

CHILD PROTECTION ADVOCACY BRIEF

Children on the Move

unicef 
for every child



(Left to right) Manena, Wael, Louay and Ayman play with a suitcase at the Skaramagas refugee camp in Greece, where UNICEF's child protection services support 11 hubs.

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Children on the move are those who migrate within their countries or across borders. Children move for many reasons – to seek protection and a better life, and to reunite with family. Some children migrate with their families, while others move alone because of conflict, natural disaster or other deprivations. Some are left in their countries of origin when their caregivers migrate in search of opportunities or protection.¹

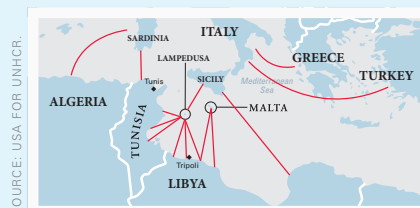
As of 2017, 30 million children were living in forced displacement² due to conflict and violence. An additional 6 million children were internally displaced by disasters in 2017 alone.

The dangers and desperation that drive children to leave their homes and communities expose them to many risks along their journeys, including violence, exploitation and human trafficking. Risks are further compounded by inadequate and discriminatory practices such as immigration detention, social exclusion, as well as lack of access to basic services (including education and healthcare) throughout their journey in countries of transit and when children arrive in destination countries.

1 UNICEF's Global Programme Framework on Children on the Move (2017) defines the scope of children on the move, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced children, trafficked and smuggled children, whether documented or undocumented (p.g. 3).
2 UNICEF Data gaps and mixed migration between West and North Africa and Europe, 2017, p.g. 2, <<https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Data-gaps-and-mixed-migration-snapshot.pdf>>
3 UNICEF 2018, Uprooted in Central America and Mexico, Migrant and refugee children face a vicious cycle of hardship and danger, p.g. 13, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Child_Alert_2018_Central_America_and_Mexico.pdf>

Children on the move are, first and foremost, children. Regardless of who they are and where they come from, **countries should provide them with protection and care.**

Migration presents an **opportunity for children to seek protection** and fulfil their dreams and aspirations.



In 2016, an estimated 700 child deaths were recorded along the Central Mediterranean route.³

Towards 2030 - Sustainable Development Goals



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that relate to children on the move concern health (SDGs 3.7 and 3.8), education (SDGs 4.1 and 4.4), violence (SDGs 5.2, 16.1 and 16.2), forced labour and trafficking (SDG 8.7), labour rights (SDG 8.8), facilitating migration and remittances (SDGs 10.7 and 10.7c), and disaggregated data (SDG 17.18).

UNICEF impact

In 2017, UNICEF Honduras and partners, including the Honduran Red Cross, assisted around 12,000 children and adolescents affected by irregular migration; 4,000 children and adolescents to recover from trauma and violence through provision of psychosocial support; and nearly 2,000 to enrol in non-formal educational or technical training options.



Jalil, 15, an unaccompanied minor from Bamian, Afghanistan, kicks a ball outside the S.O.S. shelter supported by UNICEF in Athens, Greece.

Lack of access to services

including education and basic necessities (such as food, shelter and healthcare)⁵ can have devastating effects. These effects expose children to violence, exploitation and abuse, including the increased risk of child labour. Restrictive migration policies exclude children based on their migration status, language, cultural and social barriers in countries of transit and destination, and prevent children from accessing services on par with other children.

Challenges

Inadequate support and delayed sustainable or long-term solutions often result in uncertain and precarious situations for children, which increase their risks and vulnerabilities, and deprive them of their childhood and the possibility to build and plan their future. Sustainable solutions should be guided by the child's best interests and include local integration, resettlement to a third country (including for family reunification), or return to the child's country of origin if there is no risk of harm.

For children on the move approaching adulthood, the risks are particularly dire because they often lose their special protected status as children once they turn 18.

Violence, exploitation and abuse results from a range of circumstances including state actions (e.g. immigration detention), xenophobia, bullying and discrimination, exploitation by traffickers, or from domestic violence worsened by prolonged and extreme stress related

to displacement.⁴ Such violence and abuse often has long-lasting physical, mental, psychological and social consequences on a child's wellbeing that persist following their arrival in the destination country. Children who travel alone or become separated from their adult caregivers are particularly vulnerable. Exposure to smugglers increases children's vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, child trafficking, child labour and child marriage.

Immigration detention is harmful to children's well-being and undermines their health. This traumatic experience that leaves children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse can create toxic stress, which impairs their development and potentially triggers the onset of serious mental illness.⁶ In more than 100 countries across the globe, children are detained because of their migration status.

Family separation

undermines the health and development of children, exposes them to violence, exploitation and abuse, and can create toxic stress. All children, including children on the move, have the right to grow up with their families, underscoring the importance of keeping families together.

4 UNICEF 2017, Beyond Borders, How to make the global compacts on migration and refugees work for uprooted children p.g. 14, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Beyond_Borders_Nov_2017.pdf>

5 UNICEF 2016, Uprooted, The Growing Crisis of Refugee and Migrant Children, p.g. 40

6 UNICEF 2017, Beyond Borders, How to make the global compacts on migration and refugees work for uprooted children p.g. 14, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Beyond_Borders_Nov_2017.pdf>

7 UNICEF 2018, Uprooted in Central America and Mexico, Migrant and refugee children face a vicious cycle of hardship and danger p.g. 13, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Child_Alert_2018_Central_America_and_Mexico.pdf>

UNICEF's Approach

UNICEF adopts a route-based approach to strengthen protection and support for children on the move, aimed at responding to their needs while they are still in their country of origin, along transit routes and upon arrival at their destination. This approach begins with strengthening national child protection systems to meet the needs of all children within their borders, regardless of their migration status. A child protection system works across various sectors (including justice, health, education and social services) at the community, local and national levels, guided by relevant legislation and policy to prevent and respond to violence against children. It promotes transnational and cross-border collaboration between the government and civil society actors along identified migration corridors, made possible by the extensive network UNICEF has developed through its global work across 193 countries.

Focusing on systems strengthening in the Horn of Africa, UNICEF is preventing and responding to the needs of children on the move by: building the capacity of the social service workforce, developing case management systems and tools that communicate and are interoperable across borders, building data and evidence, promoting child-sensitive justice systems, developing age- and gender- appropriate life skills activities, promoting alternatives to unsafe and irregular migration, and providing services along migration routes. UNICEF is implementing similar route-based programmes for children on the move in West and Central Africa, and South East Asia.

In the northern countries of Central America, UNICEF is focused on interventions to address the root causes of migration by creating and re-claiming safe spaces such as schools, hospitals and playgrounds for children affected by gang violence. UNICEF also supports the sustainable reintegration of returnee children and their families towards long-term solutions.



A young girl at the Vinojug transit center, Macedonia, where refugees and migrants often register intent to seek asylum before continuing their journey.



Tesfit, 25, an Eritrean asylum seeker plays with Bettie, 3, at the Cara reception center which houses 3,000 people in Mineo, Sicily.

UNICEF impact

To prevent detention of migrant children, UNICEF Mexico has developed models for alternative care, which include transit and longer-term open shelters, group homes and foster care. In the state of Tabasco, UNICEF is supporting long-term shelter for migrant children and those seeking protection, where they are provided appropriate psychosocial support, access to education and health services, and

legal support. In 2017, 481 shelter providers and social workers received training on alternative care options, inter-institutional coordination, psychosocial methodologies and tools, and special protection – benefiting 5,000 migrant children. In addition, over 830 migrant children were directly supported at the southern border (Tenosique and Tapachula) through case management, which constitutes a coordinated process of managing the needs of an individual child.

Key Asks

UNICEF CALLS FOR SIX ACTIONS TO PROTECT ALL REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN⁸

1 **Protect uprooted children from exploitation and violence.** UNICEF calls for more safe and legal channels for children

to migrate and to seek refuge. Concrete efforts to prevent trafficking, to strengthen child protection systems and to expand access to information and assistance can help keep children safe.

From 2015 to 2016, around 1.2 million people arrived in Germany seeking protection and asylum, among whom an estimated 400,000 were children (around 34 per cent). UNICEF and the German Government launched a national, multi-partner initiative in early 2016, which developed the Minimum Standards for the Protection of Refugees and Migrants Living in Refugee Centres. Over 2,500 refugee centre managers, protection coordinators and staff in the 100 refugee centres across Germany were trained on these standards.

2 **End the detention of refugee and migrant children by creating practical alternatives.** Unaccompanied

and separated children should be placed in foster care, supervised independent living, or other family- or community-based living arrangements. Children should not be detained in adult facilities.

In Greece, the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) publishes bi-weekly updates with data on referrals; the age, nationality, gender and location of children; and the number in detention. EKKA also monitors the time it takes to process referrals, the length of stay in shelters and the rate at which children abscond, providing critical information to child protection service providers, policymakers and donors.⁹

3 **Keep families together and give children legal status.** UNICEF calls for

stronger policies to prevent the separation of children from their parents and other family members in transit and faster procedures to reunite children with their families, including in destination countries. Furthermore, all children have a right to a legal identity established at birth through registration and issuance of a birth certificate.

8 See, UNICEF's Agenda for Action, <<https://www.unicef.org/children-uprooted/agenda-for-action>>

9 UNICEF, Beyond Borders: How to make the global compacts on migration and refugees work for uprooted children, 2017, p.g.16, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Beyond_Borders_Nov_2017.pdf>

10 UNICEF, Beyond Borders: How to make the global compacts on migration and refugees work for uprooted children, 2017, p.g. 38, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Beyond_Borders_Nov_2017.pdf>

11 Ibid., p.g. 28, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Beyond_Borders_Nov_2017.pdf>

12 Ibid., p.g. 39, <https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Beyond_Borders_Nov_2017.pdf>



Lebanese and Syrian young people build an architectural model at the UNICEF-supported Girls Got IT event in Lebanon to empower girls, no matter where they are from.

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In South Sudan, a UNICEF-supported working group of international and local organizations use the Inter-Agency Child Protection Information Management System (IA CPIMS) to safely and securely relay information about unaccompanied and separated children and family members using an established information protocol. More than 5,000 children have been reconnected with family members through this system that operates offline, which is important in cases of limited infrastructure and spotty telephone service.

4 **Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services.** UNICEF calls for increased collective

efforts by governments, communities and the private sector to provide migrant and refugee children with access to educational and health services; and to shelter, nutrition, water and sanitation.

In Lebanon, the UNICEF-supported Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) programme aims to provide education to around 470,000 Syrian children aged 3 to 18 over the next four years.¹⁰ In addition to efforts to include refugee children in the public school system, RACE focuses on improving access to education for Lebanese children, improving the quality of learning opportunities, and strengthening the administration and governance systems.¹¹

5 **Press for action on the underlying causes of large-scale movements of refugees and migrants.** Such efforts

should include increasing access to education; strengthening health child protection systems and social safety nets; expanding opportunities for family income and youth employment; and facilitating peaceful conflict resolution and tolerance.

In the aftermath of the Viet Nam emergency response efforts in 2016, the joint Vision and Positioning Note on Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction was developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and UNICEF. The note established a framework for child-centred disaster risk reduction in the country, which is highly susceptible to long-term effects on climate change.¹² The framework linked short-term humanitarian responses with long-term development objectives, and focused on children's vulnerabilities in disaster.

6 **Combat xenophobia and discrimination.** UNICEF calls on local

leaders, religious groups, non-government organizations, the media and the private sector to combat xenophobia and nurture a greater understanding between migrant and refugee children and families, and their host communities.

In 2017, UNICEF Chile undertook various actions and campaigns to promote the inclusion and non-discrimination of migrant children, which had a significant impact in the country. This work was reflected in the implementation of the National Plan of Regularization of Migrant Children through an agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education. This plan aims to regularize the situation of migrant children and adolescents studying in educational establishments, kindergartens and day-care centres, notwithstanding the immigration status of their parents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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