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## REFUGEE CHILDREN IN EUROPE - DEMOGRAPHIC, LEGAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS

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The United Nations High Commission for Refugees states that in 2001 there were 5.6 million people of concern for the Commission in Europe and 385 000 refugees applying for asylum that year. About one third were children. This large group fled from persecution, war and poverty. The children often have memories of atrocities and may have signs of post-traumatic stress and depression. Malnutrition, untreated neurological conditions and chronic infections are found. Refugees often have to wait a long time for a residence permit, putting the family under severe stress. Some children do not attend school. Exposure to violence and poverty as well as the difficulties of adaptation amount to a public health problem. The children do not always receive adequate health care. They are entitled to the same level of health care as European children according to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, notably art 23 "...a mentally and physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life..."

art 24: "...enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health"; art 28 "...the right of the child to education...". art 29 "...promote... recovery...of a child victim of: any form of neglect...any form of cruel...treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts..." Paediatricians in Europe should accept the responsibility to establish a standard of health care in the widest sense for refugee children.

