

The Future of African Children: Challenges and Opportunities on the Responsibility to Protect of Global and Regional Actors within the Framework of International Human Rights Law

Afrikanlı Çocukların Geleceği: Uluslararası İnsan Hakları Hukuku Çerçevesinde Küresel ve Bölgesel Aktörlerin Koruma Sorumluluğu Üzerinden Zorluklar ve Fırsatlar

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Abstract: More than 400 million children reside on the African continent, and this number is growing annually. This study explores the primary risks faced by children in Africa stemming from socio-economic and environmental conditions. It aims to analyze the main problems faced by these children within the framework of international human rights law. Within the scope of the study, the effects of factors such as conflict and violence, migration, disasters due to climate change, poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and challenges in access to education and health services on the living conditions of African children are examined through 2024 data and projections for the coming years will be presented. The study aims to guide states, as well as global

and regional actors, by addressing the causes, and consequences, and providing suggestions for solutions to these problems.

Keywords: International Human Rights Law, International Relations, Africa, Children Rights, Responsibility to Protect.

Öz: Afrika kıtasında 400 milyondan fazla çocuk yaşamaktadır ve bu sayı her geçen yıl artmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Afrika'daki çocukların sosyo-ekonomik ve çevresel koşullar nedeniyle maruz kaldığı temel riskleri konu edinmekte ve bu çocukların karşı karşıya olduğu temel sorunları uluslararası insan hakları hukuku çerçevesinde analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında; çatışma ve şiddet, göç, iklim değişikliğine dayalı afetler, yoksulluk, beslenme yetersizlikleri, eğitim ve sağlık servisine erişimdeki zorluklar gibi faktörlerin Afrikalı çocukların yaşam koşulları üzerindeki etkileri 2024 yılı verileri ile gelecek yıllara yönelik öngörüler üzerinden incelenmektedir. Çalışma, bu sorunların nedenlerini, sonuçlarını ve çözüm önerilerini ele alarak, devletlerin yanı sıra küresel ve bölgesel aktörler için yol gösterici olmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası İnsan Hakları Hukuku, Uluslararası İlişkiler, Afrika, Çocuk Hakları, Koruma Sorumluluğu.

Introduction

According to the United Nations (UN), there are currently more than 400 million children living on the African continent, and this number continues to increase every year. The UN predicts the population of Africa will double to 2.4 billion by 2050 (SOS Children's Villages, n.d.). According to the joint publication of the African Union (AfB) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) titled "Children in Africa: Key statistics on child survival and population", Africa's child population is projected to reach 1 billion by 2055, making it the largest child population of any continent (UNICEF, 2019).

States have the responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity according to the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005 (UN, 2005). This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. Therefore, the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety and well-being of children rests with the states that are the principal actors of the global system. In addition to the responsibility of the states, global and regional actors such as the UN and the AfB also have a responsibility to protect children by protecting them from threats such as war, violence, conflict, hunger, and thirst all over the world. These actors contribute to the states in fulfilling their primary duties by providing all kinds of administrative, legal, economic, and technical support in protecting the rights of the child. Globally, the UN (UN, 1945) and regionally, the AfB (AfB, 1963) are competent actors in addressing issues such as maintaining peace and security across the continent -including African children- preventing peace threats, protecting and promoting

the rights of Africans, and solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems.

In addition to these aims of global and regional actors, there are international documents that directly aim to keep safe the rights and freedoms of children, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child- UNCRC (UN, 1989), and there are some other documents focusing on responsibility to protect children in times of conflict, such as the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (UN, 1949) and their additional protocols. These binding documents serve as a guide for states in protecting the rights of the child. Furthermore, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, established within the UNCRC, is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention and guides the states about the current and feasible situations of the countries by examining and evaluating the reports submitted to it by the state parties (UN, 1989: art. 43). The objective of this study is that, despite the goals and responsibilities of global and regional actors and the regulations in international documents, the numerical data revealing the current and future situation of African children continues to be alarming and the future of Africa depends on improving the current conditions of children.

The study was conducted within the framework of historical analysis and evaluation of secondary sources. In this research, a qualitative approach is adopted and a history-based analysis method is used. The study is based on a systematic examination of secondary sources (reports and publications of international organizations, academic literature, analytical reports, official documents, international human rights texts, and statistical data on children). During the research process, English, Turkish, and French sources were mainly used.

This study assumes that the future of Africa depends on improving the conditions of today's children. The main hypothesis put forward in this study is that the negative factors that determine the future of African children, such as conflict and violence, climate change, disasters, poverty, health and nutritional deficiencies, access to education, and migration, are not being managed well by states and global and regional actors across the continent, thus more needs to be done to provide a better future for children.

The study aims to raise awareness about the future of African children and to reveal the need for global and regional actors to assume greater responsibility. This study has historically been limited to considering the data from 2024 and projections for the coming years. Since the study was prepared based on data of 2024, current growths and long-term changes were excluded from the scope.

In addition to being time-bound, another limitation of the study is its regional focus. The study mainly focuses on the African continent and regional differences are not discussed in detail within the scope of the study. For this reason, the

findings regarding the factors affecting the living conditions of African children and the solution suggestions based on these findings have been evaluated in a general framework and no applicability analysis has been conducted for each country.

Finally, data sources were also used on a limited basis. The study aims to discuss the responsibility of global and regional actors and states, the principal actors of the global system, to keep African children safe based on the reports of international organizations such as the UN, UNICEF, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank, as well as international law documents, and field research conducted at the local level could not be used as it would exceed the scope of the study.

In this study, firstly, the challenges and opportunities in the African continent are mentioned, and then the responsibility of global actors such as the UN, the AfB, and the states, the principal actors of the global system, to keep African children safe is explained through international legal documents. Subsequently, within the scope of the most up-to-date data, the current and feasible situation of African children has been tried to be analysed under subheadings such as hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition, benefiting from education and health services, protecting from conflict and violence, immigration status, family ties, and benefiting from social protection, and other solutions that need to be proposed have been offered.

An Overview of the African Continent: Challenges and Opportunities

The UN Chronicle begins a publication by stating that the mere word “Africa” is enough to conjure up images of devastated people (UN Chronicle, 2008). The continent is plagued by many problems that undermine its ability to provide food and nutrition security for its people. Human Rights Watch (HRW) describes Africa as a continent struggling with hunger, thirst, access to basic food, conflict, economic crises, massacres, murders, sexual violence, kidnappings, and forced military recruitment, including children (HRW, 2023).

Many countries on the African continent are in the position of “Least Developed Countries” within the structure of the definition and criteria set by the UN in 1971. The existence of these criteria, low income, weakness in human resources, and lack of diversity in the economy, indicates that there are fundamental difficulties in the growth processes of countries due to structural reasons (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Özüye, n.d.).

States can fail by falling into a situation where they are “*completely incapable of sustaining themselves as a member of the international community*”, as defined by Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner in their study titled “Saving Failed States” (Helman and Ratner, 2010). Considering that failed states are defined as “the

country's inability to control its territory, its inability to guarantee the security of its citizens, its inability to maintain the rule of law and its inability to provide basic services such as education and health for its citizens, its social weakening and the loss of connection between political institutions", it can be stated that this situation is also common in the African continent (Turkish Undersecretariat of Public Order and Security, 2017, pp.105-106). In international relations studies, examples of failed states from the African continent such as Rwanda, Liberia, and Somalia are given (Heywood, 2016, p. 159-160).

Despite its rich underground resources, young population, and economic potential, Africa's continued economic dependence on foreign countries due to long-standing colonialism is one of the main factors hindering Africa's growth. It is a major problem that underdeveloped, weak, or unsuccessful states in Africa have not been able to complete their institutionalization processes and that Africans cannot produce permanent solutions to political, economic, and social problems without the support of international organizations and states outside the continent (Mızrak, 2022, p. 50).

China, America, European Union countries, and Russia show greater interest in the continent for their energy and raw material needs (Orakçı, 2011, p. 76). In addition, the power struggle of non-continent actors such as Russia and France in Africa continues to deepen the security problems based on political instability, bad governance, and ethnic polarization experienced in the continent (Kavak, 2024). With the help of private military companies such as the Wagner Group, Russia is trying to increase its influence in the continent by methods such as supporting fragile governments or authoritarian regimes in Africa, suppressing rebellions, engaging in military intervention, and fighting terrorism. This approach only escalates terrorism (Özer, 2023, p. 131).

Children are among the groups most affected by these problems. In this context, it is considered that global and regional actors should establish closer relations with the continent and African states to strengthen state mechanisms that will prevent crimes such as bribery, forgery, corruption, money evasion, human smuggling, and arms smuggling, common throughout the continent (Mızrak, 2022, p. 73).

Despite these negativities, the geo-political and geo-strategic influence capacity of Africa and African countries, which has come to the forefront with its economic, political, and commercial aspects on a global scale, especially in the last half-century, its natural underground resources, hosting a great diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, and language, its market volume, young population, social changes, and technological achievements contribute to Africa being a continent of hope (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, 2022, Presentation).

Responsibility to Protect Global and Regional Actors in International Law

In international law, including the UNCRC, every individual is considered a child up to the age of eighteen (UN, 1989, art. 1). The first and foremost responsibility to protect children falls on states, the head actors of the global system.

In addition to states, there are actors globally or regionally responsible for protecting African children. It can be stated that the primary responsibility to protect children from war, violence, conflict, hunger, and thirst in the African continent lies with the UN globally and the AfB regionally. According to the UN Charter, the principal intention of the UN is to keep up international peace and security, head off threats to peace, and puzzle out international problems of an economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian essence (UN, 1945, art. 1). The UN is the primary multilateral actor in peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding activities in Africa with the rise in the number of intrastate conflicts in Africa since 1990s (Wiharta, 2014, p. 151). The vision of the AfB is an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa (AfB, 1963, Introduction), and its powers and mandates include protecting and promoting the rights of Africans (AfB, n.d.).

In addition to general objectives, it is seen that many initiatives have been taken to keep safe the physical integrity, rights, and freedoms of children in international documents that focus directly on children. The UNCRC is based on four basic principles: non-discrimination (art. 2), the best interest of the child (art. 3), the right to life and growth (art. 6), and the right to participation (art. 12), is one of these (UN, 1989, art. 2, 3, 6, 12). The Convention has prepared to protect the rights and freedoms of children struggling to survive in geographies dominated by war, improving their current and feasible conditions, preventing child abuse, preventing the use of children as soldiers in conflicts, and preventing child labor (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights-OHCHR, n.d.). The Convention, adopted on 20 November 1989, has the distinction of being a human rights document ratified by the largest number of countries in the world, to which 196 countries, excluding the USA and including all African countries, are party to it.

There are also international documents responsible for protecting children in times of conflict. Per Additional Protocol No. 1 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, States Parties must take all feasible cautions to warrant that children do not take a direct part in hostilities and, in particular, avoid their recruitment into military forces. In other words, children are prohibited from volunteering, especially in occupied areas and in liberation movements (UN, 1977, art. 77).

It is essential to provide children with the assistance and care they need within the scope of Additional Protocol No. 2 to the Geneva Conventions. This assis-

tance and care includes religious and moral education, family reunification, and responsibility to protect children from recruitment by armed forces or armed groups, temporary removal from areas of hostilities to safer areas within the country, and cautions to warrant that they are accompanied by a person responsible for their safety and well-being (UN, 1977, art. 4).

Africa has made significant progress in terms of legal protection mechanisms for human rights, although they are not fully effective in practice (Terzi and Yamal, 2019, p. 77). There are various regional regulations and mechanisms to keep children's rights on the African continent. The first of these is the African Banjul Charter on Human and People's Rights, adopted in 1981. The Charter pays exceptional care to children's rights and warrants their protection, the right to education, and other children's rights (AfB, 1981).

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) is the most comprehensive document responsible for protecting the rights of children in Africa, adopted in 1990, and came into force in 1999. The ACRWC guarantees the rights of children to education, health, safety, and participation and prohibits the use of children in armed conflict, child labor, and all forms of exploitation of children (AfB, 1990). Within the scope of the Charter, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) was established to supervise the implementation of the ACRWC and to examine violations of children's rights. The Committee monitors the compliance of states with children's rights and informs the public by preparing reports (African 1990, art. 32). As of April 10, 2025, the total number of applications made to the ACERWC is 26, eleven of which are finalized, two are amicably settled, four are pending, four are declared admissible and five are declared inadmissible (ACERWC, 2025). These statistics reveal that ACERWC has not reached the expected level of efficiency (Terzi and Yamal, 2019, p. 63).

The Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa was adopted by the AfB in 2009. This convention aims to protect and provide assistance to children displaced during armed conflicts and prohibits the use of children in armed conflicts (AfB, 2009).

Regional regulations to keep children's rights on the African continent provide a comprehensive structure to warrant the welfare and responsibility to protect children. Along with these regulations, there are also various initiatives of the AfB and regional economic communities responsible for protecting the rights of children in Africa. For example, one of these programs is the "2063 Agenda for Education in Africa", announced in 2013 to strengthen children's right to education and cover 50 years (AfB, n.d).

Factors Affecting the Living Conditions of African Children

Many factors affect the current and potential situation of African children. These factors include birth and mortality rates, family ties and the difficulty of growing up without parents, migration, child poverty, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, access to health, and conflict and violence.

Birth and Mortality Rates

Birth and mortality rates are among the main factors affecting the current and potential situation of African children. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) states that premature birth has deleterious effects on young mothers and their children. Today, fertility has measured at 2.1 live births per woman in 45 percent of countries and regions. However, according to DESA, more than one in ten countries and territories, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, have a birth rate of four or more per woman. These countries include the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Niger and Somalia (DESA, 2024, p. 10).

In a joint report by the AfB and UNICEF, it was expressed that the current trend in Sub-Saharan Africa, which has been the region with the highest number of births since 2017, is expected to continue for the rest of the century. Additionally, based on the continuation of current coverage, it is predicted that more than 300 million of the 730 million births expected to occur in Africa by 2030 will not be performed by trained health personnel (UNICEF, 2019).

The report also provides important data regarding child mortality rates. According to the report, although the mortality rate among children under-five years of age in Africa decreased by 58% between 1990 and 2017, more than half of the 5.4 million under-five deaths in the world in 2017 occurred in Africa. Additionally, while death rates in Africa are decreasing in all age groups, child deaths continue to be generally concentrated in the youngest age groups, with 85% of all deaths in children under 15 occurring in children under-five years of age. Pneumonia, malaria, and diarrhea account for more than a third of all under-five deaths in Africa. According to current trends, around 31 million under-five deaths are expected to occur in Africa between 2018 and 2030 (UNICEF, 2024).

Art. 5 of the ACRWC states that every child has the right to life and that the African States shall warrant the survival, responsibility to protect, and growth of the child to the maximum extent feasible. However, current data necessitate that African states, head actors of the international community, make much more effort to warrant the continuation of the lives of African children and the keeping safe of their health.

Per the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is planned to save 8 million lives on the African continent if all countries at risk achieve their goals.

With the support of global actors, African states also have to contribute to employment in the field of health to control birth and death rates. The changing demographic structure and growing population in Africa must employ an additional 4.2 million health workers in addition to current growth to meet World Health Organization (WHO) minimum standards (UNICEF, 2024, p. 1).

The Phenomena of Conflict and Violence

Another factor affecting the current and potential situation of African children is the phenomenon of conflict and violence. Conflicts and violence in Africa, where many of the world's deadliest wars (The Nigerian civil war 1967–1970, state collapse in Uganda in the early 1980s, Sudan war in 1984, etc.) took place, unfortunately, continue across the continent (Stedman and Lyons, 2004, p. 141). Research shows that these violent conflicts in Africa have claimed millions of lives, displaced many more, and mortgaged the development of the continent (Chingono, 2016, p. 199).

Some causes of violent conflicts in Africa are ethnic marginalization, religious differences, access to resources, poor governance and leadership, self-determination, and territory. According to Singer, the drivers of conflict in Africa are “territory, ideology, dynastic legitimacy, religion, language, ethnicity, self-determination, resources, markets, dominance, equality, and revenge” (Cited in Potro, 2002, p. 6).

Some studies have put that AfB has failed to deal with increasing outbreaks of violence and conflict in Africa. The failure of the AfB has permitted an increase in foreign intervention in the internal affairs of African states such as the UN and together with foreign states have intervened in the violence in Libya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic and beyond (Mlambo and Dlamini, 2019, p. 1939).

International and regional actors are inadequate in ending conflicts due to the prevalence of foreign interventions. Studies show that the West has instrumentalized international law and the responsibility to protect to intervene in Africa (Kelleci and Bodur Ün, 2017, p. 103). International actors, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the UN Security Council with power of veto, among others, are not only controlled by powerful states but also operate in ways that marginalize and impoverish African states. For example, history shows that veto power is meant to protect the interests of the five powerful permanent states of the UN Security Council, often at the expense of weak African states (Chingono, 2016, p. 210).

With this negative picture, it should be noted that the role of the UN in peace and security in Africa has evolved significantly over a relatively short period such as the reframing of security as human security and the development of new

norms that had implications for peace and security in Africa, adapting an integrated approach that incorporates human rights and rule of law, development and justice issues and framing of peace operations, in particular their size and mandates (Wiharta, 2014, p. 171).

It is principal to share current statistical data as well as legal and practical facts. Armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa now account for over half of the world's armed conflicts (Stedman and Lyons, 2004, p. 141). According to the 2024 end-of-year data in the Global Humanitarian Outlook Report of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), due to conflicts, the Southern and Eastern Africa region is the region that hosts the most people in need (85 million), with the disaster crisis in Sudan accounting for 35% of the total in the region. This is followed by the Middle East and North Africa, where 59 million people need aid and protection (OCHA, 2024, p. 7).

These ongoing conflicts in 2024 include the civil war in Sudan, the M23 Rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Somaliland crisis between Ethiopia and Somalia. It should be noted that the conflicts also deeply affect African children.

Civil War in Sudan

The conflicts that began in April 2023 between the Sudanese army and the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces continued in 2024 and plunged the country into a deep humanitarian crisis, primarily involving violence, death, hunger, and disease (Kavak, 2024). In the first 20 months of the war, more than 9 million Sudanese were displaced within the country, while 3 million people had to flee to neighboring countries (Sullivan, 2024). Efforts to resolve the crisis, such as the Jeddah Meetings, the Intergovernmental Development Authority (IGAD), the Neighboring Countries Initiative, the solution proposals by the AfB and the UN's Extended Mechanism, have failed, and instability in Sudan has entered its 7th year (Demirtaş, 2024, p. 1).

According to OCHA's latest Global Humanitarian Outlook report, one in five children in the world (approximately 400 million) live in conflict zones, and Sudan, one of these regions, is experiencing the world's largest humanitarian crisis ever recorded, with 30.4 million people in need of assistance (OCHA, 2024, p. 158). The number of deaths in Sudan, where 25 million people need humanitarian aid due to the collapse of the education and health sectors, has not been determined. The main groups affected by this crisis are African children, young people, chronic patients, and pregnant women (Orakçı, 2024, p.1.).

M23 Rebellion in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The ongoing M23 rebellion in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2022 has led to the rebel group escalating conflict in the east of the country. In January

2025, the Congolese government declared war after the M23 rebel group captured the country's Goma city. These conflicts increased ethnic tensions in the region, strained relations with Rwanda, and the UN reported the crisis as "mass panic" (The Guardian, 2025).

According to UN data; 2.47 million more people were displaced between January and August 2024, mostly due to conflict in the east, and the total number of IDPs in the country rose to 6.3 million as of August 2024. This made the Democratic Republic of Congo the second country with the highest number of internally displaced people in Africa (OCHA, 2024, p. 188).

Somaliland crisis between Ethiopia and Somalia

Somaliland is a de facto sovereign state in the Horn of Africa. The signing of a memorandum of understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland at the beginning of 2024 for port use and access to the sea has caused a crisis between Somalia and Ethiopia. Somalia has described Ethiopia's status as the first state to recognize Somaliland's independence as interference in its internal affairs and an "illegal agreement." Regional organizations such as the Arab League and the AfB have only condemned the crisis (Kavak, 2024).

Disasters Due to Climate Change

One of the factors affecting the current and potential situations of African children is disasters and climate change. Climate change and natural disasters are also among the biggest risks to agricultural production in Africa. Researchers highlight that in the long and short terms, droughts and temperature are the main climatic factors affecting negatively agricultural production (Coulibaly and Managi, 2020, p. 347).

Research has shown that disaster frequency is increasing on the continent (Lukamba, 2010, p. 478). Given the intertwining of many problems in Africa, disaster management must be done by establishing links between resource management, conflicts, and other transmission channels. Chhibber and Laajaj (2008, p. 7-49) argue that African states along with their development partners need to develop a more robust adaptation and response capability to disasters as part of development planning.

Among the disasters experienced in 2024, there are floods in West and Central Africa, floods in Chad, Niger and Ghana, El Nino weather events and drought in South Africa. Disasters due to climate change also deeply affect African children.

Floods in West and Central Africa

According to OCHA data, approximately 6.9 million people, including children, were affected by heavy rains and severe floods in West and Central Africa

in 2024. Scientists have stated that floods in Africa in 2024 are getting worse due to climate change and that disasters that destroy Africans' homes and crops have never been more common on the continent (Le Monde Afrique, 2024).

Flood Disasters in Chad, Niger and Ghana

According to OCHA's CHAD Report data, floods that have intensified since July 2024 have caused the death of more than 300 people and the victimization of 1.5 million people in Chad. Homes, farmlands, and animals have suffered great damage throughout the country. In early September 2024, a school collapsed in the city of Ouaddai in Chad following heavy rainfall, killing 14 students and teachers. The UN warned about the effects of heavy rainfall and severe flooding in the region and called for "exigent action and adequate funding for the climate crisis".

Many people were affected by the floods in Niger, and significant damage occurred in terms of infrastructure and livelihoods (OCHA, 2024).

In Ghana, another country affected by floods, tens of thousands of people in the city of Accra, where approximately 3 million people live, were forced to migrate to other regions due to the frequency of torrential rains caused by climate change (Qiraat African, 2024).

El Nino Weather Events and Drought in Southern Africa

According to UN World Food Program (WFP) data, the most severe drought of the last 40 years occurred in the south of Africa due to El Nino (La Nina) weather events affecting the African continent, the drought had a devastating effect on more than 27 million people, and the worst hunger crisis of decades emerged in the region (Haber Kibris, 2024).

In the countries of the continent that meet their electricity production largely from hydroelectric power plants, the dam filling rate has decreased significantly, therefore the drought has brought about an energy crisis (Le Monde Afrique, 2024). Due to the drought and drought-related hunger, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have declared a national emergency. It has been determined that approximately 21 million children in Southern Africa are suffering from malnutrition due to the failure of crop planting due to this crisis (Euronews, 2024). In addition, WHO stated in its published report that malnutrition and difficult living conditions increase the risk of the spread of water-borne diseases and that it predicts that there may be an increase in the cases of cholera, malaria, polio, tuberculosis and measles (Haber Kibris, 2024).

Family Ties: Growing Up Without Parents

Another sad reality for African children is to cope with growing up without a parent. 15 million children in sub-Saharan Africa have lost one or both parents to

HIV/AIDS. A large number of AIDS orphans live with relatives or are homeless on the streets in South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe (SOS Children's Villages, n.d.).

Growing up without a parent also brings with it the risk of being involved in crime or violence. African children are reported to be exposed to the highest rates of physical punishment and psychological aggression by their caregivers, a factor that accompanies parentlessness. The high rates of such treatment underscore the exigent need for interventions to protect children's rights and warrant their safety and well-being. Legal reforms, public awareness campaigns, support for caregivers and the promotion of positive parenting practices are crucial (African Union Commission et al., 2014, p. 105).

African Migrant Children

Displacement, immigration, or refugee status are also among the fates of African children. Children are crossing national borders with their families, sometimes even without their accompaniments, in the hope of a better life in African countries (Yohani and others, 2023, p. 101900).

Widespread poverty, rapid urbanization, unemployment, and instability have recently become common features for migration and involuntary displacement of African children in many African countries (Kwankye and others, 2021, p. 1). The intra- and intercontinental displacement of African migrant children is not only related to fleeing political conflict and violence but also to economic (e.g., weak economic growth, poverty) and sociocultural (e.g., rapid urbanization) factors that reduce educational and employment prospects. These social determinants, such as poverty, are associated with increased susceptibility to mental health problems in children and youth in African countries (Yohani and others, 2023, p. 101901).

According to current data, 1/3 of African migrants and nearly half of refugees are children. Approximately 86 percent of refugees in Africa are refugees in other African countries. The origin 5.4 million refugees in African countries, and the proportion of children in this total is above the general average of 3 million African children who have been forced to leave their countries. Although total migration rates are low compared to other continents, the proportion of children among immigrants in Africa is higher than in all other regions (UNICEF, 2016, p. 5).

Problems faced by African migrant children include child labour and ill-treatment during the migration journey. The vast majority of migrants are labour migrants. Besides, it is reported that African migrant children are repeatedly exposed to ill-treatment during their migration journey including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, or exploitation. In this context, it is suggested that policies aiming at health assessments be created in order to

identify the individualized healthcare needs of African migrant children as soon as possible (Salami and others, 2021, p. 3526).

The Phenomenon of Child Poverty

UNICEF defines childhood food poverty as the inability of children to access and consume a nutritious and diverse diet in early childhood (UNICEF, 2024, p.1). The “2024 Africa Sustainable Development Report” addresses the issue of strengthening the 2030 Agenda and 2063 Agenda and effectively delivering sustainable, pliable, and innovative remedies to exterminate poverty in times of multiple crises, and assesses the African continent in 2024 in terms of SDGs. According to the report, extreme child poverty remains a critical problem, with 70% of the world’s extremely poor children living in extremely poor households in Africa. It is considered that there is an exigent need for targeted strategies to struggle with child poverty in Africa (African Union Commission et al., 2014, p. 37).

UNICEF’s report titled “Good News or Bad News for Africa: Recent Trends in Monetary Child Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa” states that children are significantly more likely to live in poverty than adults. According to the report, 40% of children in Africa live in extreme poverty, while for adults the figure is 29.1%, meaning a child is 25% more likely to live in extreme poverty than an adult. In terms of numbers, this means that there are 174.6 million adults living in extreme poverty in Africa, while 237 million children are living in extreme poverty households.” (Hague, van Ufford, & Muchabaiwa, 2023, p. 3).

A similar analysis for Africa, examining social spending by age, reveals that African countries allocate on average only 6.5 percent of their child-focused social spending to children between the ages of 0 and 5. However, considering that this age group constitutes approximately one-third of the child population and that G20 countries allocate 27 percent to the same age group, the low social expenditure rate draws care. African countries prefer to allocate most of their child-related social spending (55%) to an older age group (children between the ages of 12 and 17) (UNICEF, 2023, p. 30).

The inadequacy, fragmentation, and largely informality of social protection in Africa have also negative impacts on children. Continental coverage for child benefits is low at 12.6%. Social protection is vital to supporting individuals and communities facing economic hardship and ensuring their access to basic services, resources, and opportunities. Therefore, social protection for African children needs to be improved (African Union Commission et al., 2014, p. 39).

Addressing child poverty and inequalities and meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged groups requires a dual approach that includes both universal interventions by global actors and access for all children by African states. According to UNICEF, the priorities for combating child poverty in Africa are:

- *“Expand equitable and universal social services to warrant inclusive and culturally sensitive access, especially in underserved areas. In this context, investments should be made in workforce training and systems to provide high-quality, accessible education, health care, and child care services.*
- *Social protection systems need to be strengthened, with an emphasis on expanding universal child benefits to reduce poverty and improve food security and access to education. Programs must be adapted to address access barriers faced by marginalized children.*
- *Childhood investments should be prioritized, paying exceptional care to the early years through integrated services supporting healthcare, nutrition, and early education, financed by progressive tax reforms to create sustainable fiscal space” (UNICEF, 2023, p. 30).*

In order to prevent child poverty and ensure child welfare in Africa, the root causes of this phenomenon such as conflict, ethnic strife, and severe economic stress, social exclusion from rights over and access to productive assets should be examined and solutions should be developed by global and regional actors and states. African experts also emphasize the substance of investment in the fight against child poverty as follows: *“Investing in the development, and protection of Africa’s children is not a choice, it is a priority.”* In this regard, it requires an integrated and holistic approach to provide sustainable solutions to child poverty (Harper and Marcus, 1999, p. 11, 41).

Access to Health: Hunger, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition

One of the problem areas experienced by the African continent is hunger, food insecurity, and health problems due to malnutrition. National and regional level health statistics reveal the pessimistic picture and child health has been particularly hard hit in countries affected by conflict such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Harper and Marcus, 1999, p. 29).

One in three children in Africa lives in food poverty due to inequality, conflict, and climate crises. African children spend 160 days of the year sick due to malnutrition. Identified as another problem area that increases mortality rates, this new analysis found that children experiencing this level of food poverty are close to 50 percent likely to suffer from life-threatening malnutrition, increasing under-five deaths (UNICEF, 2024, p. 1).

The World Bank notes that one-third of one-year-old children in Africa are not vaccinated against measles and 25% of children do not have access to safe drinking water. These statistics are more than indicators of children’s overall well-being. It is recognized that a child’s chances of succeeding in life, reaching their human potential, and living a rewarding life are profoundly influenced

by early access to education, healthcare, safe water, and nutritious food (World Bank, 2015, Introduction). Besides, some findings suggest a need to investigate the health concerns of African children, particularly during the migration journey (Salami and others, 2021, p. 3526). Another problem related to hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition is stunted growth or child stunting. Africa remains the continent with the highest prevalence of stunting at an alarming 30%. It is considered that efforts to combat stunting need to be intensified to keep safe the health of future generations and to fully unlock Africa's socio-economic potential (African Union Commission et al., 2014, p. 62).

Another health-related problem area in Africa is the obstacles to accessing sufficient drinking/potable water. All over the world, especially in Africa, there are problems due to reasons such as global warming, industrialization, climate change, and improper use of groundwater resources. According to the UN 2024 World Water Development Report, water demand in Sub-Saharan Africa is increasing rapidly with population growth, rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles and consumption patterns, and economic development. Since surface water resources in Africa are unequally distributed, more than a third of the countries in Africa do not find water safe. Factors such as climate change, temperature increase, and temporal and spatial rainfall variability further worsen water insecurity, and water availability is negatively affected by soil moisture and flow. The UN has weak institutional arrangements and legal structures; inadequate financial arrangements; insufficient data and human capacity explain factors that hinder the prospects for prosperity and peace related to water; low level of public awareness and stakeholder participation; and inadequate infrastructure for water supply for irrigation, domestic and industrial needs (UN, 2024, p. 92).

It is suggested that more investments should be made in agriculture and animal husbandry to combat health problems related to hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition. However, disasters such as drought or locust invasion that threaten the food security of 13 million people in East Africa must also be dealt with (African Union Commission et al., 2014, p. 73).

Food security is defined as "a system cycle that includes the production, processing, preparation, storage and finally delivery of food to the consumer in a way that does not cause any biological, physical, chemical and mental diseases." In this context, the UN, the World Health Organization, and African states need to invest more in hygiene, sanitation, sterilization, and disinfection practices across the continent to warrant food safety and, prevent security from being endangered (Turkish Undersecretariat of Public Order and Security, 2017, p. 249).

It is estimated that there are approximately 1 billion hungry people in Africa. Onur and Semiz (2011) note that Western countries and organizations are largely responsible for the millions of African children dying of hunger each year and

that these global actors should not approach the hunger and food problems in Africa with showy and day-to-day projects, and should question the eco-political structure that enriches speculators with funds. Research reveals the fact that the hunger problem in Africa will be largely solved with the money spent on dog food in the USA in 1 year (Onur and Semiz, 2011, p. 64).

Access to Education

Art. 11 of the ACRWC emphasizes that every child has the right to education. However, access to education for African children has been a serious problem for many years. However, with the investments made by African states in education, for example, the percentage of children completing primary school in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased from 46% to 68% (nearly 50%) from 1970 to 2010. The percentage of children completing secondary school has increased from 22% to 40% (nearly doubling). Despite these gigantic gains, nearly one in three children still do not complete primary school (Evans and Mendez Acosta, 2021, p. 14). In connection with this, another factor that deepens the problem is that children who are deprived of the right to education fall into the network of terrorist organizations due to family pressure and poverty (Madanoğlu, 2023).

According to UNESCO, 98 million children in Africa remain out of school in 2024 (UNESCO, 2024, p. 8). Moreover, the estimated 90% learning poverty rate across the continent means that the vast majority of children who go to school are not benefiting from education. According to the declaration adopted by the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI Africa) at the 2024 East African Community Regional Education Conference, countries on the continent are behind the targets set in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025, SDG 4 on education, the 2030 Global Agenda and the AfB Agenda 2063 (RELI Africa, 2024, p. 3).

The World Bank has also found that the coverage of all educational opportunities is far below universal in most countries on the African continent and that opportunities are in many cases distributed with a high degree of inequality among children in different circumstances. It has also identified a wide gap between opportunities for participation and opportunities to complete primary school and start on time (World Bank, 2015, p. 70).

Due to these concerns, investments have been made in education in Africa for many years, and global and regional actors continue to support education and carry out awareness-raising activities that emphasize the importance of education. Because of investments in African children's access to education, the net enrolment rate in primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa increased to 79% in 2018, compared to 60% in 2000.

According to the African Child Policy Forum, progress in education comes from governments embracing basic education and creating policies that sup-

port learning in schools (Okoth, 2023). AfB has declared 2024 as the “Year of Education” with the theme *“Educate and Skill Africa for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa”* to emphasize the centrality of education to Africa’s social and economic transformation. It also launched the “End Learning Poverty for All in Africa” campaign, with the slogan “Can Read, Can Write, Can Count: Foundation4Life,” based on the fact that despite progress in access to education, 89% of children in Africa cannot read basic texts with understanding and have difficulty doing basic math by the age of 10. This initiative focuses on encouraging African governments and communities to prioritize Basic Literacy and Numeracy and reduce learning poverty (AfB, 2024).

On the African Child Day, celebrated since 1991, ACERWC has chosen education as the theme for 2024: *“Education for all children in Africa: the time is now”* (ACERWC, 2024). Various proposals are presented to African States within the scope of education for the African Children’s Day in 2024. These are; a. legislative structure to warrant free and compulsory primary education and warrant the realisation of secondary education, b. gather data on children out of school, single out the reasons for exclusion, and set out cautions to warrant all children are in school including marginalised children, c. build up indicators on quality education and bear quality assessment, d. Specify particular cautions for the provision of education for children in vulnerable situations such as conflicts and e. comply with inclusive education (ACERWC, 2024, p. 3). Furthermore, African states should also contribute to employment in the field of education with the support of global actors. Considering the changing demographic structure and growing population in Africa, an additional 1.3 million primary school teachers need to be added to meet the student-teacher ratio of the best sub-regional performers by 2030 (UNICEF, 2024, p. 4).

Conclusion

The African continent has the youngest and fastest-growing population in the world. Africa’s geopolitical and geostrategic influence capacity, which stands out with its economic, political, and commercial aspects, natural underground resources, hosting a great diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture and language, market volume, young population, social changes, and technological achievements contribute to Africa being a continent of hope. However, the fact that underdeveloped, weak, or failed African states have not completed their institutionalization processes and that Africans cannot produce permanent solutions to political, economic, and social problems without the support of international organizations and states outside the continent is a major problem area. The challenges faced by children—who are at the forefront of those affected—are deeply alarming.

Factors such as climate change, hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition and challenges in access to education and health services, responsibility to protect children from conflict and violence, immigration status, family ties, and access to social protection threaten the future of African children. Data for 2024 reveal that exigent and comprehensive steps need to be taken to improve the living conditions of children in Africa. In this context, it is assessed that global and regional actors need to establish closer relations with the continent to strengthen state mechanisms that will prevent crimes such as bribery, forgery, corruption, money laundering, human trafficking, and arms trafficking, which are pervasive throughout the continent.

The principal problems faced by children in Africa include malnutrition, high child mortality rates, inequalities in access to education, and humanitarian crises in conflict zones. According to 2024 data, 3 million African children have been forced to leave their countries due to conflict, instability, and economic reasons. Early marriage and premature birth continue in Africa, with detrimental impacts on young mothers and their children. Sub-Saharan Africa maintains its status as the region with the highest number of births today. Projections indicate that more than 300 million of the 730 million births anticipated in Africa by 2030 will not be attended by qualified healthcare professionals.

The mortality rate among children under the age of five in Africa is also alarming. According to current trends, 31 million under-five deaths are expected in Africa between 2018 and 2030 due to pneumonia, malaria, and diarrhea. According to 2024 data, 70% of the world's extremely poor children live in Africa. In addition, 1 in 3 children in Africa continue to live in food poverty due to inequality, conflict, and climate crises. Southern and Eastern Africa is home to the neediest people (85 million). Especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, a large portion of children struggle to survive without basic needs. This is a problem that not only Africa but also the global community must address as a priority.

In Africa, it is seen that many problems are intertwined and negatively affect the present and future of African children. For example, the continuation of conflict and violence brings hunger, problems in accessing education and health services. The AfB should bring African states together under one roof and should not allow foreign intervention in the internal affairs of African states. In cooperation with African states, all energy should be devoted to drying up the roots of conflicts such as ethnic marginalization, religious differences, access to resources, poor governance and leadership, self-determination, and territory.

Africa's future depends on improving the conditions of children today. Thus, international and regional partnerships must take stronger action to protect the rights of African children and provide them with opportunities for a better future. Organizations such as the UN, AfB, and UNICEF must develop more effec-

tive policies and programs to supply the education, health, and security needs of children. To achieve the SDGs, it is essential to implement policies that prioritize the education, health, and security needs of children. Africa's young population is the greatest force that will unlock the continent's potential. However, for this potential to be realized, the challenges faced by children today must be addressed, and efforts must be made to ensure them a better future. This is not solely Africa's responsibility, but a shared duty of the global community.

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