**POSITION PAPER FROM NAMUN'20 UNICEF COMMITTEE**



**Committee:** UNICEF (UNITED NATION’S CHILDREN’S FUND)

**Country:** Belgium

**Delegation:** Orkun Yündem

Belgium is a United Nations country in Western Europe, where 11.46 million people live according to the census made in 2019. The country bordered by Netherlands to the north, Germany to the east, France to the southwest, Luxemburg to the southeast. Belgium has a coast on the Atlantic Ocean. Belgium participates in European Union and NATO. Belgium covers an area of 30.683 square kilometers. The capital city of the Belgium is Brussels. Belgium is an independent country and governed by parliamentary system. Many nationalities live in Belgium, but when we compare it to the number, the French, Dutch and German nations are the majority in the country. There are also 3 official languages across the country. Flemish speak Dutch, Walloons speak French and a little part of German speak German.

Belgium advocates that children are very important both for today and tomorrow, and believes that various efforts are needed to provide children with the best living conditions, that is why Belgium participates in UNICEF.

UNICEF Belgium was established on June 26, 1952 and is the oldest UNICEF national committee in Europe. Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Committee has become the first advocate of children's rights. UNICEF Belgium works with the help of hundreds of volunteers on 50 subcommittees across the country. UNICEF Belgium is collecting aid funds for the ongoing aid campaign, run by 190 countries. These and numerous other campaigns show that Belgium attaches great importance to the issue of children's rights.

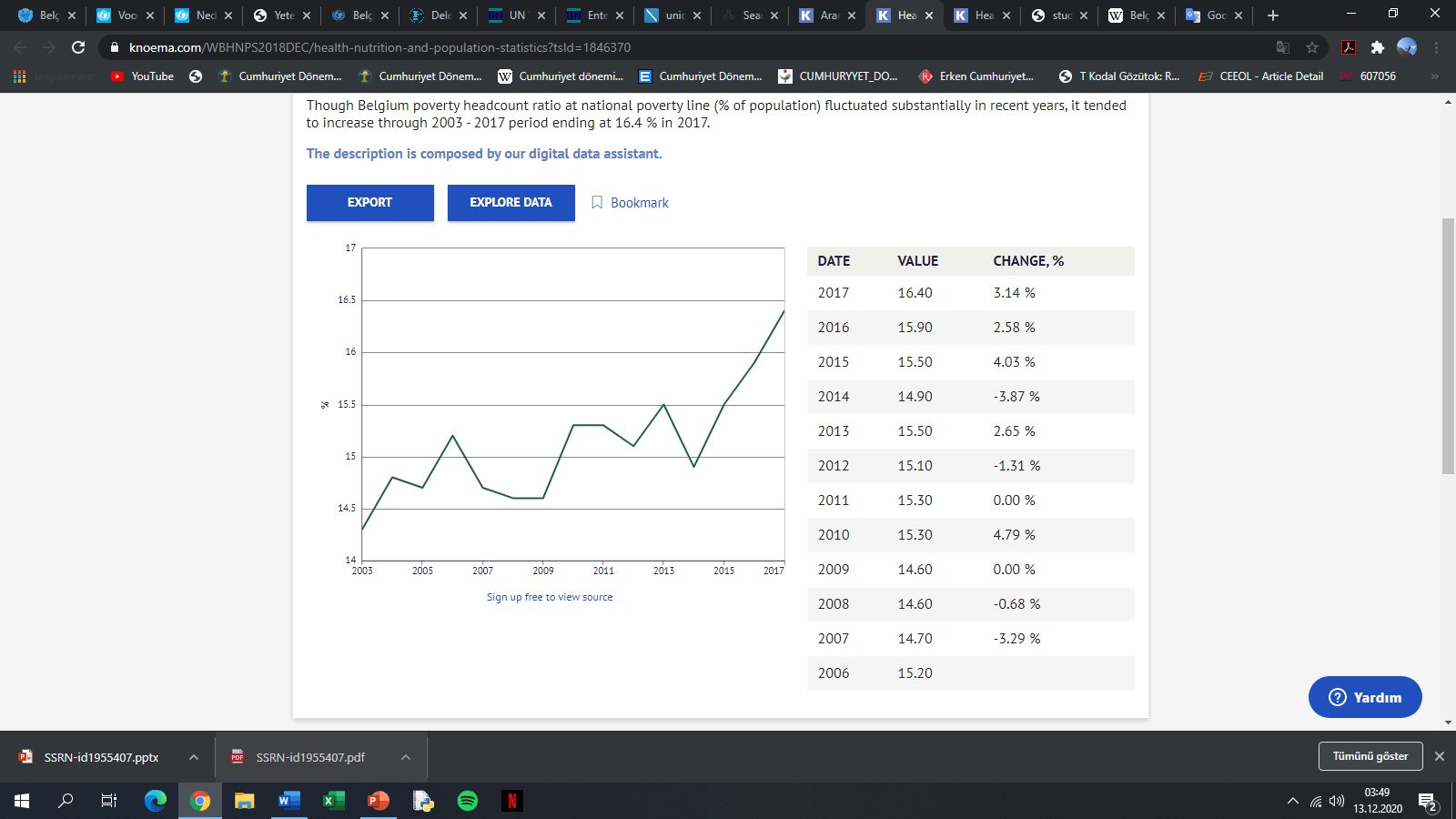
**Agenda:** Combating Child Poverty and Social Exclusion

Child poverty is a common problem worldwide that negatively affects the growth age of the child as a result of the low income of the family. Poverty can also set children on a lifelong trajectory of low education levels and reduced productivity and economic growth, and it undermines their physical and mental health. Children living in poverty are more likely to become impoverished adults and have poor children, creating and sustaining intergenerational cycles of poverty.

When the annual per capita income data are examined, Belgium ranks 17th among 186 countries with $46,724 per capita annually, which is higher than other major European countries such as Britain, France and Italy. Belgium's minimum wage is 1,593.81 EUR. Belgium has many aid campaigns to prevent child poverty. According to data from 2010, the child poverty rate in Europe is 27%. On the other hand, when the child poverty data are analyzed, Belgium ranks 11th with a rate of 23.2%. As can be seen, Belgium has lower data than the average poverty rate. In Belgium, an average of 15% of families are considered poor and 12% of the rate corresponds to extreme poverty (The tablet hat given below shows the change in the poverty rate in Belgium).

Child poverty in Belgium can pose problems such as:

* Fresh and hot food cannot be met,
* Children stay away from education as a result of not paying their school bills,
* Not being able to allocate a budget for technological products that have become the basic needs of today, such as smartphones and computers,
* Not enough money to take advantage of cultural items such as books,
* Marrying girls at a young age with the idea that the family economy will be relieved with the bride price which is the Money given to bride’s family by the groom or his family,
* With the "bad parent" thought seen in some families as a result of families not being able to take good care of their children, parents also experience psychological problems as well as children.

 When children who grow up facing these problems become adults and have children, the new generation children face similar problems to a large extent.

On the rise of child poverty in Europe, UNICEF Belgium calls for acceleration and strengthening of efforts to tackle child poverty. According to the latest analysis of the OECD (2020), GDP in Belgium fell by 14.8% in the first half of 2020. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 5 children lived in poverty (20.6%). "We call on governments to increase social protection for children in line with the support given to the business world," said Olsson, as the budget allocated to support children fell to 2% due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “Stronger family-centered policies should be a combination of unconditional income support for the poorest families, food, childcare and public service allowances, long-term rent or mortgage exemptions so that all children and their families can build a stronger foundation. survive this crisis." “COVID19 is the biggest crisis Belgium and rich countries have known for generations,” said Director of UNICEF Belgium, Dirk Jacxsens. “Children are the biggest victims. We urge everyone to do everything in their power to eradicate child poverty, raise income above the poverty line, strengthen social protection measures for children and families, and lay the foundation for children and families out of poverty. come and face future crises. By joining our forces, we can change the tide and create a better future for our children!” With these words, the Director of UNICEF Belgium argues that Belgium and all countries of the world should unite to prevent child poverty.

**Figure 1: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (%), 2009 and 2010**

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In order to reduce child poverty, which is 23.2% in Belgium, our aims are:

* To ensure that all working areas in the country do not pay less than the minimum wage,
* To compensate the educational expenses of the children of families in the poor class with the donations that collected,
* To reward poor students for their success,
* To increase the minimum wage as the country budget is sufficient,
* To publish constantly active donation campaigns in various broadcasters of the country
* It is aimed to give seminars to children and families to raise awareness about poverty.

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**Agenda*:*** Early and Forced Child Marriage

Every year, approximately 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. Early child marriages generally occur in places with low education levels, education takes very important place. UN continues to prevent forced child marriage in all countries. In addition, according to the information obtained from a source, the dowry that parents pay for their daughters in Asia is cheaper when they are young and uneducated, so they marry their daughters early. In addition, gender inequality seen in many parts of the world (men being seen as superior) causes early child marriage. The girls who are forced to marry are carrying out physical and physiological problems because of pregnancy. Also, they cannot continue their studentship, they cannot use their education rights. Child marriage is still allowed in 81 countries around the world. There is no minimum age for girls and boys to marry in Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Sri Lanka and Yemen. And in many countries where the minimum age for marriage is 18, this law is not sufficiently enforced. Statements of the European Union show how serious this issue is. “Unless we end child marriage, we won't achieve 8 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

"70,000 adolescent girls die every year from complications of pregnancy or childbirth." (UNFPA, 2012)

Belgium government is against to forced child marriages. In 2015, the Belgian Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution calling for more efforts to end the child's early and forced marriage. The decision urged the government to take child marriage as a priority in development cooperation policy. Belgium has committed to eliminating early and forced marriage by 2030, in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The government is aware of the importance of this issue. According to the source, during the Volunteer National Review at the 2017 High-Level Political Forum, the government highlighted that a multi-stakeholder platform for international health has been developed with accessible e-learning covering a range of topics such as child marriage. Also, Belgium co-sponsored 2013, 2014 and 2018 UN General Assembly resolutions on children, early and forced marriage. Belgium has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention and combating of violence against women and domestic violence (known as the Istanbul Convention), which recognizes forced marriage as a form of serious violence against women and girls and legally binds the parties to criminalizing intentional behaviour. In 2018, Belgium allocated 2 million euros a year for the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage Program, a multi-donor, multi-stakeholder program is operating Belgium ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets the minimum age for marriage of 18 years, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, which requires states to have a free and full marriage.[[2]](#footnote-2)

"Child marriage is against our principles," Theo Francken, the state secretary for Belgium's asylum and immigration policy, told these at De Morgen newspaper. Official figures show that last year, among the refugee influx, 17; 7 child brides came this year. 56 complaints about forced marriage were made to the police between 2010 and 2013. In 2013 alone, it was reported that at least 10 children and children were forced into marriage in Brussels. In the same year, 9 forced marriages were reported in Bergen and at least 5 forced marriages in Ghent. Forced (child) marriages are also reported in other major cities. (Source: Els Leye, International Center for Reproductive Health (ICRH), UGent, 2015) The main cause of forced child marriage is lack of education. Therefore, 12 years of education is compulsory in Belgium (6-18 years old).

Under Belgian civil law, future spouses must be eighteen years old to be able to enter into a civil marriage. However, they can marry at a younger age, with the permission of the court. There is no minimum age. A minor's marriage automatically results in his adulthood (item 476). This means that it will in principle get the status of an adult.

Belgians are getting married later on average than the global average. On Thursday 5 March 2015, during the plenary session of the Chamber, the resolution “On the fight against forced child marriage anywhere in the world, in particular in the partner countries of the Belgian development cooperation”, unanimously approved. The text was an initiative of Nele Lijnen (Open Vld) and Karine Lalieux (PS). Among other things, the resolution calls for the inclusion of forced marriages in the bilateral political dialogue with - among others - partner countries of the Belgian development cooperation, in order to make gender inequality (including child marriage) a transversal theme when drawing up cooperation programs with partner countries, and also to put the theme high on the agenda of Belgium's priorities in the context of the negotiations on the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals.[[3]](#footnote-3) In Belgium there is a specific criminal law article criminalizing forced marriages (Law of April 25, 2007), which entered into force on May 5 2007. This criminal law provision on forced marriages was added as Article 391sexies to the Criminal Code. Article 391e defines this in Title VII of Book II as follows: “Anyone who forces someone to marry by force or threat will be punished with imprisonment of one month to two years or a fine of one hundred euros to five hundred euros. The attempt is punishable by imprisonment from fifteen days to one year or a fine of fifty euros to two hundred and fifty euros.” [[4]](#footnote-4)

As Belgium, our aims to prevent early and forced child marriage are:

* To raise awareness among the Belgian development community of the scale and seriousness of the problem, with a focus on the Belgian partner countries,
* To provide concrete action paths with which Belgium can help governments and other actors in its partner countries to intervene preventively,
* To focus more on policy change at local, national and regional decision-making levels through support of partnerships with influential, strategic players from local civil society,
* To ensure all marriages under the control of the state,
* To investigate all marriages (either in secret or open) and to verify that there are no child marriages,
* To provide physiological and mental aid for children who suffer from forced marriage and to give heavy punishments to the people who are responsible for forced child marriage.

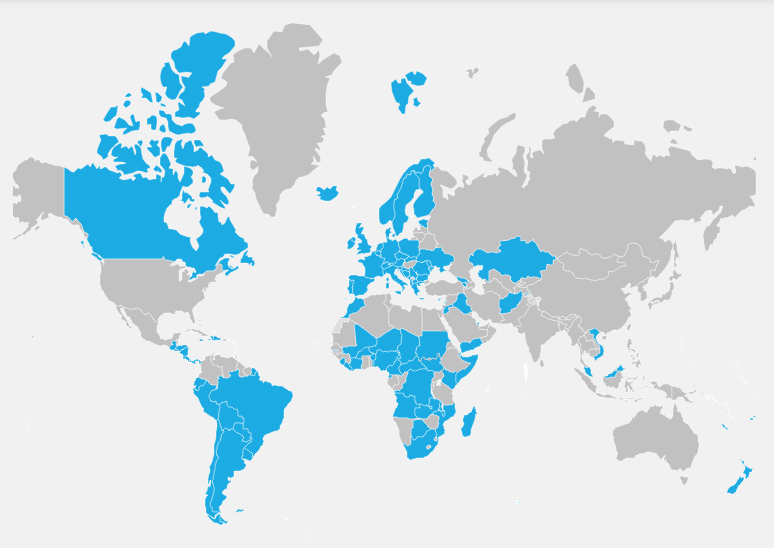
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**Agenda:** Education in Emergencies

“Education boosts economic growth and reduces poverty and inequality. It increases individuals’ ability to lead a healthy life, participate in society and restore peace and stability.” [[5]](#footnote-5) Education has been of great importance since the early years of humanity, many problems can be solved with education. Therefore, education should not be interrupted and children should use their education rights without encountering any instability. Psychological structures of children are very sensitive, a trauma in childhood can cause various problems for the rest of their life. At least 75 million children are out of school today. Children out of school are mainly found in very low-income countries, countries in conflict or affected by natural disasters, and in groups within countries that are disadvantaged. There are many reasons why children do not attend school. Poverty is and continues to be one of the main causes. As a result, the cost of education is too high for many families and the children do not go to school. In times of conflict or disaster, the education system often breaks down, with insufficient attention paid to the fastest and continuous education provision. The special focus of Belgium's campaign this year is the right to education in emergencies. More than 42% do not attend school in conflict situations. The short and long-term consequences for society cannot be underestimated. For these reasons, one of UNICEF's work areas is education.

“Education is a lifeline for children in crisis.” [[6]](#footnote-6) Today, more countries are in conflict at any time in the past 30 years. In countries affected by crises, children are losing loved ones and relatives, access to clean water and food, and their education rights. Education was added to the fields of activity of UNICEF in 1961. Between 2014 and 2018, attacks on education in 87 countries were reported. [[7]](#footnote-7) In 2014- 2018 years, approximately 35 million children around the world had to leave school because of emergencies like conflicts, epidemics et cetera. Only half of the refugee children are going to primary school. According to the data, the percent of refugees who are going to secondary school is lower than 25%. Schools protect children from the outside world, especially in crisis areas, schools are the safest places. “Without access to education, a generation of children living in conflict will grow up without the skills they need to contribute to their countries and economies, exacerbating the already desperate situation for millions of children and their families.” [[8]](#footnote-8) Education is a fundamental right for all children, a right that is enshrined in several treaties and without any exception, regardless of where you were born or live. Yet education is not an adequate part of aid programs everywhere. Because conflicts last on average for several years and domestic refugees usually stay in refugee camps for up to 17 years, education is crucial in aid programs to ensure this fundamental right for all children. Shortly after a disaster or crisis, education can protect children from danger. Essential information about hygiene as well as literal protection against child trafficking, sexual exploitation or recruitment as a soldier can be assured through education. Education can also minimize the effects of trauma and give children a sense of normalcy in an environment that, on the other hand, gives little hope for the future. Education is organized in an all-encompassing manner. In this way, the school is also a framework for other facilities: vaccination, prevention of malnutrition and psychosocial support. Quality education can save lives by providing physical protection from the dangers and abuse of the crisis environment.

 The Safe Schools Declaration was opened for state endorsement in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015. It is a political commitment to better protect students, teachers, schools and universities during armed conflict, to support the continuation of education during war, and to put in place concrete measures to deter the military use of schools.

States, countries and territories that have endorsed the Declaration shown in blue. Source: GCPEA. Information accurate as of 9 September, 2020.

UNICEF Belgium aims to inform the general public about children's rights. UNICEF Belgium also works to protect children's rights in schools outside of Belgium. For more than 20 years, UNICEF Belgium has been developing specific materials for schools and teachers to raise awareness about the plight of children worldwide. During the first eight weeks of emergencies, temporary education rooms are provided with basic infrastructure as much as possible. The resumption of education is encouraged by the reopening of schools as soon as possible, the reintegration of teachers and students, the provision of pedagogical materials and the organization of recreational activities. After these interventions, possibilities to develop and support primary education, to provide as many educational packages as possible, and to provide teachers with as many basic educational materials as possible will be explored.

A magazine published by Belgium on children's education rights states that there are no emergencies in Belgium that prevent large numbers of children from attending school. Regional turnips (such as winter floods or blizzards) can prevent children from going to school, but these are occasional and local situations. And the section in the magazine, "In Belgium, hospitalized children are in a situation that sometimes deprives them of the opportunity to go to school for a longer period of time and receive normal education. The large Belgian hospitals allow these children to exercise their" right to education "even in emergency services. Belgium ' There are many similarities between the problems of hospitalized children in hospitals and those of children affected by emergencies elsewhere in the world. " continues with the sentence.[[9]](#footnote-9) “Children who stay in a large hospital for a medium or long period in Belgium can take lessons: all major care structures organize education.”

Gazan and Belgian students are among the 300 young people participating in these virtual exchanges, which involve fifteen schools in Gaza, Syria, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Norway. Gazan UNRWA students advocated that every child has the right to receive quality education by interacting with sister schools abroad. Student voice forms part of the innovative UNRWA Education in Emergencies (EiE) programme, which aims to ensure that the most vulnerable Palestine refugee children and youth are not left behind in times of emergencies. During times of crisis, the EiE programme provides students with alternative learning spaces and interactive self-learning materials so that they can continue learning, even when they cannot attend school regularly. [[10]](#footnote-10)

UNRWA is almost entirely funded by voluntary contributions, and the increase in needs has outstripped financial support. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to make all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency's program budget. UNRWA emergency programs, as well as key projects working with major shortcomings, are funded through separate funding portals. UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949, tasked with providing assistance and protection to approximately 5 people. UNRWA services include education, health, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and rehabilitation, conservation and microfinance. Relations between UNRWA and the Kingdom of Belgium date back to 1953. In line with its main objective for humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, Belgium is a staunch supporter of UNRWA. Since 2010, Belgium has supported the Agency with over EUR 70 million. This includes annual contributions to the Agency’s Program Budget as well as support to specific projects, such as Education in Emergencies, and other UNRWA emergency operations in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory. [[11]](#footnote-11)

In December 2014, an international Conference was co-organized by a set of stakeholders - the Council of Europe, the British Council, the League of Arab States, the Institute of International Education and the Global Platform for Syrian Students – to attract attention to the urgent need to reflect further on these key questions. This Conference hosted by the “Université Libre de Bruxelles”, Belgium, brought together more than 100 participants from all walks of life – civil society organizations, Universities and associations of universities, international organizations, government representatives, aid and cooperation agencies, and the private sector - engaged in and committed to promoting higher education, in particular in emergency situations. It explored the vital role of higher education in saving lives and giving a sense of hope for the future in the context of emergencies. Using the current Syrian crisis as an example, this ground-breaking Conference aimed to solidify a series of recommendations that may pave the way for some type of Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in the event of natural disaster or armed conflict. The central idea is that, in humanitarian crises, education and in particular higher education is too often neglected. And yet, it is higher education that will produce the leaders and skilled workforce that countries need to move forward, in particular after crisis and conflict. The aid campaigns in which Belgium plays an active role, such as the campaign I gave above, can be accessed from the attached link. [[12]](#footnote-12)

As Belgium, our aims to provide education safely in emergencies are:

* To give seminars to raise awareness in the public,
* To take precautions by thinking "Crises can happen in anytime", for example to have at hand an online education system or such ways to continue education,
* To track the students and to arrange speeches for children to make them feel teachers and psychologists will always help them in the crisis,
* To provide psychological aid to children and parents before, during and after the crisis, because people’s psychology gets very sensitive during and after crisis,
* To provide the Internet connection in every point of the country, and to give online devices to poor children,
* To keep spare money on public purse for emergencies which can limit the children’s education rights,
* To construct the school buildings, which harmed because of conflicts or emergencies et cetera, immediately,
* To make plans for ensure the education after natural disasters, for example classes which are in the durable constructions.

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