences, beliefs, and practices, which can influence their adaptation and integration into new environments (Seufert, S., 2002)

Ecological Perspective: This perspective considers the various systems (micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono) that interact to influence the lives of unaccompanied refugee children. It emphasizes the importance of considering not just individual factors but also family, community, institutional, and societal influences on their well-being (Crawford, M., 2020).

Ethical considerations

● *Ethical Frameworks:* Discuss ethical issues related to research with vulnerable populations such as unaccompanied minor refugees, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' rights and dignity.

● *Humanitarian Principles*: Reflect on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence in the context of providing assistance and support to unaccompanied minor refugees, both in research and practice (Wexler, A., Largent, E., 2023).

Victimization theories and Trauma-centered theories

Unaccompanied minor refugee studies involve complex local and international procedures. The theories that lead to an understanding of the situation of these traumatized victims are evoked. This is why Huemer et al., (2009) says: "theories of trauma and victimization are used to describe and understand the experiences of unaccompanied minor refugee children" (Huemer et al., 2009).

Unaccompanied refugee children often walk across borders and are vulnerable to abuse and sexual exploitation, leading to various pathologies including depression, anxiety and grief (Bronstein et al., 2013).

The importance of these trauma-centered theories is significant, as they have influenced and shaped psychosocial interventions and policies aimed at unaccompanied minor refugee children, particularly with regard to their mental health (Marlowe, 2010).

Resilience theory

Despite the risks to which URMs are exposed, many of them demonstrate good psychological functioning and good adaptation. Resilience is defined as a tolerance to risks created by the environment (Rutter, 2000).

Several theories are born on the basis of unexpected facts or events leading to pragmatic solutions. Theories of resilience have emerged due to the increase in inconsistent and unpredictable numbers of youth from "at risk" populations exhibiting remarkably "good" mental and physical health despite various stressors (Tol et al., 2013; Ungar, 2005).

Resilience research attempts to identify what contributes to such outcomes, identifying protective factors within the individual and their environment (Borge, 2010, Southwick et al., 2014, Ungar, 2012).

Psychological resilience is often considered an individual trait. Ungar, (2008; 2011; 2012) criticize such an approach, asserting that the simplification of such a complex phenomenon can lead to considering resilience as immutable and stable. It argues that resilience is the result of a set of ecological factors that together constitute positive human adaptation. Resilience must therefore be understood within a socio-ecological framework, where individual and contextual factors are taken into account (Ungar, 2008; 2011; 2012).

Furthermore, Olsen and Traavik (2010) argue that risk and resilience are inextricably linked: developing resilience requires exposure to stress or extreme risks (Rutter, 1985).

The extent to which risk causes problems depends on the perception of the individual. A child's refugee status can be understood as an excellent opportunity to have a better life, or as a loss of relationships and connections with their family environment. It is important to understand how the individual interprets their situation (Borge, 2010).

Early research on resilience focused on mapping risk factors related to resilience. Current research focuses on understanding the resilience processes through which individuals benefit from various protective factors. Such factors can moderate the effect of exposure to risk, so that individuals have better control over the situation than if protective factors were not present (Borge, 2010, Rutter, 1990).

Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) distinguish between strengths and resources, where strengths are considered positive factors associated with individual traits, such as various coping strategies, good communication skills, problem-solving skills problems, as well as the ability to seek out supportive caregivers. Resources, on the other hand, refer to factors external to the individual, such as support networks and educational opportunities (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

Socio-ecological frameworks are not culturally neutral; Humans are part of a global social ecology, with a dominant culture that embodies values, belief systems and practices. This affects our understanding of the nature of resilience, and the "gateways" to resilience are therefore different across cultures (Førde, 2014, Theron et al., 2015).

The nature of resilience refers to the ability of individuals or systems to adapt to and recover from adversity, stress, or change. Resilience encompasses several key aspects: **Adaptability, Recovery, Growth, Resourcefulness, and Flexibility.**

Resilience theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals, communities, and systems respond to and recover from adversity, stress, and change. By emphasizing adaptability, flexibility, and the capacity for transformation, resilience theory provides valuable insights into the dynamic processes that enable systems to maintain functionality and thrive despite disruptions. This theory underscores the importance of fostering protective factors, such as social support, adaptive coping strategies, and resource availability, which collectively enhance resilience.

Children cope more easily than adults with situations such as the loss of a loved one or a disaster. Concerning unaccompanied minor children affected by armed conflict, the concept of resilience was initially described as an individual characteristic of "invulnerable" youth who flourished despite the extreme adversities of war (Betancourt and Khan, 2008).

Despite the inherent resistance that children may display, research into unaccompanied minor refugee children reveals that many exhibit remarkable resilience and the ability to "bounce back" from negative experiences. These children, even in the face of significant adversity, often demonstrate a capacity to recover and adapt to their challenging circumstances. Their resilience can manifest in various forms, such as developing coping mechanisms, forming supportive relationships, and achieving personal growth. This ability to overcome and adapt, despite their vulnerabilities, underscores the profound strength and potential of these young individuals as they navigate the complexities of their resettlement and integration processes.

Unfortunately, resilience cannot be directly observed and measured; it is arbitrary and inferred only from observations based on related concepts such as "positive adaptation" (Boyden and Mann, 2005; Ungar, 2005).

Summary of Literature Review on Unaccompanied Minor Refugees

This Chapter of the thesis provides an in-depth literature review on unaccompanied minor refugees, focusing on their unique challenges, protection needs, and resettlement issues. The review highlights that unaccompanied minors face a distinct set of vulnerabilities compared to accompanied children, primarily due to their isolation from family support systems. Key areas of concern identified in the literature include the heightened risks of exploitation, abuse, and neglect that these minors encounter. Studies indicate that unaccompanied minors are more susceptible to trafficking and various forms of abuse because they often lack adequate supervision and protective measures.

The review also examines the broader context of refugee protection frameworks, including international conventions and human rights instruments that safeguard the rights of children. Notable among these are the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which underscores the right to protection, care, and education of refugees.

Additionally, the literature review discusses the comparative aspects of resettlement processes between African countries and developed nations. It highlights that African countries frequently struggle with inadequate resources, infrastructure, and qualified social workers, making effective resettlement and protection of unaccompanied minors challenging. Conversely, developed countries often have more robust systems in place, benefiting from better funding, specialized services, and comprehensive legal frameworks that enhance the protection and support for these vulnerable children. The chapter concludes that despite the significant efforts to address the needs of unaccompanied minor refugees, gaps remain in their protection and resettlement.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A well-defined methodology is crucial for providing clear and understandable results to the readers. Methodology encompasses the rationale behind the research approach and the perspective through which the researcher reaches the final result. This chapter will delve into the detailed methodology employed for data collection and analysis.

Qualitative methodology

This study employs a comparative analysis approach, using qualitative data. Qualitative research is a non-numerical type of social science research. It is used to understand social life by collecting data and interpreting it from the perspective of a targeted group of people. This method focuses on interactions at the micro level of everyday life (Crossman, 2020).

Sociology and qualitative research have a common history; qualitative research has been used in sociology since the birth of the field. Social scientists are attracted to qualitative research because it helps them understand the meaning of people's behaviors, actions, and interactions with each other (Crossman, 2020).

Researchers who use qualitative research use their ears, eyes, and intelligence to understand and perceive different events and people. Different methods can be used to collect data in qualitative research, and each researcher selects these methods based on their preferences and needs. These methods include direct observation, open-ended surveys, focus groups, oral history, in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, participant observation, and content analysis.

Semi-structured individual interviews:

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with unaccompanied refugee minor children using open-ended questions. This type of interview method is more flexible (Frances, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009).

The semi-structured interview with open-ended questions allows for the possibility of new, spontaneous questions arising from ongoing conversations. The interviewer has greater freedom to express their point of view, while the interviewee narrates their experiences in response to the questions asked. The responses are based on individual perspectives (Frances, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009).

Interview

African countries all face the same challenge in caring for refugees and unaccompanied minor children. There is practically no automatic support when refugees arrive, and it is difficult to identify unaccompanied children who arrive in groups with other parents or widowed women due to African solidarity. These children can be mistaken as the children of a parent who accompanied the child en route from their country of origin to risky areas.

African countries, facing difficulties for their populations, are unable to take care of them. This leads to the phenomenon of street children across the city and even more children coming from elsewhere without anyone to understand their difficulties. They cannot benefit from privileges. The United Nations systems are almost non-existent in Africa; these are organizations that can be read about in books but are not visible on the ground where people need them. In some rare cases, unaccompanied children may be selected to be presented as examples, but most children disappear into early and forced marriages, or into homes where they work as servants, or, worse still, join the street children who already exist in the capital.

Narrative interviews allow participants to freely tell their stories rather than answer a structured set of questions (Horsdal, 1999). The interviews were conducted by meeting with individuals from the Ministry of Social Affairs in various cafes and institutions of their choice.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, information was collected through discussions with several employees of the ministries of Social Affairs, the United Nations High Commission, and UNICEF to make contact with unaccompanied children. Through these interviews, similar stories were discovered, but no unaccompanied child has been visible.

The narrative interviews consisted of three phases: The first phase was an introductory phase, during which one of the representative of the employer of the government institution informed the researcher that everyone individually could get to know each other. The second phase was the primary phase, during which participants were encouraged to freely share their stories and experiences about caring for unaccompanied minor children. Although the interviews were narrative, an interview guide was developed to facilitate conversation. The guide covered topics such as how unaccompanied refugee minor children and female minors perceived their current situation, and how caregivers' work should be.

The questions were open-ended to allow participants to express themselves as freely as possible. The third phase was the questioning phase. During this phase, as researcher, a question was asked to the participants to discuss different aspects of the life of a refugee, a homeless child in Congo, and the help that the government provides to this sector to take care of this category of people. All participants spoke of the difficulties that the population suffers and the lack of reception structure for unaccompanied minor refugee children. With the permission of the participants, this study recorded all the interviews, transcribing them verbatim shortly after each interview, and assigned participants fictitious names.

Thematic analysis

This research will utilize thematic analysis, a widely used methodology for qualitative datasets in various fields. The thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and creating patterns in the dataset, providing a rich description of the collected data without being restricted to codes. It also enables researchers to explore various aspects of the research subject (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis used a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, primarily based on the data findings and guided by the research question on prior understanding of the topic. The study considered using the step-by-step thematic network analysis method. After completing the transcription, the study spent time reviewing the data, then began the process of reducing and coding the material. The study divided the different text segments into general codes and then started to identify themes.

Research Design

The study is based on information obtained from reputable academic publications and government reports through open-source research. The research design will involve a conceptual analysis of the following topics: *Femininity and Gender-Based Violence, Lack of Legal and Social Protection, Poverty and Economic Exploitation, Psychological Trauma, Lack of Access to Education, and Health Risks*. These topics presented are summarized as follows:

Femininity and Gender-Based Violence: Unaccompanied minor girls are one of the most vulnerable populations in the world. They face increased risks due to their age, gender, and often dire situation. They are at a higher risk of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. Predators target them due to their lack of protection and resources. Unfortunately, the case of unaccompanied refugee minors, especially girls, is not widely discussed in academic research.

Lack of Legal and Social Protection: Many unaccompanied minor girls often lack access to legal and social protections that could shield them from harm, especially in conflict zones, during migration, or in refugee camps where institutional support is minimal.

Poverty and Economic Exploitation: Coming from impoverished backgrounds, these girls are vulnerable to economic exploitation and may be forced into labor or other exploitative practices in order to survive.

Psychological Trauma: The circumstances that lead to their unaccompanied status, such as war, family separation or natural disasters, often result in significant psychological trauma. This trauma can affect their ability to seek help or make safe decisions, increasing their vulnerability.

Lack of Access to Education: They often miss out on educational opportunities, which are crucial for their development and future independence. Without education, their opportunities to escape poverty and exploitation are very limited. They are also at increased risk of health problems, including those related to sexual and reproductive health.

Health Risks: Limited access to medical care exacerbates these risks, leading to long-term consequences on physical and mental health.

Data Collection

Data collection involves gathering information in the form of numbers and text after an experiment or observation. It is the process of systematically collecting and measuring information on variables of interest to answer research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate results. The information for this study was obtained from open-source materials and field interviews with the Ministry of Social Affairs in the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNICEF, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The cases mentioned involved unaccompanied children from countries in the sub-region. These children were not personally interviewed, but the mentioned services provided previous facts. Most comments focused on the lack of opportunity to care for refugees, especially unaccompanied minor children. The remaining case study material is derived from government and private sector reports, as well as reputable academic websites. The conclusions are based on works that discuss the disorganization in the care of unaccompanied children, who are invisible and likely struggling to survive, often becoming housekeepers, wives of the military, or joining groups of homeless children.

The safety of unaccompanied minor refugee children both girls and boys is summarized by the difficulties of access to education, mental health imbalance, difficulty in social integration, gender specific challenges. The differences in experiences and challenges faced by boys and girls are important to be highlighted.

The first challenges are the identification of common problems faced by all unaccompanied minors, such as access to basic services, legal assistance and protection from exploitation and gender specific challenges that need to be examined and detailed as to how unaccompanied girls face higher risks and different types of dangers compared to boys.

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors fleeing their countries represent one of the most vulnerable groups in the global refugee crisis. The conclusion drawn from various studies and reports on unaccompanied minor refugees highlights several key points mentioned above.

Specifically, unaccompanied minor refugee girls, are often invisible due to several interconnected factors that exacerbate their vulnerability. Unaccompanied girls are at greater risk and are vulnerable due to the risks of exploitation and abuse.

Unaccompanied girls are more exposed to sexual exploitation, trafficking and gender-based violence, health risks. Girls may face specific health challenges, including reproductive health issues and lack of access to hygiene products. There is also a psychosocial impact created by this situation and can cause trauma. The dire situation faced by unaccompanied girls can be exacerbated by cultural stigma and isolation.

Two of the main factors are forced early marriages and domestic work. Forced early marriage is a common practice in some communities such as refugees, often seen as a solution to protect girls from sexual violence, to ease the economic burden on families or to preserve family honor. These practices contribute to making unaccompanied minor refugee girls invisible to authorities and humanitarian organizations, further complicating their identification and protection.

Stigma associated with early marriage and domestic work can also deter girls and their families from seeking help. Unaccompanied minor refugee girls become invisible due to their domestic work, which isolates them and exposes them to various forms of abuse and exploitation.

It is essential to put in place appropriate protection mechanisms and raise awareness among communities to improve their situation. Meeting their needs requires a holistic and coordinated approach, focusing on their immediate needs and their long-term development, for a safer and more promising future.

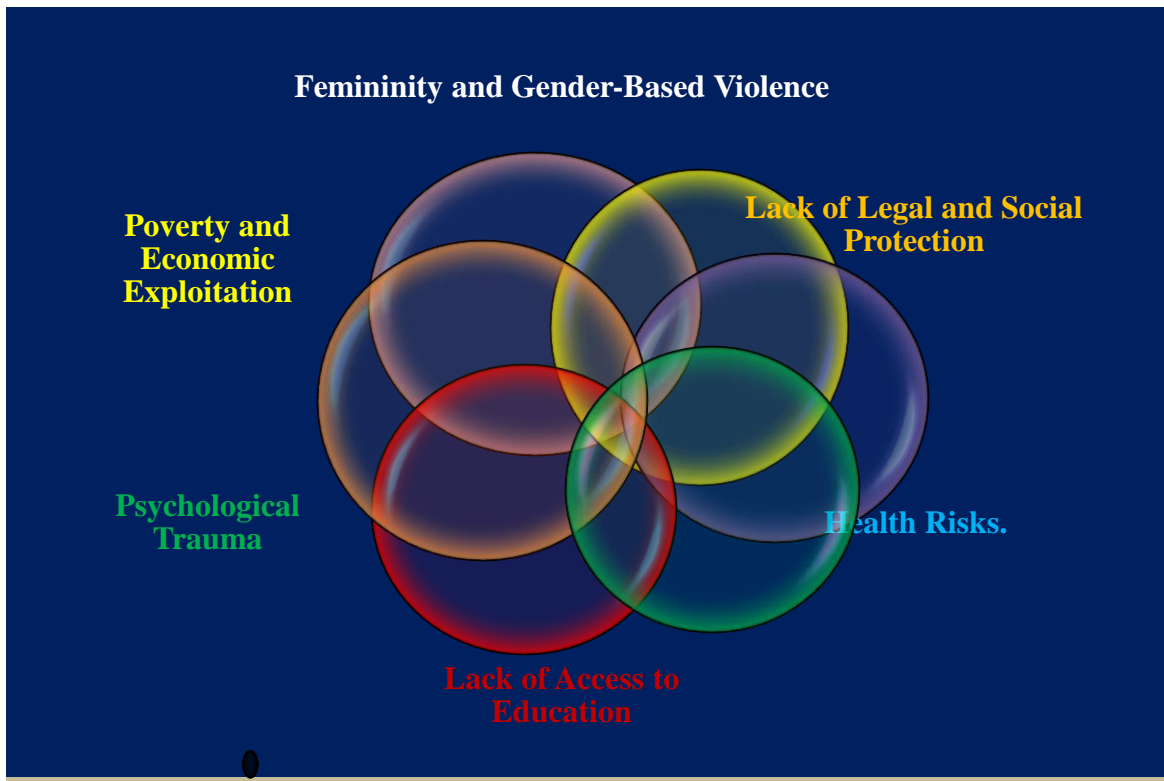# Six Conceptual Framework .

Figure 1: Six Elements of the study

Illustration:

A conceptual framework that outlines the vulnerabilities of unaccompanied refugee minors was developed, based on elements such as femininity and gender-based violence, lack of legal and social protection, poverty and economic exploitation, psychological trauma, lack of access to education, and health risks.

Categories of Refugees involved in the studies and their Rights.
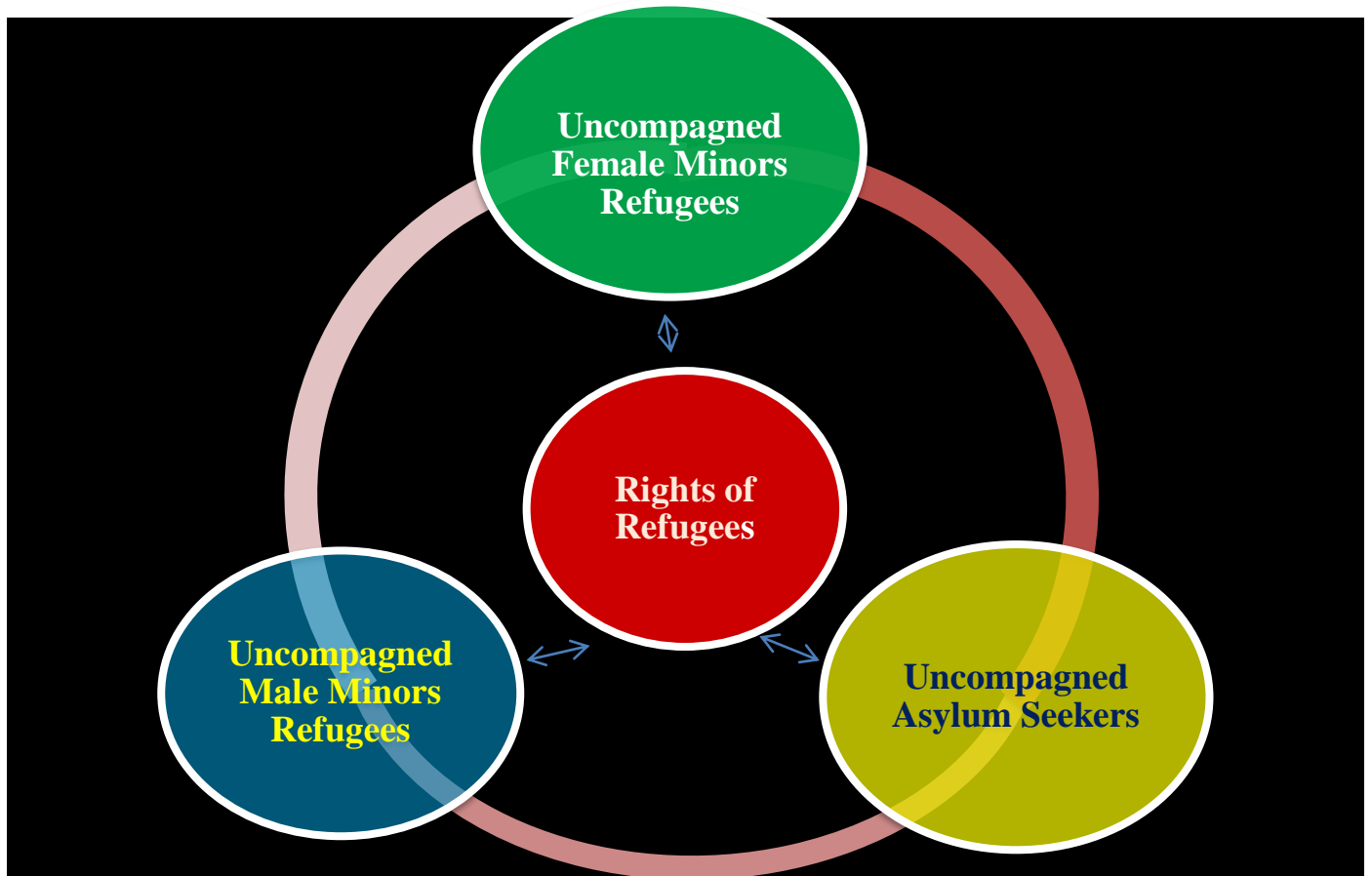

Fig 2: Case of studies <u>Unaccompanied Minor Refugees</u> -

<u>*Illustration*</u>*:*

The Age, Gender, and Refugee Status policy category aims to ensure that all refugees enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others.

Data Analysis Procedure

Recruitment and Sampling

Interview Questions: In this study, interview sampling on unaccompanied minors was not possible, so social workers were interviewed as a strategic sampling frame. They were selected to answer the research question (Thagaard, 2013).

To recruit participants, the researcher first sent information letters to various agencies that could assist in the recruitment process. These agencies included several ministers in the Congolese government and the National Shelter Committee.

The letters were followed up with emails and phone calls. While many agencies expressed initial willingness to assist with recruitment, few helped with interviews. Several agencies had difficulty recruiting participants, and most people on the Unaccompanied Minor's subject, did not understand the role of social workers or were unaware of the existence of unaccompanied minor children. Other agencies that initially expressed interest in participating changed their minds before the interview.

Those who eventually participated in the study were either unaware or unwilling to talk about unaccompanied and separated children. We also used a snowball sampling method, asking participants to refer us to other girls/young women who were aware of unaccompanied and separated children and who might be interested in the study. Due to recruitment issues, data collection took three months. Eventually, we recruited six specialists working with unaccompanied and separated children from local NGOs.

Question I: The initial questions focused on whether there were programs in place to support unaccompanied refugee children in some African countries. They also asked about the opportunities available to refugees, such as access to employment, healthy; consistent food, and protection of their rights. The responses to these questions were given humorously, suggesting that bringing a refugee to an African country where the locals struggle to access food and healthcare would not be helpful.

It was pointed out that the refugee may have already experienced similar hardships in their home country and bringing them to such conditions again would only double their suffering, despite being saved from their initial plight.

Question II*:* Questions were asked about the reception of unaccompanied minor refugees, the presence of social workers, the country's eligibility for refugee resettlement, and the impact of current living conditions on the refugees. Concerning the:

Reception structures for unaccompanied minor refugees

The presence of reception structures for unaccompanied minor refugees varies from one country to another. Typically, these structures include:

Temporary reception centers: They provide immediate shelter and basic services.

Specialized homes: These homes provide a more stable and secure environment, often with educational and psychological services.

Host families: Some organizations place minors with host families to provide them with a family environment.

Presence of social workers

Social workers play a crucial role in the reception and integration of refugees. Their presence depends largely on the policies and resources of the country. Their orient and advice refugees on available services - Help manage trauma and psychological challenges - Facilitate access to education and health services - Help with social and cultural integration.

Refugee Resettlement Eligibility

A country's eligibility to resettle refugees depends on several factors, including:

International agreements: Has the country signed agreements with organizations such as the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)?

Reception capacity: Does the country have the necessary infrastructure to welcome and integrate refugees?

Immigration and asylum policies: What laws and regulations are in place regarding the reception of refugees?

Impact of current living conditions on refugees

The living conditions of refugees can have varied effects:

Positive effects: Access to education and health care - Opportunities for social and economic integration - Security and protection from conflict situations in their country of origin.

Negative effects: Precarious living conditions in refugee camps or overcrowded reception centers - Discrimination and marginalization in the host society - Stress and trauma related to uncertainty and family separation.

Eligibility or ineligibility of African countries to settle refugees

African countries have different eligibility criteria for hosting refugees compared to resettling them. Resettlement involves providing refugees with special protection and support for their economic development. This depends on various factors such as the country's economic capacity, reception infrastructure, and immigration and asylum policies. African countries play a crucial role in temporarily hosting refugees, despite facing many challenges.

Most of the African countries are not eligible for refugee resettlement. The eligibility and capacity to host refugees depend on factors like international support, national policies, and available infrastructure. Countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia are particularly active in hosting refugees, showing significant commitment despite the difficulties.

Challenges preventing African countries from being eligible for refugee resettlement include:

Limited Resources: Insufficient economic capacity and infrastructure to meet the needs of all refugees.

Political Instability: Some African countries face conflict or instability, which complicates their ability to host refugees.

Analysis Using a Comparative Matrix

Host country	Structured Reception system	Social Workers	Refugee resettlement countries	Refugees Affected
Democratic Republic of Congo	No existing	Not active	No	Yes Negatively
Cameroun	No existing	Semi-Existing	No	Yes Negatively
Rwanda	Vulnerable	Existing	No	Yes Negatively
South Africa	Very Weak	Existing	NO	Possibly Negatively
Norway	Appropriate	Strong	Yes	Yes Positively
Canada	Appropriate	Strong	Yes	Yes Positively
United States	Appropriate	Strong	Yes	Yes Positively
Finland	Appropriate	Strong	Yes	Yes Positively

Table 2: Structured Focused Comparison Matrix

The matrix compares northern Western countries with African countries, evaluating eligibility and identifying the presence of reception structures or no.

Assumptions, Ethical considerations and Limitations

The information described in this study raises ethical questions. However, precautions have been taken to avoid further harming the real identity of the staff involved in the care of children and refugees. Protecting information regarding the identity and private circumstances of children is their right and one of the main responsibilities of this study. As a researcher, it is important to conduct individual face-to-face interviews for data collection. The researcher consent to verify information about this research (Frances, Michael, & Patricia, 2009).

Most of the people interviewed presented several limitations because no one specifically took care of unaccompanied children, although this is a phenomenon known in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but trivialized compared to other countries. Many social problems persist within different layers of society, including poverty, making one more problem just another nuisance.

Credibility

The information used in this study has been validated by multiple other studies on topics such as refugees, unaccompanied refugee minors, underdevelopment problems in African countries, wars, and political instability. These studies can be found in various search engines and online bookstores of several universities, adding to their credibility.

Transferability

The findings and evidence presented in this study are transferable to the Ministry of Social Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and other African countries that experience similar cases in their social development.

Summary

The methodology chosen in this part of the work is the qualitative method, commonly used in social research. An interview was conducted with resource persons from the Ministry of Social Affairs, who confirmed that there is no program for the care of unaccompanied minor children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In other African countries that are more economically developed, this program is still struggling to be implemented because the African populations themselves are having difficulty providing care for their citizens.

A conceptual framework that outlines the vulnerabilities of unaccompanied refugee minors was developed, based on elements such as femininity and gender-based violence, lack of legal and social protection, poverty and economic exploitation, psychological trauma, lack of access to education, and health risks.

The researcher compiled, analyzed, and presented information with the main aim of demonstrating that unaccompanied minor refugee children are invisible in society. They are often abused and exploited in jobs, and some marry early. When children are taken away from the environment where they should be nurtured as children, they are no longer considered part of the community of children. Instead, they are forced into early marriages, child labor, or become servants doing jobs that are often illegal

By highlighting the vulnerabilities in the protection of unaccompanied refugee children such as the lack of reception structures, inadequate training of care workers, and insufficient means or capacity to implement refugee protection programs, the researcher argued that African countries are currently ineligible to effectively resettle refugees. This analysis underscores the critical need for enhanced protective measures and resources to ensure the safety and well-being of these vulnerable children.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, the research will analyze the empirical data collected through individual interviews and the United Nations' instruments protecting refugees. It will also use various literature sources to support the analyses. This methodology has provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by unaccompanied minor refugees, with a particular focus on the heightened dangers for unaccompanied girls compared to boys. The final themes that emerge after the thematic analysis process will be connected to the research questions and the empirical data to observe the outcomes and results. Additionally, different theories will be discussed to relate the themes and gain a better understanding.

Discussion

This section of the thesis presents the findings from the gathered empirical data and will be structured into three parts. The first part will explore the various treaties, conventions, and laws that safeguard the well-being of refugee children and ensure their access to necessary services and protection. The second part will focus on the experiences of unaccompanied minor refugee children, their challenges, and barriers. The third part will focus on the experiences of social workers. This division aims to provide a better understanding of the three different aspects of this research, which could also address the research questions.

Importance lies in structuring this research exploration into three distinct parts, as it ensures a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the complexities surrounding unaccompanied minor refugee children. This structured approach leads to a thorough analysis and effective solutions to improve the protection and support for unaccompanied minor refugees.

Data and Analyses

First Part: Treaties and Laws Protecting Refugee Children

International Legal Frameworks

1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol: The cornerstone of international refugee law and the 1951 Convention define who qualifies as a refugee and outlines the rights and protections to which they are entitled. The 1967 Protocol expands these protections globally (United Nations, 1951; United Nations, 1967)

Non-Refoulement: A key principle that prohibits the return of refugees to places where their lives or freedom would be threatened (Moran, C. F., 2020)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Comprehensive Protection: The CRC is a critical international treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. (Kilkelly, U. (2019)**:**

Best Interests of the Child: Article 3 of the CRC mandates that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

Right to Protection and Care: Articles 20 and 22 specifically address the needs of children temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment, including unaccompanied minor refugees (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

Legal Safeguards: Ensures that all individuals, including refugees and asylum seekers, have the right to life, freedom from torture, and fair treatment under the law.

Children's Rights: Recognizes the special protections required for children to ensure their physical and psychological development.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):

Access to Essential Services: Ensures the right to education, healthcare, and an adequate standard of living, which are particularly critical for refugee children.

Instruments of Protection

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

Mandate and Role: The UNHCR is tasked with protecting refugees and resolving refugee problems worldwide. It provides critical support for refugee children, including protection from violence, abuse, and exploitation (UNHCR., n.d.).

Programs for Children: Unaccompanied minors, children who arrive in a foreign country without the presence of a parent or guardian, face unique challenges that require specialized support. Special programs tailored to their needs play a critical role in their well-being and development. Special programs focused on education, family tracing, and reunification, and psychosocial support for unaccompanied minors.

Regional Instruments:

African Union: The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which complements the CRC by focusing on the specific needs and rights of African children, including refugees (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989): UNHCR. (n.d.).

European Union: The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) includes directives that ensure special protection and care for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.

National Laws and Policies:

Best Practices: National laws vary, but best practices include the provision of legal guardianship for unaccompanied minors, access to education, healthcare, and safe housing.

Child-Sensitive Procedures: Ensuring that asylum processes are adapted to the needs and understanding of children, including the use of trained child protection officers.

Emphasis on Children's Rights

Non-Discrimination:

Equal Treatment: All refugee children should be treated equally, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or immigration status.

Vulnerability Considerations: Recognizing the heightened vulnerability of unaccompanied minors and providing them with additional protections and support.

Right to Education:

Access and Quality: Ensuring that refugee children have access to quality education that is sensitive to their cultural and linguistic needs.

Integration Programs: Programs that help refugee children integrate into the host country's education system and society.

Psychosocial Support:

Mental Health Services: Providing access to mental health and psychosocial support to help children cope with trauma and stress.

Family Reunification: Prioritizing efforts to reunite children with their families whenever possible, as family presence is crucial for the child's emotional and social well-being.

Legal Assistance:

Access to Justice: Ensuring that refugee children have access to legal representation and assistance in navigating the asylum process.

Child-Friendly Procedures: Adapting legal procedures to be more child-friendly, including providing interpreters and ensuring a supportive environment during interviews and hearings.

Challenges and Recommendations

Implementation Gaps:

Resource Constraints: Many countries lack the resources to fully implement the protections mandated by international law, particularly in conflict zones or developing regions.

Capacity Building: Investing in the capacity of national institutions to support refugee children effectively.

Policy Harmonization:

Consistency Across Jurisdictions: Ensuring that international standards are consistently applied across different countries and regions.

Collaborative Efforts: Encouraging collaboration between governments, international organizations, and NGOs to provide comprehensive support for refugee children.

Monitoring and Accountability:

Regular Assessments: Conducting regular assessments of the conditions and treatment of refugee children to ensure compliance with international standards.

Transparency and Reporting: Improving transparency and reporting mechanisms to hold states accountable for their treatment of refugee children.

The Second Part: Experiences and Challenges of Unaccompanied Minors.

According to several discussions with several officials and with resource people in non-profit organizations set, the situation faced by unaccompanied minors is described as difficult in African countries in terms of security, education, health, economics, and psychology. In the literature, it is also demonstrated that there are problems that these minors face in the integration process.

According to international standards, social workers should support these children in their integration process from their arrival until their school adaptation. Minors in the standard process have different guardians at different stages of their asylum procedure and subsequent settlement. Social workers are the closest people in their new society.

This study identified some challenges that play a role in creating barriers to integration. There are many different reasons, such as past experiences and current factors, that shape a person's environment, writes Anthony Forder (1976).

To relate this to my research topic, it can be seen that barriers to integration cannot be considered in isolation, but rather are created by the interaction of many different factors such as trauma, experiences past, difficulty settling into a new society, lack of social relationships.

Barriers that minors experience:

During my empirical data collection I have talked about the barriers and challenges to integration, I have combined them all under the umbrella theme of barriers where I will touch upon all of them, which my informants reflected upon.

Language barrier

Social workers talk about language barrier. Integration theory is focused on the political and social both aspects on integration. Integration theorists include both political and social aspects on integration should be in the discussions about unaccompanied refugee's minors. It is inevitable that the minors will have to learn the local language, for them to achieve their resettlement. Language affects the daily life of these children. For example if the language skills are very poor then daily routines tasks will be difficult to execute also like filling forms, reading and understanding official documents, watching local TV, doing grocery etc. So, one little thing has its effect on so many other different things (Summers 2016).

Social networks

Cultural barriers significantly impact the well-being and integration of unaccompanied minor refugees. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing effective support systems and policies. This section examines how cultural differences and misunderstandings can create challenges for unaccompanied minors, with a focus on the heightened impact on girls.

The unaccompanied minors arrive from different countries of origin, they have all their lives lived in a very different society where the traditional values held high place, and family was an institute with the male member as the head of the family. The traditional theory talked about above in the theoretical framework refers to this point that it is culturally very difficult for these children to accept this sudden change. It's also possible that the social background is acting as a barrier in adjusting to new society. Stress can be attributed to cultural shock also; the mental wellbeing of minors can be affected by the sudden change in cultures (Hughes 2016).

Types of Cultural Differences

Barriers Language: Unaccompanied minors often face significant challenges in communicating with authorities, caregivers, and peers due to language differences.

Access to Services: Language barriers can impede access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and legal assistance.

Cultural Norms and Practices:

Different Norms: Unaccompanied minors may come from cultural backgrounds with norms and practices that differ significantly from those in the host country.

Misunderstandings: These differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts with host community members and service providers.

Discrimination and Prejudice:

Xenophobia and Gender-Based Discrimination: Unaccompanied minors might experience xenophobia and discrimination from the host community, which can make it difficult for them to integrate and feel safe. Unaccompanied girls may also face extra discrimination because of their refugee status and gender, which makes them even more vulnerable.

Religious Differences:

Religious Practices and Religious Freedom: Unaccompanied minors may have religious practices that are unfamiliar or misunderstood in the host country, leading to social exclusion or conflict. Ensuring that refugee children can practice their religion freely while respecting the laws and norms of the host country is crucial

Social Integration: **Isolation and Identity Conflicts**

Cultural barriers can lead to social isolation, making it difficult for unaccompanied minors to form friendships and integrate into the community. Struggling to balance their cultural identity with the new environment can create identity conflicts and stress for unaccompanied minors.

Graphic
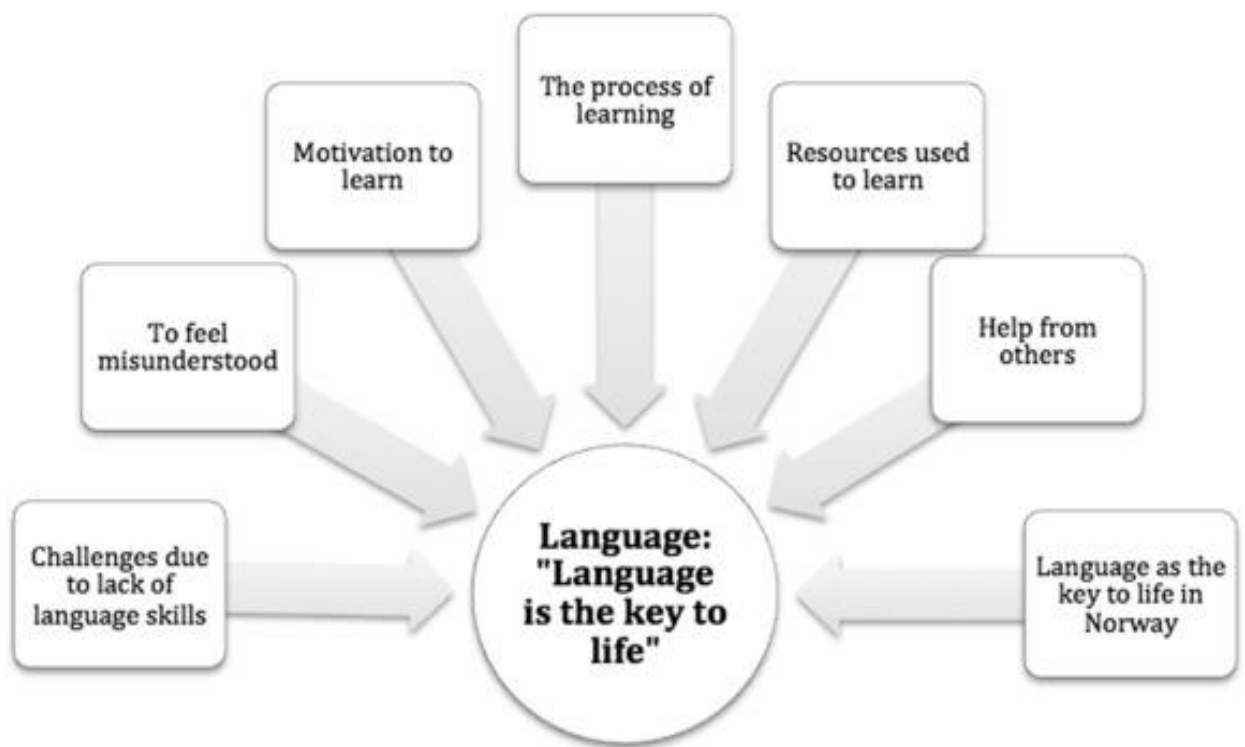

Fig 3: *Language, the Key to Life (Roach, C. C., 1951)*

Access to Education:

In some cultures, girls may encounter restrictions on their education or participation in public life due to cultural norms. It is crucial to have support systems that are sensitive to these restrictions and actively work to promote girls' education and empowerment.

Cultural differences exist in education systems. These differences in educational systems and expectations can hinder the academic progress of unaccompanied minors. Cultural sensitivity in schools is crucial. Lack of cultural sensitivity and support in schools can result in unaccompanied minors feeling alienated and misunderstood.

Education Among other factor is an important barrier in integration. The children come with different academic backgrounds, these are not similar with European educational standards but they have to in a few years to match the same level. Some children have no education at all; they have never been to school so for such a minor it is extremely difficult to adjust to the European educational system.

The data showed that the educational background plays an important barrier in integration process. The children have to work double the effort compared to their European peers to match their educational level. The children who have very strong problems regarding education they can be placed in practice work or maybe some skill education, they have been very happy in their practice work as per the participants in my research. There are also children who are very enthusiastic about getting higher education, the participants talked about how some boys that they worked with were very keen on doing better in school, they wanted to establish a career for themselves which would enable them to have a good life for themselves and their family. Refugee children have not given up on their integration efforts despite the fact that some of these children make a lot of effort but have a lot of difficulty integrating.

Mental Health Services: **Stress - Trauma**

Cultural barriers can compound the stress and trauma experienced by unaccompanied minors, impacting their mental well-being. Stigmas around mental health within certain cultures may hinder minors from seeking necessary psychological support.

Health and Hygiene:

Menstrual Health: Cultural taboos around menstruation can impact girls' access to sanitary products and health education.

Reproductive Health: Ensuring access to culturally sensitive reproductive health services is essential for the well-being of unaccompanied girls.

Legal and Social Services: **Understanding Legal Rights**

Cultural differences may affect unaccompanied minors' comprehension of their legal rights and necessary procedures, potentially resulting in insufficient support due to a lack of culturally sensitive social services.

Gender-Specific Cultural Barriers - Girls' Vulnerability

Cultural attitudes toward girls are significant. In certain cultures, girls may be viewed as less valuable or capable than boys, leading to neglect or exploitation. There is a risk of gender-based violence in some countries that needs to be addressed. Cultural norms that devalue girls can increase the risk of gender-based violence and exploitation.

Addressing Cultural Barriers

Cultural Competence Training:

For Service Providers: Training for educators, healthcare providers, and legal professionals on cultural competence to better understand and support unaccompanied minors.

Community Programs: Developing community programs that promote cultural understanding and integration.

Language Support:

Translation Services: Providing translation and interpretation services to facilitate communication and access to services.

Language Education: Offering language classes to unaccompanied minors to help them learn the host country's language.

Inclusive Policies:

Culturally Sensitive Policies: Developing policies that recognize and respect cultural differences while promoting integration and inclusion.

Anti-Discrimination Measures: Implementing measures to combat discrimination and xenophobia in the host community.

Empowerment Programs

For Girls: Developing programs that specifically aim to empower unaccompanied girls, providing them with the skills and support they need to thrive.

Mentorship and Support Networks: Establishing mentorship programs and support networks that connect unaccompanied minors with members of the host community.

Neo-functionalism integration theory

According to one of the neo-functionalist theorists of integration, Ernst Haas (1961) in (Diez & Wiener, 2018), who stated that "integration" is a process by which the political elite, in any context national, changes loyalties and begins to expect feedback from the political elite. the new position of power that holds power over the world (Diez & Wiener 2018).

Refugees who leave their country of origin and arrive in another host country tend to feel that after having done everything, moving from one country to another was pointless. Integration is a two-sided process in which the refugee and the host society must accept each other's diversity. Integration is a very delicate process, which cannot be measured properly (UNHCR 2014).

Many problems arise during the onboarding process. Not all unaccompanied minors will face the same integration problems, but certain common points can be highlighted. The integration process is a very slow and gradual process, which has many dimensions such as economic, social and legal aspects.

Among unaccompanied children there are successful integrations and it's manifests when people are doing well economically and have obtained citizenship. Many are not able to continue the integration process; they lack economic activity as well as social networks (UNHCR 2014).

Many unaccompanied minors are resilient; when despite difficult situations, they continue their struggle. Empirical data shows that unaccompanied minors face many challenges such as loneliness, they do not have their family with them, they may miss their home and/and they may suffer from mental stress, anxiety or depression.

There are other challenges such as academic performance, inability to build social networks and achieve societal acceptance. With reference to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, how different environments affect humans has been detailed by the authors (Lunstad & Lefler 2020).

The Third Part: Experiences of social workers.

Experiences of social workers:

Social workers are committed to providing support and assistance to individuals facing difficulties, and this principle extends unequivocally to unaccompanied minor children. These vulnerable children, who often arrive alone and in distressing circumstances, require specialized care and support to navigate their challenging situations. Social workers play a crucial role in addressing their unique needs, ensuring their safety, and facilitating their integration into a new environment. They offer emotional support, help with accessing necessary services, and advocate for the minors' rights and well-being. By applying a holistic approach tailored to the individual needs of these children, social workers contribute significantly to their overall stability and development. Based on the empirical data on the experiences of social workers, it appears that several social workers spoke of the same problems encountered in their work with unaccompanied children, who were emotionally affected. Despite the difficulties unaccompanied children encounter in their integration, results show that social workers who work with unaccompanied minors view these children as full of new resources and skills (Zwebathu 2018).

Social workers interviewed mentioned that the needs of each unaccompanied minor are different and cannot be described as assuming they are the same for everyone. Social workers view these children as resourceful and should learn from them (Zwebathu 2018).
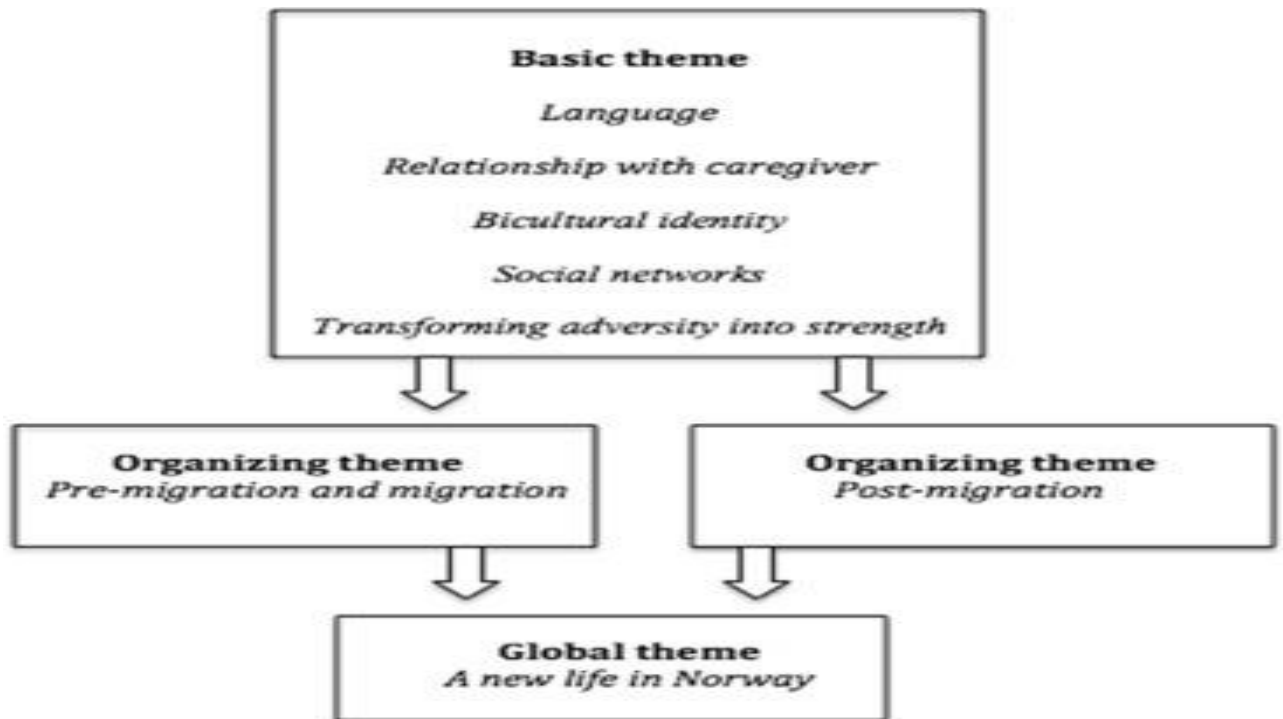
Fig 4: Resettlement Procedure in New developed country.

Social workers are exposed to many emotional and psychological events when working with unaccompanied refugee minors and they need each other to create strength. Social workers don't have much say in shift changes because they work with housing and schools for unaccompanied minors and spend more time with them, giving them more contact with these children. Social workers work for certain organizations and that organization is the main decision-making body.

Social workers in Africa

Since the 1970's the African socio-economic crisis, as underlined by the drought and famine of 1980- 85; the current drought in Southern Africa; war, famine and extensive mass dislocation in Somalia; General high rate of urbanization; infant mortality, high population growth; illiteracy; unemployment; lack of essential services; increasing poverty of the masses has worsened (UN, 1987).

The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), together with the associated privatization being undertaken by a number of countries such as Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, have not provided any answers to the problem. If anything at all, the immediate impact has been a worsening of the situation for many social groups in the short term (Osei-Hwedie, 1992; Osei-Hwedie et al, 1992).

With deepening socio-economic crises, many African countries have failed to meet the needs of their populations, especially within the current context of social provision. African strategic planning, demonstrated, for example, through the Lagos PIan of Action and the UN Programmeof Action for Economic Recovery and Development 1986- 1990, have emphasized strategies "that focus attention on the major social issues, the development of human resources and the needs of special population groups, particularly women and youth" (UN 1987: 3)

Basis of Practice and Training

The need to clarify the basis of social work practice in Africa is an urgent one. Bernstein (1991) asks a question with respect to social work in South Africa which is pertinent for the rest of Africa. One may well ask whether the emphasis in training is a response to the needs of the field or whether the service offered in the field is the result of the training given (Bernstein, 1991: 224).

A major indictment against African social work practice is the gap between theory, Western theory and practice in response to local needs. It appears the gap exists and widens because of the strong social science base. This social science knowledge base is on the whole, borrowed from a context different from that of Africa. If the social science knowledge base has to be relevant, then social workers have to begin to reassemble what is known about their own environment and take that which will drive their practice effectively.

Increasing the effectiveness of social work in Africa means refining professional expertise and establishing greater societal legitimacy and acceptability. The struggle to define social work and set its direction also involves the issue of control. This is about who controls and defines the profession and therefore assigns it socio-economic status. By necessity, the one who defines the field must also set the agenda.

However, according to Opoku (1976), African social workers face a dilemma in that they are not part of the process of defining their being, in addition to the lack of adequate guidelines and resources; and that future professionals will be even less fortunate and more confused due to the increasing complexity of situations.

A major problem is that the agenda for social work is set by others, especially politicians, and that, to a greater extent, social work education is dictated by the nature of the job, in almost all cases as offered by governments and non-governmental organizations. Once again, the indigenization of the field must address the issue of who sets the agenda and shift the content of practice from the political to the professional realm. Social work in Africa faces major challenges due to factors such as lack of resources, insufficient training schools and adequate curricula. In this situation, the actions of women's social movements can be defined as social development, more in line with the needs of the local population.

Social workers encounter numerous challenges in their profession. These challenges include insufficient public understanding and recognition of the importance of social work. There is also a generally negative perception of social work, which may be attributed to individual experiences and media coverage. The social worker mentioned the difficulty of maintaining emotional control while working with these minors for extended periods, and expressed concern about how it would be unfair for new children if the existing ones receive all the attention and affection.

Challenges Encountered by Social Workers in Their Professional Practice

Social workers play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable populations, including unaccompanied minor refugees. However, they encounter numerous challenges that can impact their effectiveness and well-being. These challenges can be broadly categorized into personal, professional, organizational, and systemic levels.

Personal Challenges

Emotional and Psychological Strain: Vicarious Trauma and Burnout: Social workers often deal with traumatic stories and situations, leading to secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue. The emotional demands of the job can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Work-Life Balance: **Long Hours and Emotional Spillover**: The demanding nature of social work often requires long and irregular hours, impacting personal and family life. The intensity of the work can make it difficult for social workers to "switch off" and separate their professional responsibilities from their personal life.

Professional Challenges

High Caseloads and Overwhelming Workload: Many social workers manage high caseloads, making it challenging to give each case the attention it deserves. High caseloads can compromise the quality of care and support provided to clients.

Complex Cases

Social workers often face cases that involve a myriad of intertwined issues, making their role exceptionally challenging. Here's a more detailed look at the complexity of these cases:

Mental Health: **Challenges and Intervention**

Social workers assist clients dealing with various mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and bipolar disorder. They provide counseling, connect clients with psychiatric services, and create treatment plans.

Substance Abuse: **Challenges and Intervention:** Substance abuse often co-occurs with other issues, such as mental health disorders or domestic violence, complicating the treatment process. Social workers coordinate with addiction specialists, support rehabilitation efforts, and facilitate support group participation.

Domestic Violence: Challenges: Cases involving domestic violence require careful handling to ensure the safety of victims, which often includes children. Social workers provide crisis intervention, help secure safe housing, and support legal actions like restraining orders.

Legal Problems: **Challenges and Intervention:** Clients may face legal issues related to custody disputes, immigration status, or criminal charges. Social workers often act as liaisons with legal services, assist in understanding legal rights, and support clients through court processes.

Child Welfare: **Challenges and Intervention:** Ensuring the safety and well-being of children in cases of neglect, abuse, or when parental rights are in question. They conduct assessments, facilitate foster care placements, and work towards family reunification when safe and appropriate.

Housing and Homelessness: **Challenges and Intervention** Clients without stable housing face additional barriers to accessing services and maintaining health and employment. Social workers help secure temporary or permanent housing, connect clients with resources for basic needs, and support long-term stability plans.

Conclusion of Current State in Africa

Lack of Structured Resettlement Programs: Many African countries lack formal resettlement programs for unaccompanied minor refugees. There may be ad-hoc solutions and local community support, but these are often inconsistent and insufficient.

Absence of Specialized Social Workers: There is a shortage of trained social workers who specialize in dealing with unaccompanied minors. This leads to gaps in the provision of psychological support, legal advocacy, and other essential services.

Challenges Faced: Unaccompanied minors in Africa face significant challenges, including lack of access to education, health care, and safe living conditions. They are often vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and trafficking.

Urgent Reforms Needed to Support Unaccompanied Minor Refugee Girls

Unaccompanied or forcibly displaced minor refugee girls face heightened vulnerabilities compared to their male counterparts due to gender-specific risks and societal norms. Addressing these disparities requires urgent reforms across legal frameworks, protection measures, education access, healthcare, and psychosocial support.

Strengthening Legal Frameworks: Implement and enforce laws that specifically protect the rights of unaccompanied minor girls, ensuring they have equal access to asylum and immigration processes. Develop policies that recognize the unique vulnerabilities of girls and provide tailored support, such as safe shelters and legal aid.

Enhanced Protection Measures: Establish and maintain safe spaces within refugee camps and host communities where girls can receive protection, healthcare, education, and psychosocial support. Strengthen efforts to combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation, including increased patrolling and surveillance in high-risk areas.

Improving Access to Education: Provide scholarships and other incentives to encourage girls' education and reduce economic barriers. Work with communities to change cultural norms that hinder girls' education, emphasizing the long-term benefits of educated women.

Healthcare and Psychosocial Support: Ensure the availability of reproductive health services and trauma-informed care specifically designed for girls. Train healthcare providers to recognize and respond to the unique needs of refugee girls, including mental health issues stemming from GBV.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Improve data collection on the specific challenges faced by unaccompanied minor girls to inform policy and program development. Conduct regular assessments of the effectiveness of existing policies and programs, ensuring they are responsive to the needs of girls.

Comparative Analysis with Europe and North America

Structured Resettlement Programs:

Europe: Many European countries have established resettlement programs for refugees, including specific provisions for unaccompanied minors. These programs often include comprehensive care plans, legal guardianship, and integration support.

North America (including Canada): Canada, in particular, has well-developed systems for resettling refugees, including unaccompanied minors. This includes specialized agencies, legal support, and community integration programs. The U.S. also has various programs, though the effectiveness and consistency can vary by state.

Specialized Social Workers:

Europe: Many European countries employ specialized social workers and child protection officers trained in dealing with unaccompanied minors. This includes providing mental health services, ensuring educational access, and legal representation.

North America (including Canada): Both Canada and the U.S. have systems in place for the support of unaccompanied minors, including specialized social workers and child welfare professionals. There are established protocols for ensuring their integration into society.

Structured Focused Case Study Matrix

Summary of Adverse Impacts: Comparing between Africa - Europe and North America					
Challenges	**Africa**	**European union**	**United States**	**Canada**	**Overall Score Africa**
Structured Resettlement Programs	NO	YES	YES	YES	0/4
Specialized Social Workers	NO	YES	YES	YES	0/4
Challenges Faced by Social-Workers'	NO	YES	NO	NO	0/4
Housing and Structure	NO	YES	YES	YES	0/4
Child Welfare	NO	YES	YES	YES	0/4
Solving Legal Problems	NO	YES	YES	YES	0/4
TOTAL /YES	0/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	

Table 3: Matrix of Case Study

Comparative table

The table provides a comparative analysis of the resettlement processes for unaccompanied minor refugee children in African countries versus Western countries. The key findings from the table are summarized below:

Key Observations

Resettlement Success:

African Countries: Recorded a score of 0 across all measured aspects of resettlement. This indicates significant challenges and inadequacies in the resettlement processes for both male and female unaccompanied minor refugees.

Western Countries: Recorded higher scores across the same aspects, indicating a more robust and effective resettlement process, with a rating of 6 out of 6.

Material Means:

Lack of Resources in African Countries: The table highlights that African countries face substantial resource constraints, which hinder their ability to provide adequate resettlement services for unaccompanied minors. This includes a lack of financial resources, infrastructure, and trained personnel.

Adequate Resources in Western Countries: Western countries generally have better access to resources, which enables them to offer more comprehensive support and services to unaccompanied minor refugees.

Specific Aspects Measured:

Housing and Shelter: African countries struggle to provide safe and appropriate housing for unaccompanied minors, whereas Western countries are better equipped with facilities such as foster care, group homes, and shelters specifically designed for children.

Access to Education: In African countries, access to education for unaccompanied minors is limited due to inadequate school facilities and resources. Western countries, on the other hand, offer more structured and supportive educational environments, including language support and tailored educational programs.

Healthcare Services: Healthcare access in African countries is often insufficient, impacting the physical and mental well-being of unaccompanied minors. Western countries provide more comprehensive healthcare services, including mental health support and routine medical care.

Legal and Administrative Support: The legal frameworks and administrative support systems in African countries are often underdeveloped, making it difficult for unaccompanied minors to navigate asylum processes and secure legal protection. Western countries have more established systems for providing legal assistance and guardianship services.

Overall Effectiveness:

Challenges in African Countries: The overall resettlement process in African countries is hampered by the lack of material means, leading to a failure to meet the basic needs of unaccompanied minor refugees.

Strengths in Western Countries: Western countries are better positioned to address the needs of unaccompanied minor refugees due to more substantial resources and well-developed support systems.

Implications

The findings from the table suggest that resettlement programs for unaccompanied minor refugees in African countries require significant improvement. The zero scores indicate an urgent need for increased investment in resources, infrastructure, and capacity-building. This could include international support and collaboration to enhance the ability of African countries to provide adequate care and protection for unaccompanied minors.

Conclusion

In this part of the discussion, I have come to realize that unaccompanied minors are not just a group of children with problems who are entirely dependent on others for help. These children demonstrate remarkable resilience and independence in their decision-making. While they undoubtedly need assistance, they possess the will and ability to improve their lives, not only for their own benefit but also for the betterment of their families and relatives.

Unaccompanied minors face significant challenges, yet their experiences reveal a capacity for strength and self-determination. This resilience highlights the importance of providing support that empowers them rather than viewing them solely as passive recipients of aid. By acknowledging their agency and potential, the community members can better tailor their support systems to foster the growth, independence, and contribution to society.

Summary

The findings presented in this chapter underscore the critical significance of addressing the challenges faced by unaccompanied minor children and the potential of the collected information for analysis. This chapter proposes a comprehensive framework for addressing the challenges faced by unaccompanied minor refugees. It aims to provide a holistic understanding of their experiences and offer effective strategies to address these challenges.

The comprehensive framework aims to provide a multi-faceted approach to addressing the complex needs of unaccompanied minor refugees. By integrating legal protections, immediate support, educational and psychosocial services, family tracing, and ongoing integration efforts, the framework seeks to ensure the safety, well-being, and successful integration of these vulnerable children.

Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that includes cultural competence training, language support, inclusive policies, and empowerment programs. By understanding and addressing these cultural barriers, the community can create more supportive and inclusive environments for unaccompanied minors, ensuring that their rights and needs are fully met.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, the study will encapsulate the key findings of this research work, explore their implications for theory and practice, and propose directions for future research. This chapter will circle back to the introduction, re-examine the research questions, and deliver a succinct reflection on the study's significance within the context of unaccompanied minor refugees.

Discussion of the Findings

The primary focus of this study was unaccompanied minor refugee children, with a specific emphasis on the vulnerability of unaccompanied minor refugee girls. These girls, as unaccompanied minors require additional emotional support and connection from the community during their displacement in the absence of direct parents.

The study aimed to shed also light on the integration process of unaccompanied children into immigration procedures in Africa, while also comparing Initial Accommodation Centers or Transit Centers in African and Western countries. The challenges faced by girls in humanitarian crises have been discussed distressing and ongoing. Displaced women and girls, lacking resources, are often compelled to trade sex for passage, food, shelter, and other necessities. Humanitarian crises affect individuals of all ages and genders in different ways. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable, with one in five women likely to experience sexual violence, girls being more prone to dropping out of school, and 60% of preventable maternal deaths occurring during crises.

Convention relating to the Status of Refugees: This chapter examined international agreements such as the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which establish fundamental rights and protections for refugee children. It also examined regional agreements and national legislation that complement international standards, including the EU Regulation and the US Refugee Act.

The study also examined the principle of non-refoulement, which bars the repatriation of refugees to nations where their life or freedom would be in jeopardy. It delved into the legal protections for education, healthcare, and legal representation for unaccompanied children, highlighting the significance of these services for the well-being and assimilation of unaccompanied children (UNHCR, 2011).

The text in question delves into the implementation of international and national laws, highlighting the involvement of government agencies like social workers and international organizations. It also identifies challenges in implementation, such as bureaucratic barriers, inadequate resources, and inconsistent application of laws across different jurisdictions in African countries.

Growing prevalence of unaccompanied minor crossing borders: This part of the chapter discussed unaccompanied refugee minors and the challenges they face. Unaccompanied adolescent refugee girls in crises are an unseen demographic within the forcibly displaced population. The growing prevalence of minor girls crossing borders into other countries and facing life-threatening conditions is particularly worrisome. There is relatively little research on the differences between girls and boys among unaccompanied minors. Despite facing multiple risks, the young women actively sought support and demonstrated resilience in adapting to their new life in exile.

Unaccompanied minors taking the exile route are at high risk of violence and harassment, with a significant prevalence of verbal, psychological, and sexual abuse among girls. The lack of water and food, along with unsanitary and overcrowded living conditions, further exacerbate their vulnerable hygienic situation.

However, all unaccompanied minors felt the need to adopt behaviors similar to those of their peers in order to achieve their goals. This led to a struggle between the need to belong, involving assimilation and acculturation, and the need to maintain their own cultural identity through integration. African immigration policy aims to integrate, rather than assimilate, refugees and does not provide means for resettlement, relying on the resilience of this population.

The majority of the population seems to favor an assimilative approach. African policymakers have thus far been unsuccessful in achieving their objective of ensuring fair participation. This study questioned the practicality of implementing an integration strategy in today's African society and the implications for individuals seeking to start a new life in neighboring host countries.

This research reveals substantial gender differences in the experiences of young women compared to research on boys/young men, it underscores the importance of taking a gender-sensitive approach to settling minors. This includes addressing the need for emotional support and the potential presence of female or motherly figures to accompany them as they transition to a new life.

Challenges and impact of social workers on unaccompanied refugee minors:

In Africa, the lack of reception facilities for unaccompanied minors poses significant challenges. Shortages, confusion, insufficient training, and undervaluation of social workers exacerbate the situation. Dedicated structures such as shelters or specialized centers are often lacking, resulting in unstable living conditions and strain on existing infrastructure. Unaccompanied minors may be placed in unsuitable conditions, negatively impacting their well-being and development. The absence of secure facilities heightens the risk of exploitation and trafficking. Confusion regarding roles and responsibilities among different agencies, as well as the lack of clear and coordinated protocols for the care and protection of minors, can result in gaps in the services provided by social workers.

The specific needs of unaccompanied minors, such as trauma and protection, are not adequately addressed due to the lack of proper training for social workers. Furthermore, the undervaluation of social workers can impact their motivation and effectiveness.

As a result, the insufficient training can lead to inconsistent service quality and inadequate support for the needs of minors. It can also result in a lack of cultural sensitivity and adaptability to local contexts. The lack of recognition and support for social workers can affect their dedication and performance.

This undervaluation can also lead to inadequate compensation, hindering the attraction and retention of qualified professionals. The devaluation of social workers can consequently impact the quality of services and the ability to effectively meet the needs of minors.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by reception facilities, resource scarcity, coordination confusion, inadequate training, and undervaluation of social workers in Africa necessitate urgent attention. To address these issues, it is crucial to strengthen reception infrastructure, clarify roles and responsibilities, provide adequate training for social workers, and recognize the value of their work. Collaborative efforts and investments in these areas are imperative to ensure the adequate protection and support of unaccompanied minors in Africa.

Implications for Practice

Addressing the needs of unaccompanied minor refugees requires practical interventions across multiple domains. Effective practices must address their immediate safety, emotional well-being, and long-term development. A multifaceted approach is needed involving legal protections, educational access, family tracing, psychosocial support, workforce development, and interagency collaboration.

Implementation of International Standards: Ensure that national and local policies align with international standards, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Specialized Legal Representation: Provide access to legal representation that is knowledgeable about the specific needs and rights of unaccompanied minors.

National Legislation: Advocate for comprehensive national legislation that addresses the unique needs of unaccompanied minors, including their right to education, health care, and protection from exploitation.

Standardized Procedures: Develop and implement standardized procedures for handling the cases of unaccompanied minors to ensure consistency and fairness.

Access to Schools: Ensure unaccompanied minors can enroll in local schools and receive appropriate educational support.

Language and Academic Support: Provide language classes, tutoring, and academic support to help minors integrate into the education system and keep up with their peers.

Specialized Educational Programs: Develop and implement educational programs tailored to the needs of unaccompanied minors' refugees, including cultural orientation and catch-up classes.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Continuously monitor educational outcomes and make necessary adjustments to support the academic progress of unaccompanied minors.

Utilization of Technology: Employ technology such as biometric data and social media to trace family members and verify identities.

Coordination with Agencies: Work with national and international agencies to streamline the family tracing process and ensure the safety and security of children.

Safe Reunification: Develop and follow comprehensive reunification plans that include safety assessments and legal considerations to ensure that reunifications are in the best interest of the child.

Post-Reunification Support: Provide support services post-reunification to assist children and families in adjusting and ensuring that the environment is safe and stable.

Counseling and Therapy: Ensure that unaccompanied minors have access to qualified mental health professionals who can provide individual and group therapy.

Trauma-Informed Care: Implement trauma-informed care practices that acknowledge and address the effects of trauma and displacement.

Specialized Training: Provide specialized training for social workers and other professionals working with unaccompanied minors to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed for effective support.

Continuous Education: Offer ongoing professional development opportunities to keep practitioners updated on best practices and emerging issues.

Recognize Contributions: Ensure that the roles of social workers and other professionals are recognized and valued, including appropriate compensation and support.

Resource Allocation: Allocate sufficient resources to support professionals in their roles, including access to supervision and mental health support for themselves.

Data Sharing: Implement systems for sharing relevant data and information among stakeholders while ensuring the protection of privacy and confidentiality.

Best Practice Exchange: Facilitate the exchange of best practices and lessons learned across different regions and organizations. By focusing on these areas, practitioners can enhance the safety, well-being, and overall development of unaccompanied minors, ensuring they receive the support they need for new life.

Assessment and Conclusion of the Study

This study on unaccompanied minor refugees in Africa and their resettlement process to developed countries highlights several crucial aspects regarding the protection and well-being of these vulnerable children. The analysis revealed that African countries, facing significant economic challenges, a lack of appropriate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified social workers, struggle to provide adequate support for these young refugees. The situation is exacerbated by the increased risk of exploitation and abuse that these children often face in Africa.

In contrast, developed countries, such as those in the European Union, Canada, and the United States, generally benefit from stronger legal frameworks, better resources, and more comprehensive social services, which allow them to better protect the rights and well-being of refugee children. International instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other United Nations agreements emphasize the importance of ensuring the best interests of the child, a principle that is often difficult to apply in African contexts due to structural and economic limitations.

The conclusion of this study is clear: while resettlement efforts in Africa are essential, they are not always sufficient to ensure effective protection for unaccompanied minor refugees. Therefore, it is in the best interest of these children to consider resettlement in countries that offer greater stability and more resources to ensure their safety and development. International cooperation and a commitment to strengthened protection policies are necessary to improve the situation of refugee minors, both in Africa and elsewhere.

In conclusion, this study calls for a thorough reflection on resettlement and protection strategies for minor refugees, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates both local and international efforts to provide a safe and promising future for these vulnerable children.

Recommendations for Further Research

After thoroughly examining the hurdles encountered by unaccompanied children in Africa, including the absence of reception facilities, a shortage of trained social workers, failure to apply United Nations laws and instruments by African nations, and limited opportunities to resettle unaccompanied African children within the continent, it is clear that concerted efforts are needed to drive future research in the field of asylum and immigration processes for unaccompanied minor refugees in African countries. There is also a need for further research to highlight the unique experiences of unaccompanied minor refugee girls and ensure that their specific needs are adequately addressed during settlement.

This research requires also, a comprehensive study and thorough examination to focus on the care and resettlement of female minors in any new country worldwide. This is necessary due to the specific challenges they face as well as the ongoing risks linked to their femininity.

Understanding and addressing the specific needs of unaccompanied children, especially girls, requires in-depth research. By identifying their vulnerabilities, improving access to services, providing support, and developing targeted policies and programs, we can ensure better care and a safer future for these children. Unaccompanied girls face unique challenges that demand careful attention and research. There are the key reasons why further research in this area is vital.

Unaccompanied girls are highly susceptible to sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse. Research is essential to comprehend the extent of these risks and devise effective prevention and protection strategies. Furthermore, girls are often at risk of early marriage, which can significantly impede their education, health, and personal development.

The reproductive and menstrual health needs of unaccompanied girls require special attention. Research can explore ways to improve access to appropriate health care and raise awareness of these needs. Unaccompanied girls may face additional barriers to accessing education, such as gender stereotypes or cultural expectations. Research can identify these barriers and propose solutions to address them.

Existing protection mechanisms may not adequately meet the needs of unaccompanied girls. Research can help assess the effectiveness of protection services and recommend improvements. Unaccompanied girls often face trauma related to displacement, family separation, and other experiences. Understanding these traumas and their effects on girls' well-being is essential to developing effective interventions. Research can explore best practices for providing tailored psychosocial support to unaccompanied girls, taking into account their unique experiences and emotional needs.

Training is needed for social workers, authorities, and non-governmental organizations to better understand and respond to the specific needs of unaccompanied girls. Research can help identify training needs and best practices for support. Current policies may not always address the specific needs of unaccompanied girls. Research can assess the effectiveness of existing policies and suggest evidence-based improvements.

Summary of the Study

This chapter, which addresses in its entirety the process of immigration of unaccompanied minors, demonstrates the crucial importance of acquiring reception centers to receive unaccompanied minors for the protection of refugee and asylum-seeking children. The study shows that well-designed legal frameworks and initiatives dedicated to the well-being could significantly improve the protection and integration of refugee children. They represent one of the most vulnerable groups within refugee populations.

This study aimed to explore the different challenges faced by children, the existing legal and protection frameworks and the effectiveness of support systems in different regions.

Unaccompanied minors are at high risk of sexual exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of abuse. Their lack of adult supervision increases their susceptibility to these dangers. Many of these children experience severe trauma due to their displacement, separation from family, and exposure to violence.

These minors often face obstacles in accessing essential services such as education, healthcare, and legal assistance, due to bureaucratic hurdles, language barriers, and lack of awareness of available resources. Key international frameworks like the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provide crucial protections for refugee minors, including the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning refugees to danger.

Various regions and countries have developed specific policies to address the needs of unaccompanied minors. However, implementation and effectiveness vary, with some regions showing strong compliance and others facing significant gaps.

In many countries, there are specialized programs for unaccompanied minors that focus on education, family tracing, reunification, and psychosocial support. These programs are essential, but they are often underfunded and overburdened. In Europe and North America, including Canada, there are more developed systems and resources dedicated to the protection and integration of unaccompanied minors. Issues that need to be addressed, such as barriers to accessing education, healthcare, and legal assistance, have been identified through the simplification of processes for unaccompanied refugee children. Difficulties in finding high-quality social workers have also been discussed, highlighting the need for comprehensive training for social workers and other professionals working with unaccompanied minors' refugees.

The findings of this study confirm that unaccompanied refugee minors face insurmountable challenges when seeking settlement in African countries due to the inadequate reception structures. These children require urgent and comprehensive solutions. Enhancing legal protections, improving access to essential services, expanding support programs, and providing better training for professionals are imperative to improve their reception and well-being.

By adopting and building upon best practices and strengthening collaboration among all stakeholders, the community can significantly improve the protection and support for unaccompanied minors. This approach will ensure their safety, well-being, and successful integration into their new environment. Prioritizing the best interests of the child is crucial. It is the responsibility of the local and international community to ensure that unaccompanied refugee children are given the opportunity to flourish and build a positive future.

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APPENDICES

In the appendices of a doctoral thesis on unaccompanied minor refugees, this study chose to
include the following types of materials

1. **Visual Aids**:
   o Photographs, maps that are pertinent to the research but not included in the main
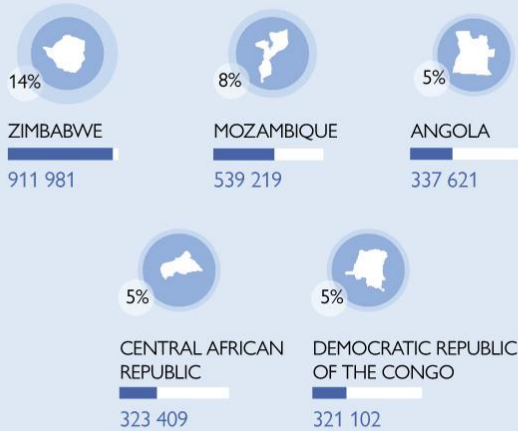   text.
2. **Letters of Correspondence**:
   o Letters exchanged with key informants, stakeholders, or organizations involved in
     the research.

MAP 3: Gaps linked with the economic impacts of disaster displacement for African
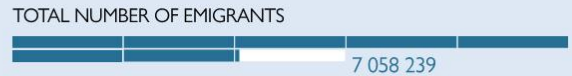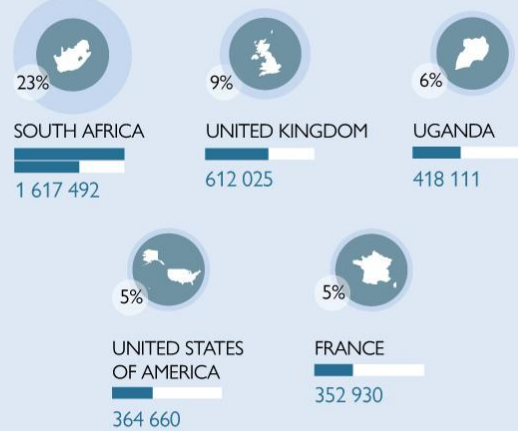
countries
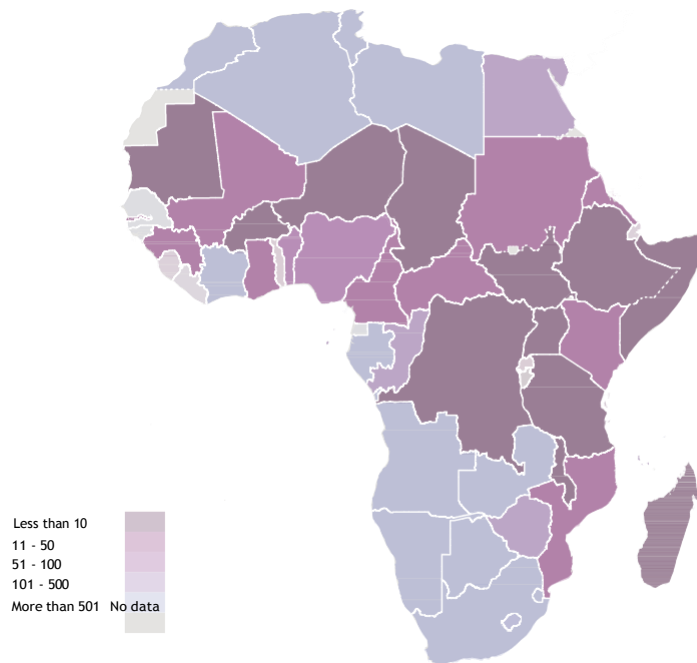
All these countries are facing economic problems, and unaccompanied children often come from these
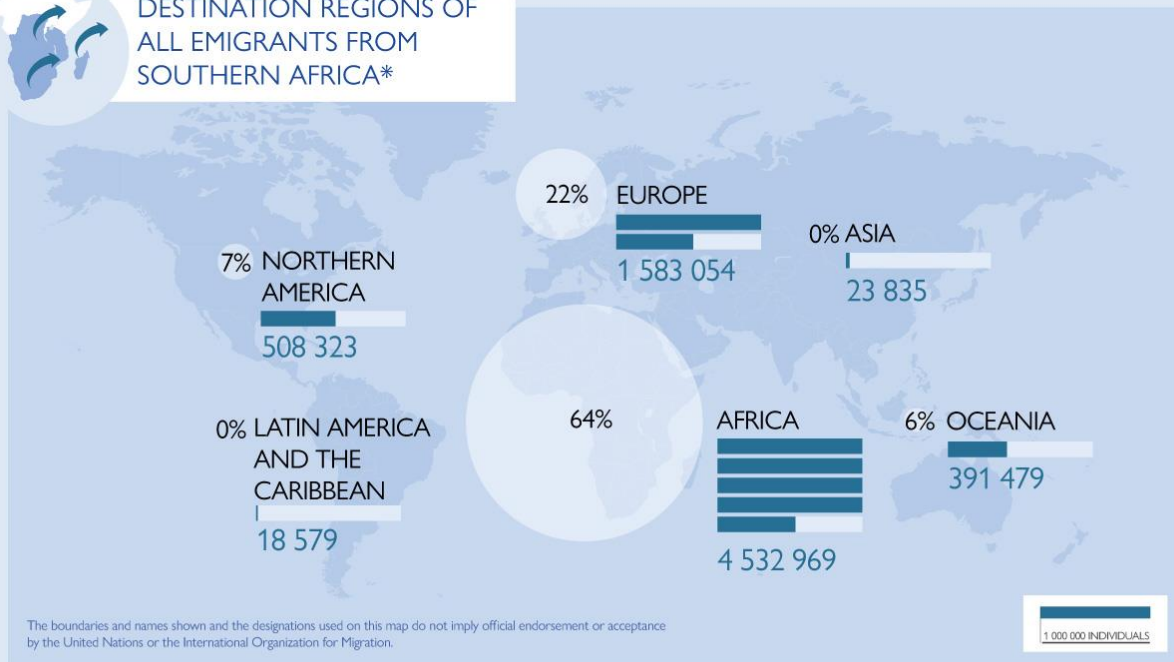*regions.*

TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF IMMIGRANTS RESIDING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA*

14%
ZIMBABWE
911 981

8%
MOZAMBIQUE
539 219

5%
ANGOLA
337 621

5%
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
323 409

5%
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
321 102

TOTAL NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS
6 384 704

TOP 5 DESTINATION COUNTRIES OF EMIGRANTS FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA*

23%
SOUTH AFRICA
1 617 492

9%
UNITED KINGDOM
612 025

6%
UGANDA
418 111

5%
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
364 660

5%
FRANCE
352 930

TOTAL NUMBER OF EMIGRANTS
7 058 239

DESTINATION REGIONS OF ALL EMIGRANTS FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA*

22% EUROPE
1 583 054

0% ASIA
23 835

7% NORTHERN AMERICA
508 323

0% LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
18 579

64% AFRICA
4 532 969

6% OCEANIA
391 479

1 000 000 INDIVIDUALS

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations or the International Organization for Migration.

*Member States of the Southern African Development Community

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). *International Migrant Stock 2020.*

Migration to and from African countries

Migration to and from countries in Southern Africa is driven largely by the pursuit of economic opportunities, political instability and increasingly, environmental hazards. There is ongoing war in several African countries, devastating their economies one after the other, which has long-term effects. During these conflicts, there have been population displacements, including children, resulting in many unaccompanied minors with all the consequences described in this thesis.

During displacements, whether voluntary or forced, families often become separated due to serious and involuntary incidents. These separations particularly expose minor children to increased risks, especially minor girls. Without the protection of their parents or guardians, these children become vulnerable to various forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse. Minor girls, in particular, face a high risk of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and forced marriages. In the absence of adequate protection structures, these young refugees often find themselves alone in a hostile environment, where each day is a struggle for their survival and dignity. Their status as minor refugees, already precarious, is further exacerbated by the loss of family support, leaving them at the mercy of the dangers around them.

These situations highlight the urgent need for targeted intervention to ensure their protection and well-being, through the implementation of robust mechanisms to prevent and respond to the risks they face.