



A call to action  
**Protecting children on the move starts with better data**



Millions of children have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced. In 2016, children made up about half of refugees and asylum seekers, at around 12 million globally.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, an estimated 23 million children were living in internal displacement – 16 million as a result of conflict, 7 million due to natural disasters.<sup>2</sup> Millions of other children had moved, within or across borders, in pursuit of better opportunities. All of the figures cited here are based on estimates, as observed numbers are often not available.

For many children, their families and the communities they leave and join, migration brings significant benefits. It also entails serious risks, where gaps in laws, policies and services leave many children and adolescents bereft of the protection and services they need. Efforts to remedy these shortfalls, in turn, come up against serious gaps in knowledge.

As Member States work towards the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, Eurostat and OECD call on them to prioritise actions to address these evidence gaps, and include child-specific considerations in both agreements.

As of 2016, around

**1 in 80**  
of the world's  
children

were living in **forced displacement**  
– an estimated **28 million** children

This number does not include  
**7 million** children internally displaced  
by **natural disasters**<sup>3</sup>

As of 2017,

**30 million**  
children

were living **outside their country  
of birth**

They had moved for a range of  
reasons, including joining family  
members, pursuing educational  
opportunities – or fleeing conflict,  
violence or persecution<sup>4</sup>



# Uprooted and invisible

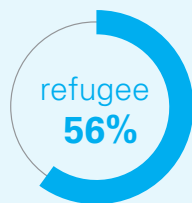
Reliable, timely and accessible data and evidence are essential for understanding how migration and forcible displacement affect children and their families – and for putting in place policies and programmes to meet their needs. Despite greater efforts over the past decade, we still do not know enough about children on the move<sup>5</sup>: their age and sex; where they come from, where they are going and why they move; whether they move with their families or alone, how they fare along the way, what their vulnerabilities are, what they need, and how migration and asylum policies affect them.<sup>6</sup>

Data gaps make it difficult to get a real sense of the scale and patterns of global migration. In many cases data are not regularly collected, and quality is

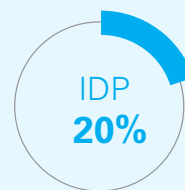
often poor. These problems are many times worse when it comes to data on migrant and forcibly displaced children, given the even greater challenges of measurement. Information comes from a patchwork of sources that provide little comparable global or even regional-level data.

Variations in the laws, definitions, rights and entitlements that apply to children further hamper comparisons between countries. Data are even scarcer on children moving undocumented across borders, those displaced, stateless or migrating internally, children left behind by migrant parents, and those who have gone missing or lost their lives during dangerous journeys.

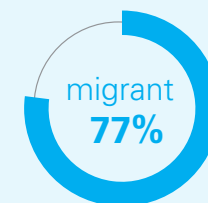
## Age-disaggregated data on migrants and forcibly displaced people are incomplete



Only around **56%** of **refugee** data have information on age<sup>7</sup>



Only **20%** of countries and territories with data on conflict-related **internally displaced persons** (IDPs) disaggregate the data by age<sup>8</sup>



Overall, **77%** of countries and territories have age-disaggregated **migrant** stock data, including only **57%** in **Africa**<sup>9</sup>

# New norms, better data

We need better data on children's movements and welfare, as well as new norms and practices to ensure its quality and facilitate its use and sharing. Investment in improved data collection on migration and displacement, with a specific focus on children, is essential to devise better policies, track progress, monitor the impact and implementation of measures – such as those to be agreed upon in the Global Compacts, and ensure that children have the protection and services they need.<sup>10</sup> Such investments can help advance the rights of migrant and displaced children, as guaranteed to all children by the Convention on the Rights of the Child – and, by enabling them to fulfil their potential, can bolster the prosperity and stability of States.

Building on existing and proposed recommendations regarding migration and asylum data by expert groups and agencies,<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, Eurostat and OECD call on Member States to address the data and evidence gaps pertaining to children affected by migration or forcible displacement. We urge Member States to support the actions and commitments put forth in the zero drafts of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, and include the following child-specific considerations:



## Disaggregate data by age and sex

In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, States agreed that data on migration and migrants should be disaggregated by sex and age. Data on children should be further disaggregated by standard age categories, from early childhood to adolescence; by other demographic and socio-economic characteristics like disability, education level and whether they live with their parents; and by migration status.



## Cover key issues relating to children affected by migration and displacement

The New York Declaration specifies that migration data should include information on regular and irregular flows, human trafficking, the economic impacts of migration and refugee movements, and the needs of migrants, refugees and host communities. Ensuring the well-being of children on the move also requires data on access to essential services such as education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and child protection, as well as on unaccompanied and separated children, family reunification, and children left behind by migrating parents.

Data efforts should also include qualitative and longitudinal data, for instance on the impact of return and reintegration, and should examine children's decision-making processes relating to migration, as well as their understanding of potentially dangerous or exploitative situations – and of options to protect themselves and pursue their aspirations.

### Good practice

International agencies – IOM, the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat and UNICEF – are monitoring migration flows to better understand the dynamics of mixed migration movements around the world. Initiatives like IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix flow monitoring surveys illuminate the challenges and risks migrants – including children – face.<sup>12</sup>



## Make better use of existing data, and share it

There is more migration- and asylum-related data collection under way than is commonly noted. Often, States collect data but do not analyse it sufficiently – nor do they share all of their data with other national agencies or countries. Currently, there are few internationally recognized mechanisms for countries or agencies to share information on migrant children. To maximize the use of existing data, concerted efforts are needed to develop new norms and practices for data sharing across sectors and agencies, and to encourage further sharing on a local, national, regional and international level. All data sharing efforts must take measures to protect children’s privacy and interests, and ensure ethical use of data.



## Coordinate data efforts within countries and across borders

Ensuring the well-being of children who move across borders or who are internally displaced is an immense task that requires governments and other actors to work together. Data are key, especially information on child protection and services. Yet data often remain scattered among countries and, within them, among agencies and ministries that do not necessarily work together.

To better protect the rights of children on the move, systematic efforts are needed to coordinate data collection and analysis and create new norms to guide it. Within countries, one agency – often the national statistical office – should lead these efforts, with support and collaboration from other agencies. Across borders, governments, regional bodies, the United Nations and international organizations should increase collaboration.

### Good practices

**The Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative** (CTDC), launched by IOM and Polaris, is the world’s first open access, multi-stakeholder repository of human trafficking data, including data on trafficked children. CTDC is developing new international standards on sharing this type of data.<sup>13</sup>

OECD, IOM and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) organized the **International Forum on Migration Statistics** aiming to advance availability, international comparability, timeliness and quality of migration data – including data on children.<sup>14</sup>

UNHCR, Eurostat and Statistics Norway have established and steered the work of an **International Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics** (EGRIS).<sup>15</sup> As mandated by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), EGRIS produces international recommendations to harmonize and improve data on forced displacement at the national level, with a focus on the disaggregation of data by refugee and IDP status, age, gender and other characteristics. Once finalized and adopted by UNSC, the recommendations will apply to all Member States and will lead to improved quality and comparability of data at the national and international levels, as well as more evidence-based decision-making, programmes and advocacy.



## Make special efforts to collect and analyze data on children

Children are among the most vulnerable migrants and refugees, yet are often overlooked in data efforts. Countries and international agencies should develop a research agenda to understand and address the issues that migrant and refugee children face. A child perspective should be incorporated into all stages, from devising methods for data collection to data processing and analysis.

Children's data must be kept confidential, and their privacy maintained. All actors concerned with collecting migration and asylum data must be trained in ethical standards and age-appropriate methods that take into account children's rights and needs.

### Good practices

#### **Ghana's Integrated Migration Management Approach**

(GIMMA) links ministries, departments and agencies in order to better manage migration data and support evidence-based policymaking. A Migration Unit and an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration coordinate key stakeholders, while a national migration data management framework and database help identify data sources and provide tools for data collection, data storage and the assurance of data quality.<sup>16</sup>

**Thailand's digital government project** uses unique identifiers to better link and share government data across public institutions – to better monitor migration and its impacts, and track the country's progress towards related Sustainable Development Goals, such as targets 8.8 (protecting migrant workers' rights) and 10.7 (facilitating orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration). Linked data sources include administrative data – like civil registration data, foreign workers' registration data, and immigration and social insurance records.<sup>17</sup>

In 2010, **Switzerland** introduced the **System for Household and Person Statistics** (SHAPE) to replace the traditional population census. SHAPE allows for better monitoring of migrants' integration into Swiss society by using unique identifiers that make it possible to link information from different sources and track long-term developments. SHAPE combines administrative and household survey data, connecting harmonized variables – including origin, citizenship, last country of residence, household type and size, education level, social protection and labour market status – across national agencies and institutes.<sup>18</sup>

## Endnotes

1. There were almost 9 million child refugees and children in refugee-like situations under UNHCR's mandate, while an additional estimated 2 million refugee children were registered with UNRWA and almost 1 million were in the process of applying for asylum. UNICEF analysis based on UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2016*, UNHCR, Geneva, 2017, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 2017.
2. Some had been displaced that year, others earlier. UNICEF and IOM, *Harrowing Journeys: Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation*, New York, 2017, pp. 22-23.
3. UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2016*; UNICEF and IOM, *Harrowing Journeys*, p. 22; UNICEF analysis based on UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2016*, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 2017. <<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/about-unrwa/unrwa-figures-2017>>.
4. UNICEF analysis based on UN DESA, *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 revision*, New York, 2017 and UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2016*, Geneva, 2017.
5. The term 'children on the move' refers here to children in national and international migration movements and includes those children who move or have moved alone or with their families, forcibly or through regular channels.
6. See IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, 'Child Migrants: How little we know', <<https://gmdac.iom.int/gmdac-data-briefing-10>>.
7. Refugees under UNHCR mandate only. UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2016*, Annex Tables v4, 2017, UNHCR, Geneva, 2017.
8. Some had been displaced that year, others earlier. Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, *Global Report on Internal Displacement*, 2017, Geneva, 2017, p. 74.
9. Migrant stock data describe the number of migrants living in a country who were born abroad. UN DESA, *International Migration Report 2017: Highlights*, New York, 2017, p. 3.
10. See IOM, *More than numbers: How migration data can deliver real-life benefits for migrants and governments*, IOM and McKinsey & Company, 2018.
11. Global Migration Group, *Handbook for Improving the Production and Use of Migration Data for Development*, New York, 2017; Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics, *International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics and Technical Report on Statistics of Internally Displaced Persons*, forthcoming, under global consultation; United Nations Expert Group Meeting, 'Improving Migration Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda: Recommendations', New York, 2017; UN DESA, IOM and OECD, *Improving Data for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, New York, 2017; International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, *Strengthening Migration Data, Research and Training, in the Context of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, 2017; UN DESA, *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, Revision 3, New York, 2016; IOM, 'International Migration Statistics', Global Thematic Paper.
12. IOM, <<http://migration.iom.int/europe/>>, Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat <<http://www.regionalmms.org/index.php>>.
13. Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative, <<https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org/>>.
14. International Forum on Migration Statistics, <<http://www.oecd.org/migration/forum-migration-statistics/>>.
15. For more information and background documents on EGRIS, see <<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/expert-group-on-refugee-statistics>>.
16. Gyebe, Godwin Odei, 'Initiatives Undertaken to Improve Migration Data: Ghana's experience', presented at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting, 'Improving Migration Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda', New York, 20 June 2017 and 'Ghana Integrated Migration Management Approach', <<https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/ghana/GIMMA-Information-Sheet-January-2016.pdf>>.
17. Sanonoi Buracharoen and Thirada Chaidej-Akarakul, National Statistical Office of Thailand, 'Using Administrative Sources to Compile Data for Migration-Relevant SDG Indicators Thailand', presented at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting, 'Improving Migration Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda', New York, 20 June 2017.
18. Heiniger Marcel, Federal Department of Home Affairs Federal Statistical Office, 'Definition of Migratory Status and Migration Data Sources and Indicators in Switzerland', presented at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting, 'Improving Migration Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda', New York, 20 June 2017, and Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland, 'New Statistical System on Households and Persons: Monitoring for the future', <[https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/statcom\\_seminar/New%20Statistical%20System%20on%20Households%20and%20Persons%20\(SHAPE\).pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/statcom_seminar/New%20Statistical%20System%20on%20Households%20and%20Persons%20(SHAPE).pdf)>.



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