

Investing in the Future: Protecting Refugee Children in the Middle East and North Africa

15 – 16 October, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Sharjah Principles

Representatives of States and governments, together with representatives of international organizations and civil society, met in October 2014 in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, to jointly address the situation of refugee children in the Middle East and North Africa.

Noting that half of the world's refugees are children, millions of whom are located in the Middle East and North Africa,

Acknowledging the long-standing traditions of hospitality and humanitarianism in Islam, including the principle of asylum ('aman'),

Appreciating the generosity of States in providing international protection and assistance to millions of refugee children, including through access to national child protection systems, educational opportunities, and essential services,

Recalling that refugee children have special needs and vulnerabilities that must be addressed within the wider context of forced displacement,

Noting the serious impact of armed conflict on children, who are at particular risk of abuse, exploitation, violence, and discrimination,

Recognizing that, while both girls and boys face similar risks, they also experience protection risks specific to their gender that need to be appropriately addressed,

Recognizing that refugee children with other specific needs, including children with disabilities, require targeted assistance,

Acknowledging, also, that refugee children and their families are highly resilient, and recognizing the importance of harnessing the capacity of children to participate in decisions affecting their well-being and protection,

Reiterating that the protection of refugee children is primarily the responsibility of States, and noting the supporting role of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society,

Emphasizing the importance of international solidarity, cooperation, and burden sharing in responding to the challenges faced by refugee children and adolescents,

Recognizing the need for joint efforts to mobilize the necessary resources for and support to governments and local communities hosting refugees, in light of the scale of displacement caused by ongoing crises,

Recalling that children's rights are enshrined in international human rights law, notably in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,

Acknowledging that improving the situation of refugee children and adolescents in the region is a shared responsibility and a means of investing in the future of the region,

Recognize that the following international standards and principles are of particular relevance to improving the protection and well-being of refugee children in the region:

1. All refugee children and adolescents to enjoy international protection.
2. All refugee children and adolescents to have their best interests taken as a primary consideration in all matters affecting their well-being and their future.
3. All refugee children to be registered and documented at birth in countries of asylum.
4. All refugee children and adolescents to enjoy their right to family unity and be protected from family separation.
5. All refugee children and adolescents to enjoy their right to quality education in a safe environment supportive of their developmental needs.
6. All refugee children and adolescents to be protected against violence, abuse, and exploitation, including child labour, and have access to national systems and services delivered in a protective way, including health and psychosocial support.