

Protecting Every Child: A Global Call for Action amid Humanitarian Crises

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The Belgian Academy of Paediatrics strongly highlights the affirmation of the universal right of all children to protection under international humanitarian law and medical ethics by the European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP) and stated by the EAP on 16 July, 2025:

No child, adolescent, or caregiver should suffer or die due to war, displacement, terrorism, sexual abuse, sexual and gender-based violence, systemic sexual violence, or denial of essential resources or care. Such violations are grave breaches of children's rights and must be unequivocally condemned. Around the world, children are the most vulnerable victims of conflict, disaster, and neglect, facing displacement, hunger, injury, and trauma. Paediatric professionals have a duty to protect and advocate for their rights, everywhere and without exception.

The EAP Calls For:

Immediate and Sustained Humanitarian Access

- All parties to all conflicts must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law to allow safe, unimpeded access to children and civilian populations.
- Humanitarian corridors must be protected, and aid workers must be guaranteed safe operational environments, and guarantee unimpeded delivery of food, clean water, vaccinations, medical care, and psychological support.
- Healthcare personnel and humanitarian workers must be protected as neutral actors, and the neutrality of medical facilities and aid convoys must be upheld at all times.

Universal and Consistent Child Protection

Every child deserves protection from violence, exploitation, and deprivation, and these rights must be protected under international law. In armed conflict and humanitarian crises, children and their caregivers continue to face grave violations, including:

- Injury, death, and disfigurement
- Hunger and malnutrition
- Denial of access to medical care and essential vaccinations
- Psychological trauma and chronic mental health conditions
- Displacement due to violence and destruction of homes
- Family separation and orphanhood
- Recruitment by armed groups and use as human shields
- Abduction and sexual violence
- Disruption of education and the loss of safe learning environments

Children must be recognised and protected as non-combatants

Ceasefires and de-escalation must prioritise the safety of children. Wherever conflict continues, access to life-saving services must be guaranteed, and children's dignity, safety, and rights must be respected under international law.

A Global Commitment to Peace and Prevention

The EAP is a non-political organisation focused on children's health and well-being. While humanitarian crises often have political roots,

EAP is only focused on children's lives, safety, and rights. This statement reflects an exceptional convergence of global humanitarian concerns affecting child health.

The EAP remains committed to advancing a culture of child protection in Europe and globally - rooted in medical ethics, compassion, and universal human rights.

It joins international partners in calling for diplomatic efforts and conflict prevention strategies that prioritise children and safeguard the rights of future generations.

Moving forward, the EAP aligns itself with the child-focused advocacy and humanitarian reporting of agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations (UN) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and supports their work as a reference for its members and partners.

A Worldwide Emergency for Children: Selected Humanitarian Contexts

Many crises unfold in silence. The following are just some of the most urgent humanitarian contexts currently affecting children:

- Afghanistan: 22.9 million people require humanitarian aid, including 3.5 million acutely malnourished children and over 8 million internally displaced. Children face chronic hunger, limited access to healthcare and education, rising disease outbreaks, and collapsing services. Restrictions on female aid workers have further impeded relief efforts, disproportionately affecting women and children. Many children are exposed to child labour, early marriage, and psychological distress, with minimal access to mental health or protection services.
- Armenia: Armenia currently hosts approximately 115,000 refugees, including 36,000 children, who fled to the country in late September 2023 or were escorted through the Lachin corridor between December 2022 and September 2023 following the displacement from Nagorno-Karabakh. These arrivals joined 26,700 individuals already displaced since the 2020 conflict. Many fled without warning, resulting in severe disruption to education, healthcare, and social support systems. Host communities and national health services remain under considerable pressure. Children face heightened risks of trauma, food and housing insecurity, interrupted vaccination schedules, and limited access to routine and psychosocial care.

- Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Over 28 million people need humanitarian assistance, including 4.75 million malnourished children under five and 7.8 million internally displaced. Children face hunger, displacement, conflict, and gender-based violence – especially in eastern provinces. Attacks on schools, health centres, and aid workers are common. Thousands of children risk recruitment by armed groups, trafficking, or family separation.
- Gaza: More than 2 million people are affected by the ongoing crisis in Gaza. UNICEF's Situation reports state that up to 1.9 million people (~90% of Gaza's population, estimated at 2.2 million) are internally displaced in the ongoing crisis. Multiple humanitarian agencies cited that 17,000 children have been killed in Gaza since October 2023, with approximately 37,000 injured. The number of malnourished children is estimated as 65,000 and the UN reports 57 children having died from the effects of malnutrition since May 2025. Children face severe food and water insecurity, with many infants lacking access to infant formula and appropriate nutrition. The crisis is further compounded by the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure - including schools and hospitals, some of which have reportedly been used for military purposes - as well as acute shortages of shelter, overcrowding, and the collapse of health and sanitation systems.
- Haiti: An estimated 5.7 million people face acute food insecurity, including 277,000 malnourished children. Over 1 million people, many of them children, have been displaced due to gang violence and institutional collapse. Armed groups control large areas, restricting access to schools, healthcare, and aid. Children are at risk of violence, abduction, exploitation, and recruitment. Health systems are overwhelmed, and essential services—vaccinations, maternal care, and mental health support – are severely disrupted.
- Israel: Since the October 2023 attacks, thousands of children have experienced severe trauma due to bereavement, displacement, and ongoing violence. Infants and children were among those tortured, killed, or abducted on October 7, in acts of extreme and systemic violence. As of June 2025, 50 hostages remain in captivity, those still alive are held without access to medical care. More than 58,000 rockets and UAV alerts have disrupted daily life, exposing children to persistent fear, sleep disturbances, and emotional distress.
- Sudan: More than 14 million children require aid amid civil conflict, famine risk, and mass displacement. Children face acute malnutrition, disrupted health and vaccination services and armed violence – particularly in Darfur. Twelve million girls and women are at risk for sexual and gender-based violence.
- Syria: 16.7 million people need humanitarian aid, including over 7 million children affected by prolonged conflict. Children endure chronic displacement, malnutrition, disrupted education, and limited health and psychosocial support. Since December 2024, over 330 children have been killed or injured by unexploded ordnance. Attacks on infrastructure and overcrowded camps increase the risk of disease, exploitation, and trauma.
- Ukraine: More than 4 million children have been impacted by war, with over 2,500 confirmed casualties. According to the UN, since February 2022, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) has reported the deaths of at least 716 children and 2,173 children injuries, but considers that the actual number of child casualties may be much higher, since entire regions of Ukraine remain inaccessible. Many children face repeated displacement, the loss of family members, and destruction of schools, homes, and hospitals. Medical facilities have been attacked, limiting care. Children endure daily air raid sirens, prolonged sheltering, and ongoing disruptions to their education. Seventy percent of children in Ukraine (3.5 million) lack essential goods and services, including nutritious food, appropriate clothing, heating at home, and access to education. In frontline areas, students have missed up to 85% of classes.

Humanitarian corridors are frequently compromised. The psychological and developmental consequences for children are deep and long-lasting.

The crises highlighted here are not exhaustive. Many other regions - including Yemen, Myanmar, the Sahel, Venezuela, and parts of the Horn of Africa - face equally urgent humanitarian emergencies affecting children. Their omission reflects no judgment or prioritisation, but rather the limitations of scope within this statement. The EAP recognises that every crisis is shaped by complex, deeply rooted historical and political factors that cannot be fully explored here. We acknowledge that no conflict can be fully understood without its context.

Nevertheless, these and all other affected regions, whether at this point and any point in the future, are fully included in the EAP's call for the protection, care, and rights of every child.

Peace is a prerequisite for child health.

Political actors must commit to ending cycles of violence and investing in systems that safeguard children before, during, and after conflict including mental health, education, and resilience-building. This is the only sustainable foundation for child health and development.

We call on the international community, humanitarian actors, and all sides in conflict to *put children first. Everywhere. Always.*

Attacks on hospitals and aid convoys further restrict access to care. Thousands have been separated from their families and are at risk of exploitation or recruitment by armed groups.

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