

**The Impact of War, Conflict and Political
Violence on Children and their Families**

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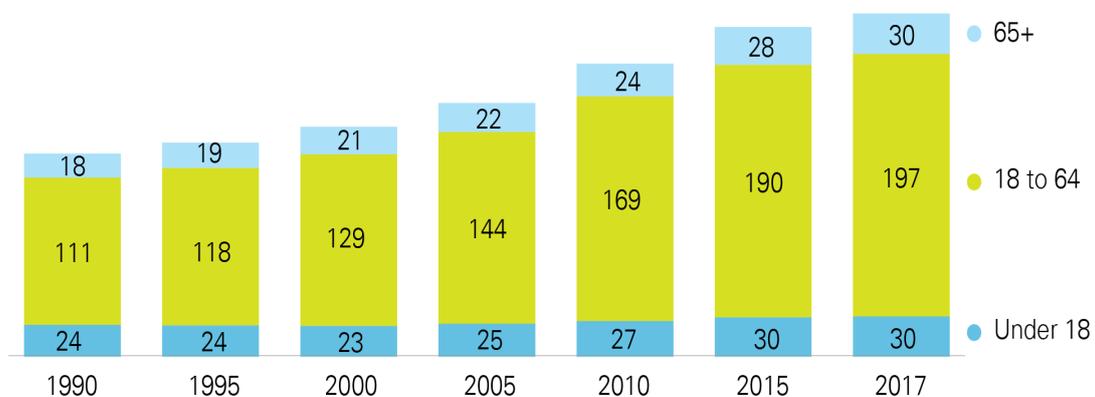
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Every child has rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). Children's rights are outlined within 54 articles which cover every aspect of a child's life, including cultural, economic, social, civil and political rights. These rights are inclusive to all children, regardless of their gender, language, ethnicity, religion, abilities or other status. But what happens when children do not experience their rights? The UNCRC has stimulated governments to promote policies through which the child rights education brings adults, children and young people to work together. Despite this, around the globe, children and their families remain in situations of organised violence, armed conflict and persecution resulting in forced migration (Elliott and Segal, 2012). The following report considers the rising of international migrants, the impact of unfortunate experiences and the role of the early years professional when supporting children and families who have arrived in the UK. The report is based upon information which is not sourced from personal research thus, ethical considerations are not relevant.

International Migrants

International migration occurs when a person moves away from their country of birth to another country, permanently or temporarily, for a variety of reasons (International Organization for Migration, 2019). In 2017, the number of international migrants increased to 257 million, with an estimated 30 million children under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2018). A rising global

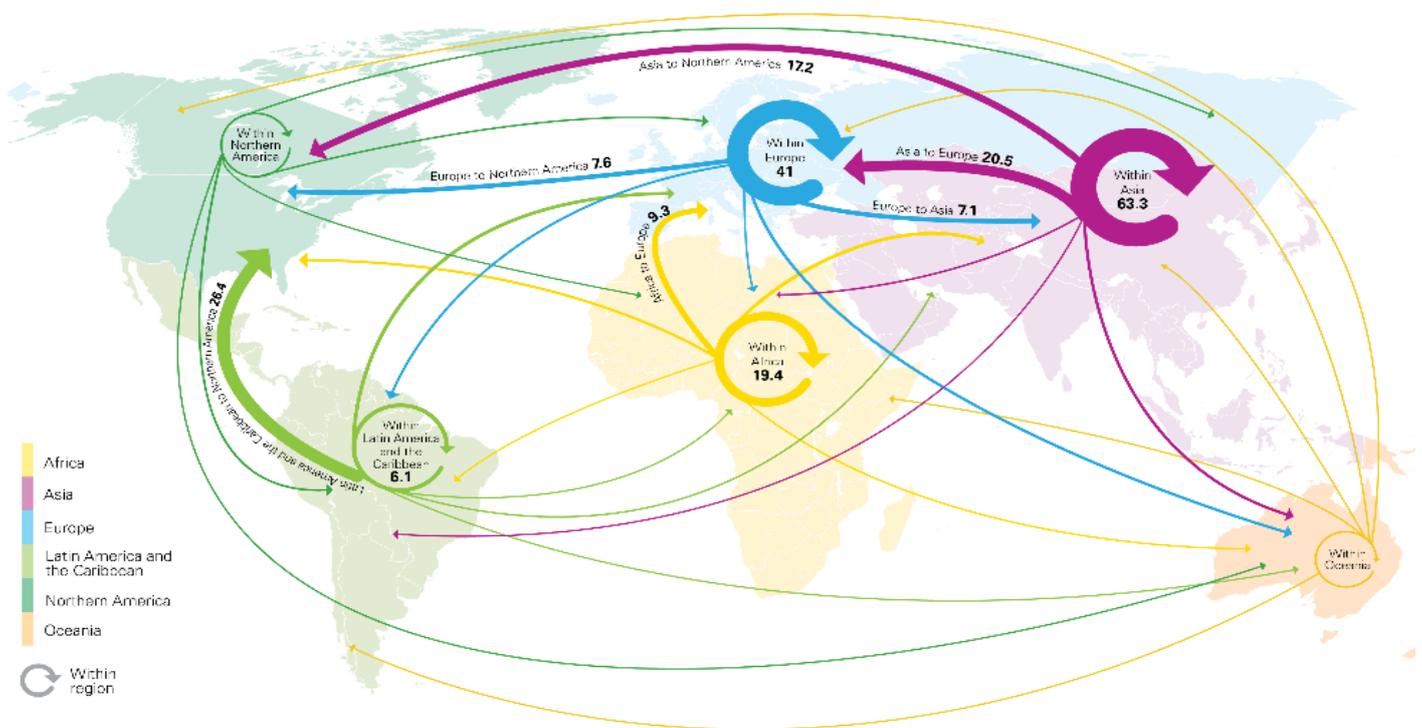
Figure 1 Number of international migrants by age, 1990-2017 (in millions)



Source: United Nations (2017, cited in UNICEF, 2018)

population contributes to the increase of international migrants over the past 27 years, with the UK alone reaching 66.4 million people in 2018. Along with an aging population, migration remains the main factor contributing to population growth (Office for National Statistics, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the number of international migrants from 1990 to 2017 and represents the increasing number of people who migrate from their homelands. An increase in population growth and migration levels suggests more and more children and families are forced or choose to leave their homelands (Vargas-Silva, 2014). Figure 2 demonstrates the number of international migrants and their journey from their homelands to a country of potential safety.

Figure 2 Number of international migrants by region and destination, 2017



Source: United Nations (2017, cited in UNICEF, 2018)

Globalisation

The rise of globalisation impacts the global population, especially noticeable to those who live below the poverty line or in situations of war, conflict and political violence. Horton and Patapan (2004) states globalisation exacerbates social and economic inequalities within and between countries. Another claim is globalisation results in new forms of discrimination,

including inequalities in power resulting in a change in rules which control the emerging global order. But why do such inequalities take place in a world which humans ultimately share? The United Nations Development Report (1999, cited in Horton and Patapan, 2004) states the income gap between a fifth of the world's people living in the richest and poorest countries was 74 to 1 in 1997, in comparison to 60 to 1 in 1990. This data supports the fact the income gap between the world's richest and poorest countries has increased between 1990 and 1997. The impact of globalisation is seemly increasing the divide between countries, with little benefit to people in need of support and protection.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, Undated (a)) was created in 1950 after the Second World War, with the aim of supporting millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes. 68 years later, they continue to support and protect refugees from around the world. The Refugee Convention and Protocol (UNHCR, 1951) is the key legal document underpinning the foundations of their work. The document includes the rights of those defined as a refugee and the states responsibility to provide protection to those who seek asylum. Dettlaff and Fong (2016)

explore the reasons behind the decisions people make to leave their homelands and the difficulties people face upon arrival in a new country. The information widens understanding of the situations people leave behind and the horrors they may face as they



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migrate to another country, only to be placed in a refugee camp or detention centre. The picture above shows the conditions of the EU's refugee camp in Greece and the conditions people are currently living in. Refugees are individuals who arrive traumatised by their experiences, potentially witness to unspeakable crimes and even the murder or death of their loved ones. The journey they undertake to arrive in another country is often dangerous and potentially life threatening. Migrants may board unsafe vessels to cross the ocean, many lose their lives and

those who do not, witness these deaths. Some travel on foot, on trains and busses or in the backs of trucks or lorries. Often the journey to safety is nearly as treacherous and traumatic as the situations left behind. Knowing what lies ahead only upholds the fact children and families are willing to take these risks in hope of a better, safer life.

Cultural Perspectives

Cultural perspectives influence how children respond and interpret experiences of war, conflict and political violence, as an experience may be viewed differently in different cultures (UNICEF, 1993). Bracken (1998, cited in Hyder, 2005) gives the example of dreams; some cultures view dreams as powerful and insightful events, whilst other cultures may view dreams as unimportant and without meaning. In relation to children's experiences of war, conflict and political violence, children's interpretations are based upon their culture, lifestyle, and family attitudes. Nevertheless, violence and war will have profound effects on children's wellbeing and development. Lander (1998, cited in Hyder, 2005) identified three areas of impact as a result of violence, including:

- Clinical manifestations,
- Behavioural manifestations,
- Spiritual and psychological impact.

Lander suggests clinical manifestations arise as a result of sensory overload due to the child's experiences. Children in conflict situations develop coping mechanisms which disrupt holistic development. Behavioural and spiritual manifestations present differently in line with the child's age; children from birth to three years may respond to the reactions of adults, becoming watchful and over-attentive. Children may display violent behaviour or may regress to previous behaviours. Children's development will suffer as they may not respond and interact with their environment in an exploratory and confident manner (Hyder, 2005). Lander suggests the age of the child influences their reaction to the event, along with cultural and individual responses. Figure 3 presents Landers understanding of children's reactions to traumatic events based upon the age of the child.

Figure 3 Children's reactions to traumatic events

Babies	Toddlers	Preschool
Withdrawal, Clinging, Restlessness.	Fears, Aggression, Destructive behaviour, Regression.	Fears, Traumatic fantasies, Grief and mourning, Guilt, Creating stories, Social withdrawal.

Source: Landers (1998, cited in Hyder, 2005).

This information could be used further to understand the impact of traumatic events on children's wellbeing as they become adults. Therefore investigating if there is a correlation between the age of the child witnessing traumatic experiences and the potential increase of unwanted, violent, or socially unacceptable behaviour as adults needs further attention.

Children's Mental Health

Traumatic experiences in childhood result in neurological and biological changes, affecting social, behavioural, medical and emotional problems in later life, says McCollum (2006, cited in Pernicano, 2010). The effects of war will have profound consequences on children's mental health. Meier (2002) states research has shown children are highly susceptible to trauma. Factors contribute to the extent of the effects of trauma, including:

- The child's developmental level,
- The degree of exposure,
- The reactions of family members to the traumatic experience.

Meier further suggests the effects are heightened when children are directly involved in devastation or loss, especially when separated from their parents or primary carers. With regards to attachment theory, established by Bowlby (1961, cited in Bowlby, 2005), separation from parents or primary carers may result in potentially damaging consequences for children in war. Similarly to Lander (1998, cited in Hyder, 2005), Leavitt and Fox (1993, cited in Meier, 2002) identify correlation between the age and maturity of the child and the effects of trauma; a child aged 10-11 years is increasingly vulnerable to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than an older child. Anxiety levels in children aged 12-13 are greater than children aged 15-16.

This information suggests younger children have an increased vulnerability to the effects of traumatic experiences. Research since the 1980's suggests PTSD is a condition which refugee children are particularly vulnerable to. A study estimates around 40 per cent of refugee children within the UK have PTSD (Hodes, 2000, cited in Rutter, 2006). A further study suggests refugee and asylum-seeking children are at an increased risk of mental health problems if they are exposed to the consequences of parental PTSD (Carlsson et al., 2019). Both studies are important in terms of highlighting issues of potential risks refugee children are facing that needs further recognition especially when discussing these children education and care.

Arriving in the UK

Immigration rates are at an all-time high, with the UK alone receiving 26,350 applicants for asylum in 2017. Of those applicants, 15,618 people were granted protection, asylum or resettlement in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2017). This figure represents a minority of people applying for asylum; at the end of 2018, approximately 3.5 million people awaited a decision on their asylum claims (UNHCR, Undated (b)). To those who seek protection or asylum, within the UK, will receive somewhere to live and a cash allowance of £37.75 per person in the household each week. Mothers and young children receive additional money to pay for healthy food (Home Office, 2019). The impact of living on a low income will not be the sole challenge children face once they enter the UK. Children arrive traumatised by their experiences and are placed within nurseries or schools which may not be equipped to provide effective support or have teachers trained to support and understand these families. The family's cultural attitudes may differ in comparison to the UK. A study in the USA on refugee preschool children suggested that causes of children's difficulties when adjusting to life in another country, included:

- Learning a new language
- Cultural differences,
- Low expectations of schools and teachers,
- Unrealistic expectations of teachers,
- Insufficient number of books translated to native languages,
- Difficulties understanding and expressing the country's native language.

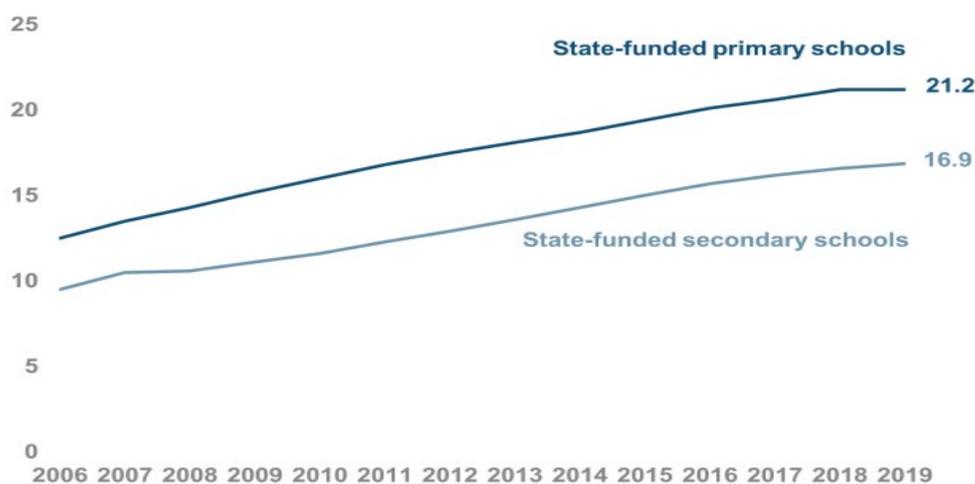
(Çiçekoğlu et al., 2019)

Early years settings within the UK are required to provide an inclusive environment for all children under the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2017). The framework seeks to provide children with equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice to ensure every child is supported and included.

Addressing Inclusion

Inclusion is ‘an active effort to address ways in which children or adults may be excluded from services or experiences, whether this result was intentional or the result of unreflective practice’, states Lindon (2012: 10). Providing an inclusive environment is one of the roles of the Early Years Professional. The increasing number of children migrating to the UK, along with children whose parents speak languages other than English, increases the likelihood of Early Years Professionals encountering children whose first language is not English. Rodgers and Wilmot (2011) value inclusive practice for children, stating progression of language skills increases when children are exposed to English speaking peers. Figure 4 illustrates the increasing percentage of children with English as an additional language in primary and secondary schools.

Figure 4 The percentage of children with English as an additional language between 2006-2019



Source: Department for Education, 2019

Children with English as an Additional Language

Children and families may arrive in another country which may not be equipped to provide adequate support to begin the healing process or successfully integrate them into a new culture (Dustmann and Frattini, 2014). Children are required by law to attend school but may not speak the language and may experience a different culture to their homelands. The National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC, 2019) highlights factors which impact children's language development as they learn English as an additional language. The factors include:

- The age of the child when beginning the educational system,
- The child's previous experience of schooling,
- The child's current level of understanding and level of spoken English,
- The child's understanding of the school's curriculum, home and community expectations of schooling,
- The support structures available to the child at home and in school.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2017) states the Early Years Professional must provide opportunities for children with English as an additional language to develop and use their home language(s) at home and within the setting. The Early Years Professional must ensure children have adequate opportunities to develop their English skills in preparation for school readiness. Children's holistic development must be assessed, including their English language skills. It could be argued this approach is not inclusive to children with English as an additional language as their skills in another language may be stronger than their English language skills (Mistry and Sood, 2015). This may result in an inaccurate representation of children's progression and stage of development. The Early Years Foundation Stage states further investigation is required if the child's communication and language development appears delayed. However, the Early Years Foundation Stage does not provide additional methods to track children's home language skills which may better the Early Years Professional's understanding of the child's holistic development and methods of supporting further learning and development.

Supporting Children and their Families

Children arriving from abroad may lack social and language skills and may be unable to communicate using English. These families may face isolation within their communities,

difficulties with communication and adapting to different ways of life. The children may have limited to no verbal communication skills, making communication and partnership working challenging. Mistry and Sood (2015) state the role of the Early Years Professional, when supporting children with English as an additional language, is to facilitate learning and increase the child's confidence and self-esteem. As children arrive from diverse backgrounds, creating an inclusive environment and meeting the needs of all children poses numerous challenges for the Early Years Professional. The challenges include creating a partnership with parents with limited English skills, meeting each child's individual needs and the Early Years Professional's knowledge regarding how to support children with English as an additional language. As migrant workers have begun to settle in the UK, they have brought over their families, increasing the demand for support of children with English as an additional language (Mistry and Sood, 2015). The demand places increased expectations and pressure on the Early Years Professional's working with children and families.

Conclusion

War, conflict and political violence will have a profound impact upon children's mental health and wellbeing. The journey to a safer country poses complicated implications for children and their families, without assurance they will be better off migrating to another country. A rise in children arriving in the UK from abroad increases the likelihood of the Early Years Professional encountering families and children with complicated situations and effects of war. The Early Years Professional has the role and responsibility of providing children with an inclusive environment where they and their families can begin to heal from their traumatic experiences.

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