

Media Update

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United Nations

joint Press Release

Massive data gaps leave refugee, migrant and displaced children in danger and without access to basic services

An estimated 28 million children were living in forced displacement in 2016, but the true figure is likely much higher

Download 'A Call to Action' here: <http://uni.cf/2EzKqYe>

NEW YORK, 15 February 2018 – Gaps in data covering refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and internally displaced populations are endangering the lives and wellbeing of millions of children on the move, warned five UN and partner agencies today. In '[A call to action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data](#)', UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, Eurostat and OECD together show how crucial data are to understanding the patterns of global migration and developing policies to support vulnerable groups like children.

The Call to Action confirms alarming holes in the availability, reliability, timeliness and accessibility of data and evidence that are essential for understanding how migration and forcible displacement affect children and their families. For example:

- There is recorded information on age for just 56 per cent of the refugee population under UNHCR's mandate;
- Only 20 per cent of countries or territories with data on conflict-related internally displaced persons (IDP) break it down by age;
- Nearly a quarter of countries and territories do not have age disaggregated data on migrants, including 43 per cent of countries and territories in Africa; and
- Lack of information on migrant and displaced children deprives the affected children of protection and services they need.



“Information gaps fundamentally undermine our ability to help children,” said Laurence Chandy, UNICEF Director for the Division of Data, Research and Policy. “Migrant children, particularly those who migrate alone, are often easy targets for those who would do them harm. We can’t keep children safe and provide them with lifesaving services, both in transit and at their destination, if we don’t know who they are, where they are or what they need. We urge Member States to fill these gaps with reliable disaggregated data and to improve cooperation so that data is shared and comparable.”

“Many refugee children have experienced or witnessed appalling violence and suffering in their countries of origin and sometimes also during their flight in search of protection and security. They need and deserve care and protection but in order to provide this, we need data on their identity and needs. In no area is coordination on data and strengthening capacity more important than for children, especially the most vulnerable,” said Volker Türk, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

“We need reliable and better data on child migrants to protect them and guarantee their best interests. Data disaggregation by age, sex and origin can inform policymakers of the real needs of child migrants. This will ensure that no child is left behind and that they are not exploited. All migrant children are entitled to care and protection regardless of their migratory status,” said IOM Director General William Lacy Swing.

“Time is of the essence when it comes to integration into education,” said OECD Director for Employment Labour and Social Affairs Stefano Scarpetta. “Success or failure at this vulnerable age can have lifelong labour market consequences. Only with a comprehensive knowledge – backed up by appropriate data – can we identify and address the needs of these children, better protect them and build upon their skills and capabilities as they make their way through the school system and into the labour market.”

In many countries, available national data do not include information on migrants’ and refugees’ age, sex and origin, or if they travel unaccompanied or with their families. Differing criteria for age categories and for recoding data make disaggregation extremely challenging.

This makes it very difficult to estimate accurately how many children are on the move worldwide. Data on children moving undocumented across borders,

those displaced or migrating internally, or children left behind by migrant parents, are even scarcer.

While much of global migration is positive, with children and their families moving voluntarily and safely, the experience for millions of children is neither voluntary nor safe, but fraught with risk and danger. Children who do not have access to safe and regular migration pathways often turn to irregular and dangerous routes, putting them at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. Many children lose their lives taking perilous informal migration routes – drowned at sea or lost in the desert – but their deaths regularly go unreported and uncounted.

In 2016, over 12 million children around the world were living as refugees or asylum seekers, while an estimated 23 million children were living in internal displacement – 16 million as a result of conflict and 7 million due to natural disasters. Yet the true number of children driven from their homes remains unknown and is apt to be significantly higher than the estimate because of gaps in reporting and data.

In the absence of reliable data, the risks and vulnerabilities facing children on the move remain hidden and unaddressed. In some contexts, children who cross borders irregularly may be held in detention alongside adults or prevented from accessing services that are essential for their healthy development, including education and healthcare. Even in high income countries like, the number of refugee and migrant children out of school is unknown because it is not counted.

The need for better data collection and analysis are key features of the related but distinct Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees currently being developed for adoption in 2018. While there are ongoing efforts to strengthen data collection and analysis at both the global and country levels, far more needs to be done. As Member States work towards finalizing these two agreements, the five agencies and partners urge them to address the evidence gaps and include the rights, protection and wellbeing of children as central commitments in the final texts. If these gaps are not addressed, it will be impossible to implement and monitor the Compacts and the impact they could have for children on the move.

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Note to editors:



UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, Eurostat and OECD urge Member States to address the data and evidence gaps pertaining to children on the move, and include the following child-specific considerations in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees:

1. Disaggregate data by age and sex;
2. Cover key issues relating to children affected by migration and displacement;
3. Make better use of existing data, and share it;
4. Coordinate data efforts within countries and across borders;
5. Make special efforts to collect and analyse data on children.

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About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. For more information about UNICEF and its work for children visit www.unicef.org.

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