I had to think as a mature person
I could not be weak

children in war
2022
DCI’s mandate is to ensure ongoing, practical, systematic and concerted action directed towards effective implementation of the human rights codified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), by means of effective coordination between different levels and active membership within key networks and fora. DCI considers that integrated child protection systems, which include robust preventative measures, must be implemented.

We believe that children must be able to pursue a life in which they can exercise and enjoy their human rights with dignity, in a just and responsible society.

Defence for Children International (DCI) is a leading child rights-focused and membership-based grassroots movement, founded in 1979, the first International Year of the Child. We promote and protect the human rights of children at the local, national, regional and international level, and were one of the drafters of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. DCI has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNICEF, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe. DCI also has observer status with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights and the League of Arab States, among others. Moreover, DCI maintains a close relation with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and key agencies and experts on the human rights of children.
# Table of Contents

Foreword by Najat Maalla M’jid, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children .......................................................... 3

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 5

National Sections with Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) focus + their Activities ............................................................... 6

Child + Youth Consultations ............................................................................... 8

On the Ground
   Central African Republic (CAR) ..................................................................... 9
   Greece ........................................................................................................... 10
   Palestine ...................................................................................................... 10
   Yemen ......................................................................................................... 11

Voices of Children + Youth all names have been changed to protect identity
   Aspirations for the Future ............................................................................ 13
   Child Rights Violations During Armed Conflicts ......................................... 17
   Call for Action .............................................................................................. 20
   Ensuring Accountability for Children in Armed Conflict .............................. 23

Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 25

DCI Recommends ............................................................................................ 26

Annexes
   Participant Demographics .......................................................................... 27
   Methodology ................................................................................................. 28
I have been deprived of my safety and security
one of the soldiers threatened to arrest me – my dog was barking

We would like to thank warmly the DCI National Sections in Yemen, Central African Republic, Palestine and Greece for organising group discussions with children as well as interviews with individual children on the move that have crossed countries like Afghanistan, Mali, Libya, Iran and bravely talked about the violence exerted against them across migration routes. Our deep respect and gratitude to all the children who accepted to break the silence.
Children are not just the future. They are the present and they need to be duly involved in all matters affecting them. They must be seen as part of the solution and as agents of change!

Children in countries affected by conflicts are not the exception: they are experts on how to address the challenges faced by them and their communities.

Programs, policies, and services should be informed by their views, experiences, and recommendations. We need to further advocate for increased empowerment of children everywhere – especially those in vulnerable situations – recognising their positive impact on multiple issues, including those related to violence prevention and protection.

Refugee children in humanitarian settings have been one of the most affected vulnerable groups by the pandemic, and they need to be duly informed and listened to. As evidenced by these consultations taken forward by Defence for Children International, children in countries affected by conflicts have an understanding regarding how these have affected their lives, their protection, and their possibilities of influencing change. Regardless of the adverse and challenging situations they face, children want to be considered active members of their communities and hope to have a positive impact in the world, which they should be able to do as rights holders. But they are also asking for further protection for themselves and their communities, including services designed to respond to their needs. This resonates with what children everywhere are telling us.

On the margins of the Human Rights Council, I held an interactive dialogue with more than 450 children from all geographical regions around my Report. Children are critical stakeholders and therefore, our partners in achieving a world free of violence: we must be accountable to them. During this event, children submitted questions, one quarter of them related to the issue of meaningful participation and the importance of including them in decision-making processes and spaces. Children want to know how they can effectively use their voices to prevent violence, inequalities, and discrimination, to address social norms, influence their governments and policymakers. Children also put forward questions specifically asking about children in vulnerable situations – including those in conflict zones – and how can they be informed, listened, consulted, and involved in decision-making processes. Children are advocating for more inclusive, just, peaceful, and safe societies.

Defence for Children International, through this publication is informing and listening to children and their concerns regarding meaningful participation, being provided with safe pathways, and having their views are duly addressed. I encourage States, Civil Society Organizations, UN agencies, and all stakeholders to continue to advocate for increased child and youth participation in inter-governmental spaces, including the UN system, and for the ongoing engagement and mobilisation of children everywhere as key partners in putting an end to all forms of violence.

Najat Maalla M’jid
Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children
with the increase of conflicts nationally and across borders in many parts of the world, DCI reaffirms its commitment to advocate for the respect of the parameters settled by international law to protect children from the devastating impact of armed conflicts.
In addition, DCI is a founding member and convener of the Child Rights Connect Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The Working Group links directly with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as of the Group of Friends in Geneva. DCI is also an associated member of the Watchlist on Children Affected by Armed Conflict in order to better make the link with the Security Council Working Group and the annual report process (Resolution 1612 of 2005).

Twenty-five years after the presentation of the UN Study on children and armed conflict, 20 years after the entry into force of the Second Optional protocol of the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, it is still a main priority for DCI due to the massive and grave violations against children that are still taking place worldwide. The Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty estimated that every year at least 35,000 children are deprived of liberty in the context of armed conflicts, while the Annual Report 2021 of the Secretary-General, despite the limitations of data collection linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, evaluated 26,425 verified grave violations, including 8,521 cases of recruitment and use, 8,422 cases of killing and maiming, followed by 4,156 of denial of humanitarian access. DCI supports, as much as possible, the current SRSG, Ms Virginia Gamba, as well as her predecessors in the realisation of their challenging mandate. DCI has also contributed to the realisation of the Special report for the 25 years of the mandate, including with some of the child voices of this report.

These millions of children are deprived of their childhood and basic human rights. Despite the protection that should be afforded to them by international law, conflict places them in situations of extreme vulnerability and risks. All too often, they are drawn into hostilities, either directly as child soldiers or indirectly by being forcibly displaced, detained, killed, maimed, abducted, injured, or exploited. As a result of poverty, discrimination, or avenging past sufferings, children of any age and sex are (forcibly) recruited by governmental forces, paramilitaries, or rebels. Despite several decades of international attention on this issue and some progress, children continue to be subjected to the scourge of conflict in general. With the increase of conflicts nationally and across borders in many parts of the world, DCI reaffirms its commitment to advocate for the respect of the parameters settled by international law to protect children from the devastating impact of armed conflicts.

Defence for Children International and its national sections have been active in Central African Republic to support survivors of rapes, and to demobilise and reintegrate child soldiers involved in the conflict-affected regions of Bouca and Kaga-Bandoro. In Colombia the rates of recruitment of children are increasing despite the peace agreements made. In Yemen, it is a living hell for children with the war ongoing since 2014. In Palestine children are brutally detained, killed and maimed in the Palestine-Israeli conflict.

In addition, DCI is a founding member and convener of the Child Rights Connect Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The Working Group links directly with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as of the Group of Friends in Geneva. DCI is also an associated member of the Watchlist on Children Affected by Armed Conflict in order to better make the link with the Security Council Working Group and the annual report process (Resolution 1612 of 2005).

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1 Children Affected by Armed Conflict: defenceforchildren.org
3 NGO Panel: childrendeprivedofliberty.info
4 Study on the Evolution of the CAAC Mandate: childrenandarmedconflict.un.org
Rethinking peace through protection and reintegration of former child soldiers and monitoring of population movements.

With 899 grave violations in Central African Republic verified in the annual report of the Secretary-General, electoral violence, and high levels of child recruitment, the UN Secretary-General remained in his 2021 report “alarmed at the elevated numbers of grave violations, including the sharp increase in recruitment and use, sexual violence, abduction and attacks on schools, including by parties that have signed action plans with the United Nations.” Despite that, a considerable number of children were released (497 according to the UN Secretary-General’s report) and DCI-CAR focused, among others, on offering hope and a better future to children including vocational training as well as awareness raising on the rights of the child. Another new initiative of DCI-CAR, in partnership with the International Organization on Migration (IOM), implemented a mechanism for monitoring population movements, aimed at quickly reporting concrete data to identify locations, demographic characteristics, risk of violations, and identify the most urgent needs of the populations affected, in terms of access to services throughout the prefecture of Nana Grinzi.

In Colombia, despite the peace agreement with the FARC-EP, an armed conflict persists between the State and armed groups that include FARC dissidents. Weak implementation of the peace agreement has contributed to the continuation and aggravation of the maiming of children. DCI-Colombia regularly reports to the UN Human Rights Council, highlighting the incidence of sexual violence against children in armed conflict, including the abuse of girls associated with armed groups in Colombia. Historically, these crimes have mostly affected girls, who constitute 84% of all victims of sexual violence. Moreover, of 276 incidents of armed conflict in 2020, 222 involved crimes committed against children, including killings, illegal recruitment, kidnappings, attacks on schools and hospitals and forced displacements. More than 8 400 children have been affected by the armed conflict, and victims of illegal recruitment and use have increased by 113%.
Since 1991, DCI-Palestine has investigated, documented, and exposed grave human rights violations against children; provided legal services to children in urgent need; held Israeli and Palestinian authorities accountable to universal human rights principles; and advocated at the international and national levels to advance access to justice and protection for children. DCI-Palestine has recently published a detailed report about the Israeli atrocities against Palestinian children in 2021. It stated that the Israeli occupation had killed 77 Palestinian children in 2021, with one more child being killed after the report was published. DCI-Palestine also stated that the Israeli occupation authorities put between 500 and 700 Palestinian children before military courts annually. Since 2000, the Israeli occupation has killed around 2,200 Palestinian children. Between October 2015 and October 2021, the group reported that Israel kept 41 Palestinian children under administrative detention, including four still enduring illegal detention until today. DCI-Palestine created a Socio-Legal Defence Centre to ensure the rights of Palestinian children in the Israeli jurisdiction system and the Palestinian juvenile justice system are defended and protected. The centre provides legal aid and psychosocial support for children in conflict with the law, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, had a tremendous impact and demonstrated enormous potential in this area. This project is even more crucial realising the risks that these children are exposed to in terms of recruitment in armed conflict despite the 2018 road map to end and prevent child recruitment and use of children in Yemen.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres says on Yemen in his 2021 report, I am gravely concerned by the continuing rise in the number of grave violations including recruitment of children…

In Yemen, even though UN data collection was seriously disrupted by COVID-19 during 2020, the UN verified 4,418 grave violations against 1,287 children. From the experience of DCI-Yemen, which continued their activities during the pandemic, these figures are seriously underestimated. While peace negotiations are ongoing at the highest level, the situation of the rights of the child in Yemen has been seriously deteriorating with intensification of fighting all over the country and grave violations of human rights, including children’s rights. Within this context, DCI-Yemen continued activities, despite concrete obstacles and a shrinking space for civil society. DCI-Yemen continued with the Children’s Parliament which prepared new elections, promoting meaningful child participation (see below on Child Participation). In another initiative in partnership with UN Women, DCI-Yemen promoted awareness among school children to build a peace culture, support young leaders and ambassadors for peace and community coexistence in schools. Finally, a pilot project on socio-legal defence for children in conflict with the law, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, had a tremendous impact and demonstrated enormous potential in this area. This project is even more crucial realising the risks that these children are exposed to in terms of recruitment in armed conflict despite the 2018 road map to end and prevent child recruitment and use of children in Yemen.

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Study on the Evolution of the CAAC Mandate: childrenandarmedconflict.un.org

In total, DCI interviewed 29 children and young people affected by conflict and this report presents their views with personal testimonies.

The goal of the discussion groups was to reflect on the needs and rights of children in armed conflicts on the occasion of a study led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), together with UN entities, NGOs and Member States to analyse the evolution of the CAAC mandate and how it has been implemented since its establishment in 1996.

However, given the conditions and the timeline of the study, we agreed that this is not a child/youth consultation on the study, but rather a collection of their thoughts and quotes around the substance of the mandate on children and armed conflict and the 6 grave violations in particular.

This study marks the 25th anniversary of the CAAC mandate and looks at the results obtained by the mandate in the past 25 years, the challenges that have impacted its implementation as well as the challenges and opportunities encountered to improve the protection of children affected by conflict. As such, the views of children are an important component of the study to analyse the context of the CAAC mandate provide guidance for the future, from the point of view of the main beneficiaries, i.e. children in armed conflicts and young people who have spent their childhood in this context.

Some of the children voices were quoted in the report but we thought it would be important to have a more detailed transcription of their ideas and views. This is the reason of this special report, which is published a few months after the official study of the UN.7

7 Study on the Evolution of the CAAC Mandate: childrenandarmedconflict.un.org

DCI was invited by the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to conduct focus group discussions with children and young people.

During fall 2021, this activity aimed at providing a space for children and young people affected by conflict in countries where DCI operates including: Palestine, Central African Republic, Yemen and refugees from Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
Central African Republic (CAR)
The humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic has escalated to new levels of concern since 2015 due to the recent election-related conflict developments in late 2020. In 2022, it is expected that 3.1 million people – 63% of the population - will require humanitarian assistance in the country. The living conditions in the CAR have worsened during 2021 due to the increase of violence and deterioration of basic services. In 2022, the population of the CAR will be particularly in need of water, hygiene, and sanitation (WASH) services, including medical care, protection, and food security. The risk of diseases and malnutrition has risen as the access to water services have decreased. Gender-Based Violence (GBV), particularly sexual violence is increasing to alarming levels.8

Despite the fact that the majority of the cities are under the control of national army forces, armed groups are present in marginal areas and military operations continue, hence forcing displacement.9 The economy of the country is experiencing the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the degradation of the security situation. Civilian infrastructure in the country is being targeted and occupied such as hospitals and schools, and the conflict is compromising the access of civilians to basic services. The World Bank projects that 3.44 million people, equivalent to 70% of the population in the CAR, is expected to live in extreme poverty in 2022.10

The recent Report of the Secretary General on the Central African Republic presented at the United Nations Security Council in October 2021, informed that between 1 June to 1 October 2021 alone, the country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 282 grave human rights violations on 241 children, committed by armed groups, defence forces, and unidentified armed individuals.11 In 2020, UNICEF documented 582 cases of children recruited and used by armed forces and groups out of the 792 confirmed cases of human rights violations against children.12 In April 2021, UNICEF reported nearly 370,000 children internally displaced across the CAR, as a result of the ongoing violence and insecurity.

The humanitarian and human rights situation in CAR for 2022 is of high concern. Severe acute malnutrition of children under five years old is expected to increase by 10% to 69,000. Across the country, 1.4 million children need to access education and 944,000 need protection, particularly from the psychosocial effects of the conflict and from the risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence.13

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8 OCHA Central African Republic Situation Report: unocha.org
12 Central African Republic: Nearly 370,000 children now internally displaced amidst ongoing violence – highest number since 2014: unicef.org
Palestine

The Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including East Jerusalem and the West Bank are experiencing a chronic humanitarian situation. In 2020, the crisis aggravated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Israel’s plans to annex part of the West Bank. In response, the Palestinian Authority (PA) decided to halt almost all bilateral relations with Israel. The PA has reduced its capacity to pay salaries, provide services and maintain social safety nets due to the loss of the 80% of its income\(^\text{19}\). Figures estimates 2.5 million people, including 1.4 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance. Between 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of tensions in East Jerusalem and the increase of hostilities in the Gaza Strip have fast deteriorated the situation in the OPT. Palestinians are at risk of violence and lack access to basic services due to the financial crisis, political divisions, and protracted political conflict\(^\text{20}\).

As the tensions continue in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, 9 Palestinian children were killed and 556 were injured by tear gas, rubber-coated bullets, live ammunition, and concussion grenades between May and July 2021. In the Gaza Strip, 67 children have been killed and 685 were injured. In the same period, in East Jerusalem 170 Palestinian children were detained. Around 675 000 children need Mental Health and Psychosocial support in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Electricity blackouts for nearly twelve hours a day affects the provision of basic services. In the West Bank, Israel’s restrictive and discriminatory planning regime prevents civilians, including children to accessing services\(^\text{19}\).

The COVID-19 pandemic has fast exacerbated the situation in the OPT since 2020. As the blockade arrives to its fifteen years in Gaza, Palestine refugees struggles with high levels of unemployment, food insecurity and poverty. Palestinian refugees, particularly youth live in repeated conflict cycles with Israel, including prohibitions to study, travel, work, outside Gaza\(^\text{21}\).

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\(^{14}\) UNFPA, Greece Humanitarian Emergency: unfpa.org
\(^{15}\) UNICEF Country Office Annual Report Greece: unicef.org
\(^{16}\) UNHCR, 2020; Greece UNHCR response to the COVID-19 and other needs: unhcr.org
\(^{17}\) UNICEF, 2021: Children in Greece: unicef.org
\(^{18}\) Save the Children, 2021: Future of over 20,000 refugee children up in the air because of government neglect: savethechildren.net
\(^{19}\) OCHA, 2020: Humanitarian Response Plan OPT: ochaopt.org
\(^{21}\) UNRWA, 2021: OPT Emergency Appeal 2021: unrwa.org
Yemen
Since the beginning of the internal conflict, now entering into its eighth year, the people in Yemen continue to experience the impacts of the ongoing crisis. Across the country, escalations on military hostilities and tensions between armed groups are causing the death of civilians, including children. Today, Yemen remains one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world22. Nearly 20 million people – 70% of the population, including 11.3 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance due to the country’s economic collapse, the deterioration of the national systems, infrastructure, services and the protracted armed conflict. Since the beginning of the conflict, nearly 4 million people has been internally displaced, from which 2 million are children. The country is experiencing a divided governance structure and increasing tensions between parties, which obstacles humanitarian workers to deliver services to the population23.

Children’s health and nutrition has been severely impacted by the conflict. Around 2.3 million children are acutely malnourished and almost 400,000 children under 5 years old are severely malnourished. In the country, 15.4 million people requires access to water, hygiene, and sanitation (WASH) services, and 37% of children under 1 year old are missing routine vaccinations. Across the country, children suffer human rights violations, with 8,526 grave violations against children documented between 2019 and 2020. School drop-out due to the conflict reached 2 million children in 2021, and school infrastructure has been damaged or occupied. Children in Yemen are at risk of violence and abuse, child marriage, child labour, forced recruitment, gender-based violence, exploitation, and psychosocial distress24.

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2015, over 10,000 children have been killed. Yemen’s humanitarian crisis is considered as one of the worst in the planet. 4 out of 5 children in the country need humanitarian assistance. While one child dies every 10 minutes from preventable causes. In 2020-21, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, whilst the authorities refuse to monitor and share data on the number of cases and people deceased due to the pandemic.

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24 UNICEF, 2021. Remarks on the situation in Yemen by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore at the 8840th meeting of the UN Security Council: unicef.org
we are human rights defenders – ready to unveil the truth about atrocities
Palestine
The children’s answers varied for this question. Adam expressed his interest to be an active social member in his community, no matter what this exact role would be. He said that being a part of community under occupation obligates the new generations to take roles that would support people in need. Other answers included, veterinary medicine, trade, medicine physio and occupational therapy.

Rawan from Nablus said that she wants to study anatomy. She said she wants to be able to investigate the human body and reveal the impact of armed conflict, by autopsying bodies of the children killed during hostilities.

Central African Republic (CAR)

After finishing my studies, I plan to work in the social sector in order to eradicate child abuse in my country. Apart from my studies, I also learned to sew which would allow me to earn some money.25

“My dream is to become a doctor to help people, for me health is paramount, so I have to fight to enter Science School.”

“We have electricity problem in this country, so I want to become an electrician.”

25 Training and skills development of children formerly recruited by the parties in the conflict has been one of the very successful activities of DCI in CAR. Indeed such training activities have been able to break the vicious circle of recruitment of children, transformed into « cheap labour » from the parties in the armed conflict.

Yemen
Children believe that the situation in the country because of the conflict directly affected their lives and dreams, some of whom wanted to be programmers and other wanted to finish their studies and specialise in the medical field to provide service to their community. However, the war and conflicts in the country has been a direct obstacle to their education and to their dreams.

Children seem to have lowered their ambition in general, but they remain optimistic:

One day, our dreams will come back again.
What do you wish to become in your life and why?

Young Refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland
Karim, 19 years old

When I was a child, I was living in Afghanistan. I wanted to become a policeman. I could see that the Taliban were doing a lot of wrong things and nobody could contest … I thought that if I could be a policeman, I would be able to bring justice and the rule of law. Of course, this was what I thought at the time, as a child; I realised later that given the situation of the Taliban regime imposing their own rules, this wouldn’t change anything…

Young Refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece

The children that we spoke to and participated, all said they wanted to make a positive impact in the world. The children wanted to become journalists, doctors or pharmacists. Others said they didn’t know exactly what they wanted to become yet, but they knew they wanted to help people, be of service, work with children or asylum-seekers, or raise awareness about the situation in their home countries. They hoped to be able to contribute to making the world a better place. The children that had left Afghanistan hoped that one day they would be able to go back and participate in the reconstruction of their country, which would be built on principles of equality and peace.

Young refugee from Sierra Leone in France
Leila, 24 years old

When I was a child growing up in Sierra Leone, I wanted to become a human rights lawyer to fight for the rights of every child and young women in Sierra Leone, because it was as if they had no rights. Children and young women were faced with all forms of violence that affect their wellbeing and we hardly find people to assist them properly in the judiciary, so my dream was to become an influential lawyer to fight against the several injustices our generation faces.
Palestine
Most of the children mentioned that the occupation and the political context are the main obstacles for them to reach their goals. Girls expressed the fear they will have to choose some specialisations where jobs are available in their governorates, just for the purpose of avoiding exposure to military check points during their daily commutes.
Adam (16 years old) mentioned that for any kind of work, children would be exposed to threat in the OPT, as children and young people will always be in touch with the military inhuman and illegal practices.
Murad (16 years old) said that before he becomes concerned about his future, he wishes his current life was safer and added,

“In my village, the occupation forces prevent the construction of any park or garden that is child-friendly. As a kid, I pass military check points every day to reach my school, and most of the time, the Israeli forces humiliate me and my friends using harsh investigation practices, they keep asking us the same questions every day. They search our school bags under the pretext of inspection.”

Central African Republic (CAR)
“There are plenty of obstacles, for me it’s a question of organisation and a lot of courage to be able to achieve my goals. At the level of the education system, due to the armed conflict there is a problem of qualified educational staff to deliver good curricula; teachers are often corrupt selling grades and advancing those who do not perform well in school and fail the best students.”
“The security aspect is very important, in recent years each time when there is the military-political unrest the schools are closed for several weeks and when the lessons resume the teachers are in a hurry to finish and at the end of the year and the school programmes are partially completed.”

For the children of Bangui, it is better but for those of the ones leaving in remote areas because of the war the teachers do not even go there, the lessons are given by the volunteers it is very difficult there. My parents are 530 km from Bangui and sent me here to my uncle to study and it is really difficult for me.

“There is no peace, whatever we want to become will be difficult. Some parents are killed these days so how are we going to have the money to pay the tuition fees?”

Yemen
The participants all agreed that the war is the biggest obstacle that stands in front of them and threatens their daily lives and safety. On the other hand, the children noted how the deterioration of customs, traditions and economic state has led to an increase in the phenomenon of child early forced marriage, which made their dreams and ambitions vanish. They have to live like adults.

What are the obstacles you will have to overcome for your aspirations to become reality?
Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland

Karim, 19 years old

“One of the most frustrating issues related to the armed conflict and the ruling of the Taliban in my region in Afghanistan, was the fact that I couldn’t go to school. Indeed, I always wished to study, learn and develop my knowledge but the Taliban didn’t let us go to school. They were threatening us, in particular girls, but also boys. Going to school was forbidden. This made me very unhappy because I wanted to go to school, I loved and still love to learn... my older brother understood how sad I was about it and he was teaching me at home how to write and read, as well as what he had learned himself at school...”

Even going out of the house to play was impossible and very dangerous. Once I was arrested by the Taliban and this caused a lot of suffering. My family was obliged to leave Afghanistan because otherwise we would never survive.

Young refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh in Greece

The obstacles that they faced in their country of origin were diverse.

For a young girl from Afghanistan, many of the obstacles were linked to gender (restrictions for the girls), but also to poverty, war, the absence of protection or a future in the country.

For the boys from Pakistan and Bangladesh, obstacles were linked to extreme poverty, lack of education and work opportunities.

However, the obstacles the children are facing while living in Greece are similar for all of them. They mentioned the lack of support from the State and the lack of integration schemes. None of them have finished high school at 18, and yet, they have to leave the shelter at 18, and if they are recognised refugees, they also lose the financial help from the State. This forces them to find a job and makes it very hard to continue with their education – some continue high school at night, but it puts a lot of pressure on their mental health. Next to this, they also pointed the lack of integration plans – the lack of Greek classes, long waiting lists to go to school, lack of activities in shelters, and the isolation of life in camps. Lastly, some mentioned the pressure they felt from their family to start working and contribute – even before turning 18.

Young refugee from Sierra Leone in France

Leila, 24 years old

“My aspirations were blown away by a heavy storm of culture, it is only a dream that I see while sleeping. I wanted to make a difference, but cultural harmful practices did not permit me to do so. I was intelligent even to a point that I became a head girl in my school. When I was about to enter university, everything changed because my parents failed to choose wisely, they chose tradition over me. They wanted me to undergo female mutilation by all means but I refused and because of my rebellious act I was exposed to all sorts of violence which affected me badly. I was raped countless times and became pregnant without knowing who was responsible for the pregnancy just because my parents threw me out of their house. After going through so much pain, stigma, neglect from people who should protect me I decided to give in to their demands (accept to go into the process of FGM) which was the greatest mistake I ever made in my life. Now I can only see with one eye because my other eye was destroyed by several beatings I received while resisting FGM in the bush. I had to run away because my life was in danger. In a desperate attempt to save my life I went to Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Libya where I witnessed violations of all forms (see below in question 3) and finally I reached Europe after a perilous journey including crossing the Mediterranean Sea on a small boat.”
What violations have you witnessed in your community?

**Palestine**

Tala (14 years old) told us her heart-breaking story. When she was a baby, her father spent many years of his life in Israeli military detention and Tala’s mother was arrested during a night raid to their house. This forced little Tala to stay home alone after midnight,

“I had to think as a mature person during that time, I could not be weak as I didn’t want to collapse. I had to stay strong at my own house, my relatives came to stay with me.”

About her feelings, Tala said that she was very sad, but she could not express that feeling, “The occupation is violating my right to feel safe with my family that should protect me, I have been deprived of my safety and security and one of the soldiers threatened to arrest me, because my dog was barking.”

Ahmad and Murad (both 16 years old) talked about their daily journey to school located outside their village. They mentioned that they have to deal with the check point every morning and evening.

“The Israeli soldiers do not respect that we are still children, we are under threat every day, especially during clashes at the check point,” Murad said, while Ahmad added that they fear to be shot or arrested during such events.

“Our right to life is always under threat.” Ahmad said.

**Central African Republic (CAR)**

We witness a lot of atrocities, children saw their parents being killed, our property was looted and today we cannot recover.

We had to leave our neighbourhood where we grew up. Every day, we witness atrocities, people cut their throats, burned.

“We lived in Bangui, the Muslims who couldn’t get out of that neighbourhood used a school there to bury the bodies, they kidnapped my father several times, that’s why we had to leave. Children are raped, several schools and health centres in the provinces serve as bases for armed groups.”

**Yemen**

The answers by children to this question were summarised as suffering from the six grave violations and even the most heinous crimes as a result of the killings and mutilations practiced against children in various Yemeni provinces. The repeated airstrikes and bombing attacks on schools and hospitals and their destruction by the parties to conflict and the prevention of humanitarian access because of the blockade applied to all land, sea and airports. In addition to abducting and recruiting children are used as human shields to be thrown without regard to their right to protection, survival and development.

Reem (15 years old) talked about the military attacks she witnesses every day while the Israeli forces target the boys near the secondary school.

“We live in horror, smell tear gas and feel the danger every second…” Reem said.

**Palestine**

Tala (14 years old) told us her heart-breaking story. When she was a baby, her father spent many years of his life in Israeli military detention and Tala’s mother was arrested during a night raid to their house. This forced little Tala to stay home alone after midnight,

“I had to think as a mature person during that time, I could not be weak as I didn’t want to collapse. I had to stay strong at my own house, my relatives came to stay with me.”

About her feelings, Tala said that she was very sad, but she could not express that feeling, “The occupation is violating my right to feel safe with my family that should protect me, I have been deprived of my safety and security and one of the soldiers threatened to arrest me, because my dog was barking.”

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“Our right to life is always under threat.” Ahmad said.
What violations have you witnessed in your community?

Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland
Karim, 19 years old
“My community (Hazara) was particularly targeted by the Taliban. Children were insulted and hit in the streets, and even sometimes arrested. I know of children that have been arrested and tortured by the Taliban without any reason... others have disappeared, and their families never found their trace again. I believe that children should be protected from any violence in armed conflicts and should be also given the right and safety to attend school and pursue their dreams.”

Young refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece
Killing of children: While none of the children have personally witnessed the killing of a child, the young people from Afghanistan had many stories about children being killed in strikes, by the Taliban or the regular army.
Recruitment of children by armed groups: Once again, the Afghan youth spoke about adolescents being recruited by the Taliban. They highlighted that in Afghanistan, you stop being a child at 12 or 13 years old.
Attacks on schools and hospitals: It is no secret that there have been many attacks on schools in Afghanistan – all were aware of the attacks on girls’ schools.
Rape and sexual violence: All the children knew someone personally that had been the victim of sexual violence – but not only in their country of origin. One of the children said he had been the victim of sexual violence in a refugee shelter in Greece.
Denial of humanitarian assistance to children: For children coming from Afghanistan, they all agreed that it was happening right now in their country and had been happening in the region for years. They said it was also happening in Greece however, in camps, where children were denied their basic rights, especially their right to healthcare.

Young refugee from Sierra Leone in France
Leila, 24 years old
Rape in Tripoli, Zawiya (Libya): “This a story I tell with lots of tears in my eyes. Because I was beautiful and not mutilated most men wanted to have sex with me. I was raped countless times in Libya, I saw young girls raped to death, young boys were forced to have sex with their mothers and sisters. Fathers were forced to have sex with their daughters and even sons. Girls below ten years were brutally raped to death.”

Prostitution in Zawiya: “Girls and young women were seriously engaged in prostitution forcefully by women and if they refused, they beat them leaving scars all over their body and let them starve. So many of them became pregnant without knowing who was responsible. Some who tried to abort their pregnancy died in the process.”
Kidnapping: “This was the order of the day in Libya. ‘Asmar Boys’ will kidnap people including children and demand for ransom and if their family fail to comply with them, they will use different method to kill their captives sometimes they use gun, sometimes they will put a big stick in their anus and live them to die slowly, sometimes they will rape women and young girls to death and sometimes they locked them in an undisclosed prison where it is impossible to survive.”
Children in war (January 2017): “There was a war in Tripoli where millions of people lost their lives children were ask to kill their parents and parents were asked to kill their children. People were amputated right in-front of me. People thought they could hide in mosques, restaurants and schools to save their lives, but perpetrators threw bombs there. It was so fierce that I had to use a dead body to cover myself. Many children died.”
What could you do to protect yourself or your siblings and friends from these violations?

**Palestine**
This question required a lot of elaboration by the moderator, for the children to be able to understand and answer it. The children agreed that they cannot protect themselves when they are under the threat. Yet, they agreed that as human rights defenders they can only work on advocating for their rights and raise their voice to expose the violations they face on a daily basis.

Reem (15 years old) said that they can monitor the violations and report them to the official bodies who should react to protect them as children, yet the children recommended more capacity building at this level.

**Central African Republic (CAR)**
“Honestly, it is a bit difficult to reply. Some friends do not respect what parents say, between friends we try to share instructions given and avoid certain places such as places occupied by armed groups or bandits.”

**Yemen**
For this question, the children were confused. As a result of their helplessness, they said that they heard the airstrikes and bombing of cannons, some of whom lost a member of their family without being able to do anything to protect them/themselves, as if they were saying we are children and we need protection and safety. They lost the feeling of safety since the beginning of the war.

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**Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland**
Karim, 19 years old
“There was nothing I could do, the same as my siblings and my parents. We were all afraid of the persecution by the Taliban. We had no other choice but flee….”

**Young refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece**

> **A state that is not corrupted, that cares about its citizens**

> **No war.**

> **Children’s rights that are accepted and respected by all parties.**

> **An authority to report abuses.**

> **Education and investment in education.**

> **Intervention from the international community.**

> **Without effective support from the state, the international community and organisations, there are not many things I could do.**

> **Hold people accountable for their crimes.**
What could or should your parents/guardians, and community do to protect you from these violations?

Palestine
This question was also confusing for the children.
Kholoud (15 years old) said,

"I would ask the community to protect me, but my whole community is under the same threat. We are not part of conflict we are under continues attack."

Tala (14 years old) said, "The only role the community can take is to unify and exert efforts to raise up the voice and hold perpetrators accountable for all those violations."

Central African Republic (CAR)
“If each parent takes responsibility for educating their children, it would prevent children from rallying into armed groups. We need to create the right conditions for the development of children. Some parents use the children to sell in order to bring money home, these parents do not want their children to go to school because they say they bring no money from school."

Yemen
The views of children differed from those who feel that a safe and healthy environment at home is a practice that could be done by the parents to protect children from violence, employment and drop-outs. The society plays an important role in protecting against child rights violations by raising awareness of children’s rights and principles of protecting them from any violation they might be subjected to.

Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland
Karim, 19 years old

"Given the absolute rule and the terror imposed by the Taliban, nobody could oppose them nor do anything to protect children. He/she would be eliminated immediately by the Taliban in full impunity."

Young refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece
Children said parents and guardians were powerless, as the violations come from armed groups and authorities.
What should your state or local authority do to protect you?

**Palestine**

Ahmad and Murad (16 years old) said that they would ask the local authority to offer them more means of transportation, as there is only one car that pick all of the pupils to their school that is located outside their village. “It is an old car and does not fit for all of us.” said Murad.

Rawan (14 years old) and Reem (15 years old) talked about the authorities’ role to activate the Safe School Declaration and urge the international community to support obligating the Israeli occupation to sign this declaration and to be held accountable for all the violations of their right of education in particular.

**Central African Republic (CAR)**

“The state has a duty to protect us against all these violations, but unfortunately in our country the state only protects the children of the rich. The CAR government must raise awareness through the heads of districts, on radio and television to disseminate information related to the security of the country and safety of children. Ensure the proper functioning of administrations especially education with qualified teachers. Too many young people become soldiers for the moment, but these people are not of good reputation, they are the ones responsible for several robberies recently in Bangui.”

**Yemen**

Working to reach an agreement to end the war and secure a government of national unity that takes into account the rights of children in various sectors, and listen to them. The children focused on the importance of activating and implementing all laws on the protection of children from recruitment, violence and exploitation in all its forms.

Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland

Karim, 19 years old

“In my region of Afghanistan, the Taliban had the absolute rule, no other state or local authority was present. So, children and all civilian population in general were suffering directly from their aggressions and nobody was in a position to help. We thought that even nobody knew about it, that was also very frustrating.”

Young refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece

The children from Afghanistan replied

“What State? There is no state. We are not protected.”

meaning that a prerequisite would be democracy and rule of law as a first step.

Children from Bangladesh and Pakistan

“There is violence in the country, it is generally accepted. The state doesn’t intervene much. Corruption is such a problem... More money in education, more opportunities for young people.”

In Greece

“Not putting children in camps. Safe zones that are not safe.”

**There should be an authority, independent, that controls the shelter because many of them are bad.**

“80% of the people in shelters don’t care about children/UAMs.”

Children are currently being robbed of their childhood, but the state has the responsibility to ensure unaccompanied children have a childhood and enjoy it same as their national peers. By investing in shelters, education, activities, having more staff etc.
What child rights violations do you believe are not being addressed or addressed adequately by the responsible humanitarian actor or relevant authority?

Palestine
The children agreed that the humanitarian actors mainly the international bodies are not available in the field to witness the violations in their daily life. Adam (16 years old) said that they are too may statements but too little interaction with children. Rawan (14 years old) also mentioned that as part of the child protection teams’, they have been given chances to participate in different events and meetings with such international human right bodies, but never saw clear follow up from experts to address the children needs. The children recommended these agencies to have field offices in the marginalised areas, in order to be close enough and see the conditions on the ground.

Central African Republic (CAR)
Humanitarian actors are supporting the country, but much remains to be done such as making school free, some children do not eat well. Health issue is a priority, we must support the health system and rebuild destroyed homes.

Yemen
The children focused on the existence of a number of violations directed against them with excessive atrocities and this is done in front of the eyes of the entire world, including the United Nations and its agencies. Children continue to suffer from a lack of intervention in Yemen.

Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland
Karim, 19 years old
“In fact, in my region, there was no UN presence not even other international/NGOs. So, all the arbitrary violations imposed by the Taliban were never addressed or reported. I believe that if the UN agencies and international community were present, they could at least report on the violations and illegal activities perpetrated by the Taliban in complete impunity.”

Young Refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece
Their reply was: “Which are being addressed well?”
“In Afghanistan, none are addressed as there is no state nor protection.”

In Greece, the children told us stories of children being abused by the police or in the shelter, or being beaten up in front of the police but they don’t intervene because these are not Greek children.

There is a lack in the right to housing as many children still live on the street.

Right to integrity: sexual violence, selling sex for money, being coerced into selling drugs for local gangs in Athens is still a harsh reality.
What do you think should be done to make sure that the perpetrators of violations are held accountable?

Palestine
Adam (16 years old) said that the most important step to ensure holding perpetrators to account is to take actions by the international agencies.
“Why do not feel that such bodies are neutral and fair during when they are dealing with the Palestinian case,” said Adam. “Children are being killed, injured and arrested without any actions,” he added.
Reem (15 years old) said that, “We do not need financial assistance, what we do really need is to see people in the field to protect us during attacks at our schools.”
Rawan (14 years old) added that international agencies should have mobile teams in the field. “We do not see any change in our life.”

Central African Republic (CAR)
It is the responsibility of the government to bring those responsible for the crimes to justice and also to control our borders. Some perpetrators are from the military. I wonder how they’ll be judged?

Yemen
The recommendations of the children here were to put pressure on the parties to conflict in order to end the war and work to neutralise perpetrators of grave violations, and to set up national committees to monitor violations against children and to work with relevant authorities to ensure accountability.

Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland
Karim, 19 years old
“Linked to the previous answer (absence of international community), I believe that in such circumstances were grave violations of human rights and children’s rights take place, international organisations (both UN and NGOs) should be present. As a minimum, they would be able to report on the violations and ensure that one day the perpetrators are punished.”

Refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece
When it comes to the Taliban, children believed that the only way was for the international community to intervene. There needs to be a form of international justice.
“The intervention by USA in the past was the reason why there is such a mess in my country and why these extremists’ groups were created. However, now and since all these years everyone had their own agenda and nobody really cared for the people of Afghanistan, seems to be no other option than the community to be present at least and intervene if needed. They created a dependence from external intervention, and they divided the country.”
“Many people have done war crimes so they must be held accountable for,” said another boy from Afghanistan.

When it comes to Greece
Abolish camps; more shelters that are financed better and a watchdog for shelters; education opportunities; children need to be protected; police need to care.
What role do you want to play in ensuring that perpetrators of grave violations are held accountable?

Palestine
“‘We are human rights defenders ready to unveil the truth about atrocities.’”
Our only role is to spread awareness among our community and friends. Adam (16 years old) said.

Lastly, the children recommend to the international humanitarian bodies to play a major role in protecting children and to approach children, to involve them in their reporting preparations and planning of actions.

Central African Republic (CAR)
I would denounce those responsible, if I knew them. The government has put a toll-free number online if a weird person is hiding in the neighbourhood, the number should be called automatically.

Yemen
The role of advocacy is key and ongoing follow-up to monitor violations and raise to relevant authorities, as well as to disseminate findings at the local and international levels.

Young refugee from Afghanistan in Switzerland
Karim, 19 years old
“As I experienced and survived all these grave violations in my childhood, and was lucky enough to be now in safe place, pursue my education and learn about my rights, I believe that I have the responsibility to bear witness, to sensitise other children and be in solidarity with children all over the world who are suffering same violations around the world. With the help of DCI, I often exchange and try to support other children in similar situations, for instance with unaccompanied refugee children in Greece. This is what I started doing and hope to continue. In 2019, for the 30th anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, – still a child of 17 years old and in my way to find a safe place in Switzerland to live and study – I participated in the DCI Child Rights Award: Listen to my story, Know my Rights. Through a poem I expressed all my feelings and need for love.”

Karim won a special prize of the DCI Special Child Rights Award and his poem was exhibited at the Palais des Nations during the UNCRC celebrations, although he was not able to be present, as he was asylum seeker in Switzerland at the time.

Young refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece
The majority could not think of a specific role.

One girl from Afghanistan said, “The only way I think I can play in all this, is to speak about what happened and what I have seen, so as people to know what is going on in my country and to raise awareness.”

While a boy said, “Yes it is important to speak about it so as people to know, but to be honest everyone knows about it so I would like to ask you: what the international community will do so as to ensure that perpetrators of grave violations will be held accountable?”
Even if the consultations were held in completely different countries and contexts, children and young people had the same reaction to some difficult questions, especially the one related to their protection, their friends and family and the uncertain prospects about their future. This shows the trauma they suffered but also a sense of despair. Those living outside of the capital cities felt forgotten by the international community, they ask for an international presence or regular visits of the United Nations and NGOs to monitor the violations and protect them, or at least hold the perpetrators accountable. They all appreciated the consultations and the fact their voices matter as survivors and resilient human beings.

Substantially reshaping how the United Nations engages children and young people is an imperative as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict embarks for another mandate. Despite tremendous challenges, the United Nations should keep working to transform its work and modes of operation in order to build an organisation that is relevant to and in touch with those it serves.

**Against this backdrop, Defence for Children International adopts two main approaches in its work:**

- Advocate for the empowerment and meaningful participation of children and young people, especially the ones in vulnerable contexts;
- Recognise the positive impact made by children and young people to advance peace building and upholding human rights in their communities.

Children and young people who participated in the focused discussion groups for this study hope this consultation is the beginning of a more regular participatory process taking into account the meaningful participation of children and youth, as actors for justice, advocates for change.
Increasing children and youth participation in the inter-governmental space

We envision a United Nations that is child and youth-friendly, promotes children and youth leadership within and outside the organisation, taking due account of child safeguarding also. The SRSG CAAC should work closely with member states to create an enabling environment for children and youth voices in the inter-governmental negotiations and UN official processes, including but not limited to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Human Rights Council (HRC), and the Security Council (UNSC). In this perspective, the SRSG CAAC should work with the member states and the Office of the Secretary-General to convene a regular gathering of children and youth with Ministers and other high-level officials.

Realising the potential of children and young people within the UN system

The SRSG CAAC mandate and wider UN system should recognise children and young people as partners, not just beneficiaries – at all levels; A child friendly version of the Special Representative’s reports should be developed, providing children with practical information which can be used to support children’s actions to address CAAC priorities.

Engagement and mobilisation of children and young people

The SRSG CAAC mandate should convene and consult children and youth, in particular in remote areas, and consider their inputs in a meaningful way. Children and young people should be involved systematically in decisions affecting them. It means inviting children and young people to participate during negotiations of peace agreements and in policy design and implementation, but also during armed conflicts, in consultations ahead of the release of the Special Representative reports to the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council as well as United Nations Security Council.

Enhance accountability for war crimes and transparency in reporting

DCI reiterates the call for accountability and transparency made in May 2021, when 18 nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), including DCI addressed an open letter calling on UN Secretary-General António Guterres to publish a complete list of perpetrators of grave violations in his 2021 annual report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (S/2021/437). The letter urged the Secretary-General to publish a list that is evidence-based and accurately reflects data collected and verified by the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM). Reacting to the 2021 annual report of the Secretary-General, a group of internationally respected experts on children and armed conflict released a statement expressing their deep disappointment at continued omissions from the perpetrators list, particularly of government forces.
Afghanistan
DCI-International Secretariat interviewed Karim, an Afghan young man of 19 years old who has now a refugee status in Switzerland. Karim’s family was obliged to leave Afghanistan and flee to Iran because of the persecution from the Taliban. Arriving in Iran, Karim was separated from his family and had to find his way on his own. He managed to travel from Iran to Turkey and from there, to Greece (followed by DCI-Greece through their legal helpdesk). He has been in Switzerland since 2019, year in which he participated and won the DCI Special Award with a poem he wrote in the context of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 40th of DCI. In 2020, the Swiss authorities granted him asylum status. He is now very happy to live peacefully and develop his skills while healing the wounds from his childhood. He is currently finishing secondary school; he has learned German and is working to improve his English and French literacy. At the same time, he is totally engaged in sharing his experience, promoting child rights, helping unaccompanied children. He is part of an experimental youth group, the DCI Youth Ambassadors for change.

Young refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan in Greece
From 16 to 17th October 2021, DCI-Greece organised a workshop retreat with eight children and youth. The participants age ranged from 16-21 years old and consisted of six boys and two girls.

Central African Republic (CAR)
The FGD was organised by DCI on 27th September 2021 in Bangui with the participation of four boys and three girls, aged between 16 to 21 years old, all affected by the ongoing conflict. In CAR, DCI is also known as the Center for the Promotion and Defence of Children’s Rights (C.P.D.E.-RCA).

Yemen
On 30th September 2021, DCI-Yemen, also known as the Democracy School, held a FGD in Sana’a for five children: two boys and three girls, aged between 15-18 years old. The session was conducted in person. DCI-Yemen office addresses violations of children’s rights daily and work closely with Save The Children for the implementation of the Child Parliament in Yemen. The children interviewed at the FGD are active participants in the Child Parliament.

Palestine
Seven children took part in the FGD that took place on 28th September 2021. Four of the participants were girls. The participants chose an alias. The group demographics are as follows:

- Adam – 16 years old
- Rawan – 14 years old
- Ahmad – 16 years old
- Kholoud – 15 years old
- Tala – 14 years old
- Reem – 15 years old
- Murad – 16 years old

Since the participants came from different governorates far from DCI-Palestine’s main office located in Ramallah, the session was conducted online through Zoom. The participants are from Hebron, Tubas, Ramallah, Nablus and Jerusalem governorates. The selection of the children was based on the main purpose of this session, thus, DCI-Palestine team decided to select children from marginalised areas and trigger points that are exposed to hostilities and regular attacks from the Israel, or from those who have been exposed to specific violence, in relevance to the armed conflict.

Yemen
Leila, a young woman from Sierra Leone went through a perilous forced migration journey to Mali, Niger and spent almost a year in Libya in 2017 before managing to find a way to arrive to safe place in Europe (Italy then France). She had to flee in order not to be subject to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in her country of origin and persecution for her activism. She was only 16 years old at the time. During her migration route, and in particular in Libya, she witnessed horrible atrocities and grave violations of the rights of the child. She is a survivor and a very resilient person. DCI followed her case and supported her during the asylum procedures in France. In 2021, Leila obtained a refugee status in France and has started to rebuild her life together with her husband and 2 young children, one born in Italy and one in France.

All names have been changed to protect identity
The FGDs started in DCI countries with a clear briefing on the purpose of the activity. Previous preparatory sessions were held with the children and young people in September and October in order to prepare and brief them more on the CAAC mandate, the six grave violations the aims of the study, and how they can contribute to it in a child and youth friendly manner.

Mediation was also organised with the children’s parents. In the respective countries, children and young people participating in this activity were supported by a DCI protection officer, a focal point person and the FGD moderator.

In order to make sure this activity was run in a way that actively prevents harm, harassment, abuse and neglect, despite short deadlines, DCI followed strict child safeguarding procedures. We shared with our National Sections the template of risk assessment form, activity consent and multimedia forms in advance.

The moderator, focal point for the FGD and child safeguarding focal point were nominated in each section and briefed on their individual responsibilities. Although the child safeguarding focal point had a particular responsibility in terms of safeguarding, all staff members were trained and aware of child safeguarding procedures. Two members of staff remained present with the children during the entire process surrounding the FGD (in accordance with the “Two Adult rule”). Staff members were trained on the appropriate conduct and response mechanisms.

At the start of the activity, there was an introduction and reminder on child safeguarding principles and how they apply to that activity presented in child friendly language and in a language the child understands. The briefings also reminded children of the voluntary nature of their participation, making sure they understood that they could leave the activity at any time. After the briefing and before the event, children were invited to contact DCI, if they had any questions or concerns.

For each country, a specific Risk Assessment was undertaken before the FDGs, taking into account each context and country-specific situations. DCI policy to protect children’s privacy and identity were checked prior to events; we used alias instead of their names in the report. If during the FGD, a child disclosed information that would allow them to be identified, DCI did not publish this information and carefully selected the quotes by removing locations/names, or other information that could jeopardise the safety of the child. This procedure covered all activities associated with the FGDs that were organised by DCI in the different countries, and was applied to the professional and personal lives of all the persons involved in the process, i.e. all staff, volunteers and other adults in contact with the children. Finally, the documents we provided to DCI National sections were aligned with the DCI Child Safeguarding Policy, which is followed in any activity that the organisation takes forward.

We would like to express our gratitude to volunteer designer Ms. Susan Carswell, who generously offered her valuable design skills for this publication, making the children’s voices even more impactful.
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actors for justice advocates for rights