



MISSING FROM THE STORY

THE URGENT NEED
FOR BETTER DATA TO
PROTECT **CHILDREN**
ON THE MOVE

CURRENT DATA

CRITICAL INFORMATION GAPS

PROMISING INITIATIVES

We know they number in the tens of millions. We know many face dangers and deprivations no child should experience, and violations of their rights that countries around the world have pledged to protect. But for too many children who have migrated or been displaced, their stories remain largely untold. Too many remain uncounted and unseen, missing from data collection and analysis efforts. Children on the move have a right to be heard. A first step is to count them, no matter where in the world they live or what the circumstances of their movement are.

This inaugural International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC) info brief, Data InSight #1, uses the most recent available data to describe the current situation of children on the move. Key facts and figures illuminate the scale and scope of children's movement around the globe and how data and statistics play an integral role in protecting these vulnerable children. Convincing as these data are, they are also far from complete – we explore some of the reasons why, which data are missing and how the global community can address these gaps.

As highlighted, many IDAC members are already investing in good practices at country, organizational and international level. But much more needs to be done to ensure children remain firmly rooted in any conversation about migrant and displaced persons' rights, beginning with collecting quality evidence that reflects their day-to-day reality and intense challenges.





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1 AN URGENT ISSUE

Millions of children on the move, millions at risk

The numbers are staggering:

At the end of 2020, 35.5 million children under the age of 18 were living outside their country of birth. An estimated 33.7 million children – or 1 in 69 children globally – have been displaced within their own borders or across them, mostly due to conflict and violence. Many are urgently fleeing life-threatening situations, including disasters like floods and storms.

Many move to secure their rights to an education, proper health care, economic security, or a home safe from persecution, discrimination or harm. An alarming number will travel alone, often without the protection and resources needed for a safe journey. Millions of children are also impacted by parents or caregivers that migrate without them. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis continues to add new layers of complexity and urgency to these experiences, which have yet to be widely understood or reflected in the data.

Today, more girls and boys are on the move than ever before.

The numbers point to the sheer scale of their movement, but do not capture the specific circumstances or intense risks and challenges involved. They do not capture the serious extent to which these children see their rights violated, which often sparks or forces their decision to leave home, shapes their journey and persists at their destination.

While the data we have provide compelling evidence that migrant and displaced children must be prioritized by the international community, these data are also critically limited.

Children on the move is an umbrella term that describes girls and boys who have left home for any reason, including due to conflict, violence, disasters, lack of opportunities or other threats to their well-being. They may be in transit or may have found new residency within their country or outside their country. They may be alone, or with a caregiver or parent

ASKING HARD QUESTIONS

Why have these children left home? How many are crossing borders, travelling regionally or across continents, or living in internal displacement? How many children on the move manage to keep up in the classroom, or graduate from secondary school? How many are hungry, or lack access to clean water and proper sanitation? How many see a health practitioner when needed, or travel with a disability and are able to access the support they need? How many have been left out of public health initiatives, including responses to COVID and vaccine roll-out programmes? How many have been abused, trafficked or exploited? How do they fare compared to their peers who do not have to move and are assured protection by their families, communities and governments? How many children have been 'left behind' by migrant parents or caregivers? And, how do the answers to all these questions differ for an infant or an adolescent, a girl or a boy?

Without quality data to capture this information, children on the move will continue to be seriously harmed. They will continue to miss out on the humanitarian assistance, health care, education, social and protective services, and opportunities that offer them the right to thrive and a fair chance in life.

An uncounted child is an unprotected child. Resources and support are unlikely to reach them. Interventions designed to support, assist and empower them will fail to respond to their needs. Policies and programmes will inevitably fall short. In a resource-constrained environment, this means already limited resources will be leveraged less efficiently and effectively than they could be. This means fewer children are protected and more children are facing threats to their well-being.

Yet in many countries, even basic information on children on the move – such as their age and sex – is unavailable. As COVID-19 continues to undermine the safety and security of vulnerable children even further, data that reflect the escalating insecurity of children on the move are needed more than ever. **These data gaps must be addressed with urgency.**

A LIFE TOO DANGEROUS FOR A CHILD

Migrant and displaced children often endure intense hardships that compromise their well-being. Many witness crisis destroy their communities and sever ties with friends, family and neighbours. Many miss out on an education and their basic need for food, clean water and health care goes unmet. Children on the move may be forced into child labour, exposed to trafficking, subjected to violence and exploitation, or held in immigration detention. Experiencing discrimination – during their journey, in their new community, or if they return home – is far too common. Though the physical and psychological effects of these experiences are likely to be long lasting, many children cannot access the resources to help them heal and move on. While we know the rights of migrant and displaced children are commonly violated, we need to know more about the circumstances of these injustices in order to prevent them.

Children on the move face serious deprivations. A 2018 UNICEF U-Report poll found that among 3,922 migrants and refugees between the ages of 14 and 24:



49%

» HAD NOT SEEN A DOCTOR WHEN NEEDED



58%

» LOST 1 OR MORE YEARS OF SCHOOL



UNICEF A Right to Be Heard, 2018.

COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN

Children who have migrated or live in displacement are protected by a strong international legal framework (see p. 42) that underscores the need for quality data – both

quantitative and qualitative. By adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and committing to negotiated intergovernmental agreements like the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), countries around the globe have pledged to better protect these vulnerable children and respond to their unique needs. This includes collecting data and deriving statistics that accurately depict their lives and spell out their protection and development needs. These data provide a necessary measure of how well we are honouring our commitment to children and the progress toward achieving the SDGs and upholding the compacts.

Regionally and globally, action is being taken to improve data and statistics – but these efforts are still leaving out too many hard-to-reach populations – including children on the move.



WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL DATA ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE (IDAC)?

- A cross-sectoral, global coalition that protects and empowers children on the move by improving data and statistics on migrant and displaced children. This evidence is vital to effective, sustainable policymaking and programming
- An open platform for Member States, international and regional organizations, NGOs, think tanks, academia and civil society to share insights and expertise to fill the data and knowledge gaps on migrant and displaced children

INVESTING IN SOLUTIONS

The International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC) is spearheading efforts to fill data gaps by providing an open platform where global champions of children's rights in migration and displacement contexts work hand-in-hand with partners across disciplines to derive creative solutions to data challenges. Like children on the move themselves, IDAC members span the globe (see p. 39). Guided by the Secretariat (Eurostat, IOM, OECD, UNHCR and UNICEF (Chair)), members work at country level, regionally or internationally – perhaps with refugee populations, large internally displaced populations, children in transit, or children who have newly arrived and are beginning a new life, many of whom have fled situations of great crisis. IDAC members are united by a common purpose: to end the invisibility of children on the move.

IDAC is driven by the conviction that it is only by bringing together all concerned stakeholders and pooling relevant data sources and knowledge that the international community can fully comprehend the scale and magnitude of the protection and development needs of migrant and displaced children. This brief is one of many IDAC efforts to bring the current situation of children on the move to the fore and expose their many risks and deprivations. It presents not only the available data and statistics but also, critically, why and where the data are falling short and what investments might be done to close the gaps. By highlighting good practices from around the world, this publication also shows existing tools and mechanisms with the potential to be replicated, scaled up or used as a building block for more inclusive and strengthened data systems for children on the move.

When robust evidence informs decision-making, children on the move are given the chance they deserve. Because to be counted is to be seen and heard – and that is a right to which every child is entitled.



RAPIDLY EVOLVING SITUATIONS AND TIMELY DATA

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely exacerbating the already significant data gaps about children on the move. Evidence is urgently needed to reflect how migrant and displaced children are being affected by this global crisis, not only to inform the short- and longer-term response but to also better prepare for future crises. How have the vulnerabilities commonly faced by children on the move shifted – their economic security, food and living conditions, and risks of exploitation and abuse? What about access to health care? To what extent have these children been able to adhere to health and safety measures? With so many school-age children now relying on remote learning, how many are able to continue their education, and how will their longer-term success at school be impacted? How are mobility restrictions affecting family reunification and children's ability to maintain personal ties, particularly among trans-national families? Evidence is also needed on policy responses, the inclusion of child migrants in national recovery plans, and access to protection. Standardized data collection methods that allow for disaggregation by relevant characteristics – age, gender and migratory status – are essential at this critical moment for child migrants, whether embarking on their journey, in transit, or at their destination.

For more information, see IDAC issue brief #1: [A Web of Insecurity: Gendered risks and vulnerabilities for children on the move during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

KEY TERMS RELATED TO CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Many children's stories of migration and displacement are not linear. Refugees, for instance, are often first internally displaced before crossing a border. The statistics and definitions used in this report provide a framework for telling these stories – but these terms are not a substitute for children's lived experiences.

Asylum seekers are individuals seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim is yet to be decided upon by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker.

Children on the move is an umbrella term that describes girls and boys who have left home for any reason, including conflict, violence, disasters, lack of opportunities, or due to other threats to their well-being. They can be in transit, asylum seekers, or have found new residence within their country or outside their country. They may be alone or with a caregiver or parent.

Displaced persons have been forced or are obliged to flee or to leave their home or place of habitual residence as a result of, or in order to avoid, the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or because of natural or human-made disasters. This term includes internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been forced or are obliged to leave their place of habitual residence (i.e., usual residence at the time of a displacement event) and are found within the internationally recognized borders of their country.

Internal migrants are those who are moving, or have moved, within a State for the purpose of establishing a new temporary or permanent residence or because of displacement.

Irregular migrants are people who move, or have moved, across an international border and are not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.

Migrants are defined as “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons” by the International Organization for Migration. However, there is no internationally agreed upon definition of migrants – usage varies by context and purpose. For data collection purposes, the United Nations Statistics Division defines an international migrant as “any person who changes his or her country of usual residence”. To calculate the actual number of international migrants, the United Nations Population Division bases its estimates on official statistics on the foreign-born or those with foreign citizenship. Most of these definitions include refugees and asylum seekers, even though persons in these situations will have considerably different reasons for leaving, vulnerabilities, legal status, and challenges, etc.

Mixed migration refers to movement in which a number of people are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation.

Refugees are individuals who have been granted protection in another country because of a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees are defined and protected by international law.

Regular migration is migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination.

Unaccompanied and separated children have been separated from their parents or primary caregivers. If they are accompanied by other adult relatives, they are considered separated; if no adult relative is caring for them, they are considered unaccompanied.

Undocumented migrants are non-nationals who enter or stay in a country without the appropriate documentation.



2 THE DATA & THE GAPS

What we know about migrant and displaced children, and why so many are falling through the cracks

Data play a critical role in our commitment to upholding the rights of children on the move. They provide vital insight into children's movement – where it is happening, why it is happening, and what these often dangerous and difficult times of transition entail. Data offer a lens into the day-to-day vulnerabilities these children face. Too many children are forcibly displaced or have had to flee home because of disasters. Many will see their rights violated to an alarming degree, facing violence, exploitation or trafficking. Data shine a light on these harrowing experiences, ensuring children who become refugees or asylum seekers have access to the protection to which they are entitled. They help clarify where vulnerable children are missing out on vital services and support and where we need to do more to protect their well-being.

The key facts on the following pages provide the most up-to-date snapshot available of children on the move. Many of them are based on limited data and are the result of statistical modelling and estimations. They include a degree of – but often unknown – uncertainty in relation to the true numbers. Although hindered by limitations, the numbers provide critical evidence to inform the global outlook on children on the move.

Accurate, timely and disaggregated data are needed to identify the children who are being left out. This section provides insight into which data are missing, and why, while also highlighting efforts, investments and actions to illustrate how to close these gaps.



9 FACTS ABOUT CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

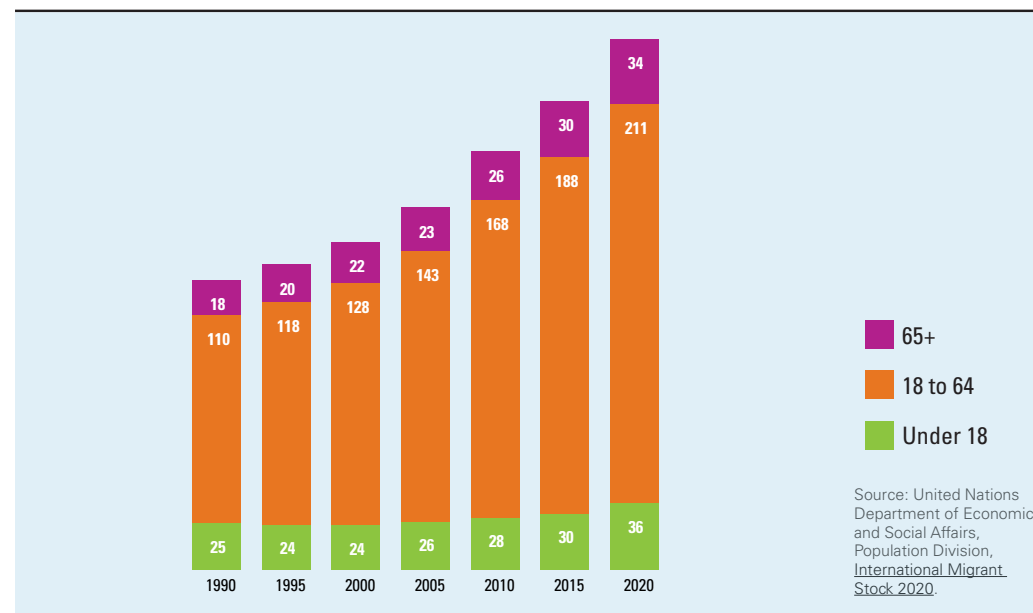


INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT CHILDREN

FACT 1: In 2020, there were an estimated 35.5 million international child migrants globally, the largest number ever recorded. Around one in 66 children worldwide living outside the country of her or his birth was considered a migrant

The global total of 281 million international migrants reported by the United Nations¹ captures any individual living anywhere outside her or his country of birth at a specific point in time (in this case, mid-2020). It includes persons from a range of backgrounds and circumstances, with different needs, challenges and aspirations: regular and irregular migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and those who have recently emigrated or who left their home country decades earlier.²

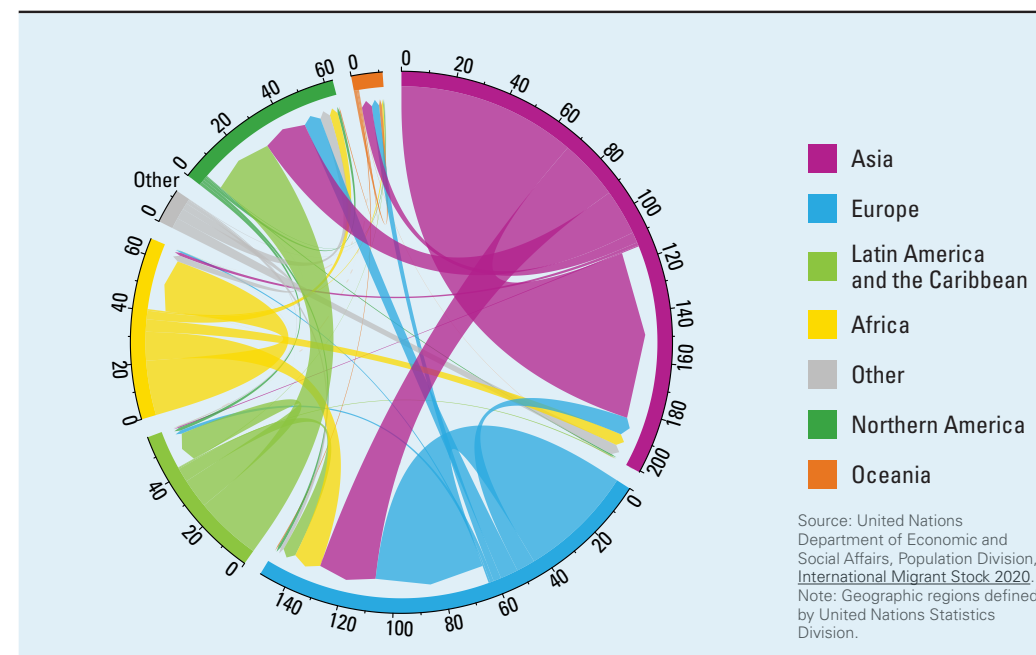
FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS BY AGE, 1990–2020 (IN MILLIONS)



FACT 2: Most international child migrants move within their global region

Of the 115 million migrants from countries in Asia, 60 per cent had moved to another Asian country. This was similar in Europe (70 per cent), Africa (52 per cent), and Oceania (56 per cent), but not in the Americas, where only 26 per cent of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean stayed within the same region, and in Northern America (only the United States and Canada), with 25 per cent. Although data on children for these corridors may have been collected, country-level analysis is not done with age as a factor – but the movement for children will likely not look very different from the pattern shown here.

FIGURE 2: DIRECTION AND SIZE OF REGIONAL CORRIDORS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, 2020 (IN MILLIONS)



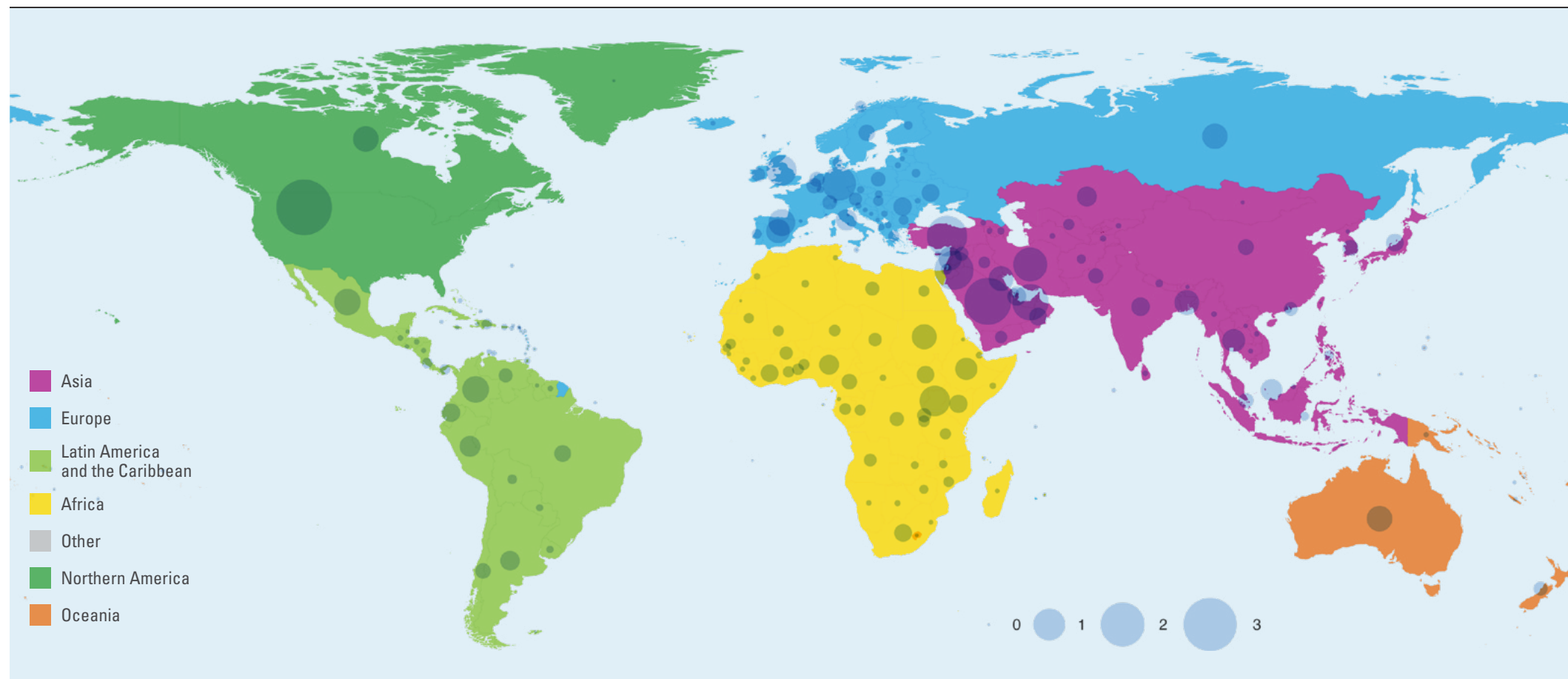
1. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *International Migrant Stock 2020*.

2. **Migrant stock** counts migrants referring to their usual residence at a special time, as opposed to **migrant flow**, which refers to the number of persons immigrating (or emigrating) every year into (or out of) a country. Although 'country of birth' is the preferred criteria to determine the migratory status in the context of migrant stock, 'citizenship' is used instead if information on country of birth is missing.

FACT 3: Half of the world's international child migrants live in just 15 countries

The United States is home to the largest group of international migrant children, numbering 3.3 million. In some countries – for example, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Canada and the United States – children comprise a relatively small percentage of the migrant population, but those countries' large overall migrant populations result in a large total number of migrant children. Other countries – like Jordan, Iran and Uganda – have high proportions of children in their overall migrant population (45.7 per cent, 41.9 per cent and 53.9 per cent, respectively). In many cases, the majority of international migrant children are refugees. In Turkey, for example, almost all of the 1.7 million child migrants are refugee children from neighbouring Syria.

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE BY COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE, 2020 (IN MILLIONS)



This map does not reflect a position by IDAC, its members or contributors to this publication on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area has not yet been determined.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [International Migrant Stock 2020](#).

DISPLACEMENT

FACT 4: The number of children forcibly displaced, internally and internationally, has nearly doubled over the last 10 years

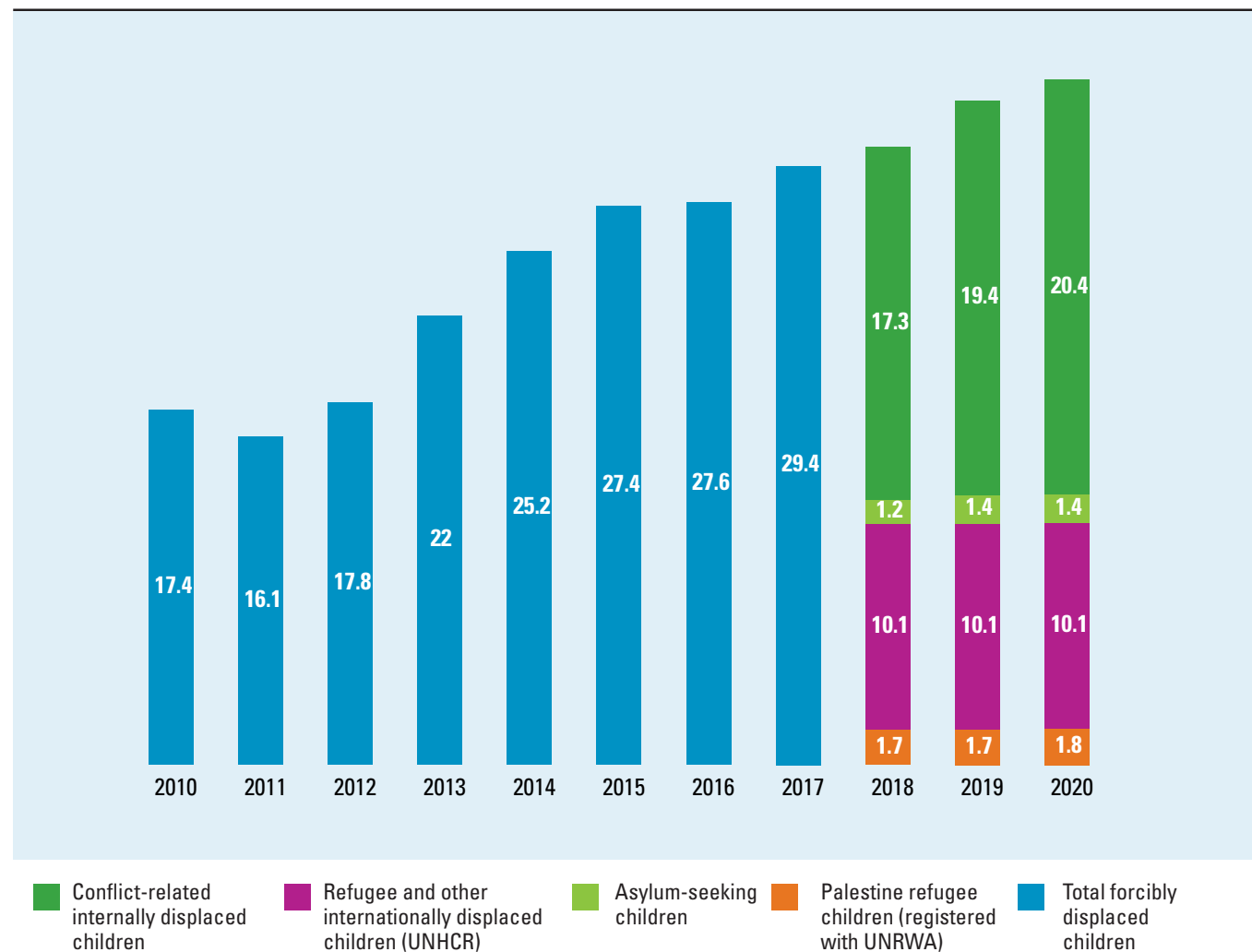
At the end of 2020, UNHCR reported that 82.4 million people worldwide were living in forced displacement within their own country or across borders, driven from home by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order.

Children accounted for more than two in five of the world's forcibly displaced people.³ An estimated 20.4 million were internally displaced children, another 10.1 million were children displaced across borders under UNHCR mandate,⁴ and 1.4 million were children in the process of applying for asylum. In addition, 1.8 million Palestine refugee children were registered with UNRWA. The number of children displaced as a consequence of conflict and violence and other rights violations has increased markedly over the last 10 years (with the exception of 2011), from 17.4 million in 2010 to 33.7 million in 2020. This trend does not show any signs of slowing down.

3. This figure differs slightly from published UNICEF data (see data.unicef.org) due to differences in methodology of estimation, which must accommodate the incomplete available data on numbers of displaced children. Similarly, in Figure 4, numbers for 2020 are not directly comparable to the other years.

4. Unless otherwise stated, all references to children/people displaced across borders in this document refers to refugees, people in refugee-like situations and Venezuelans displaced abroad.

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED CHILDREN, 2010–2020 (IN MILLIONS)



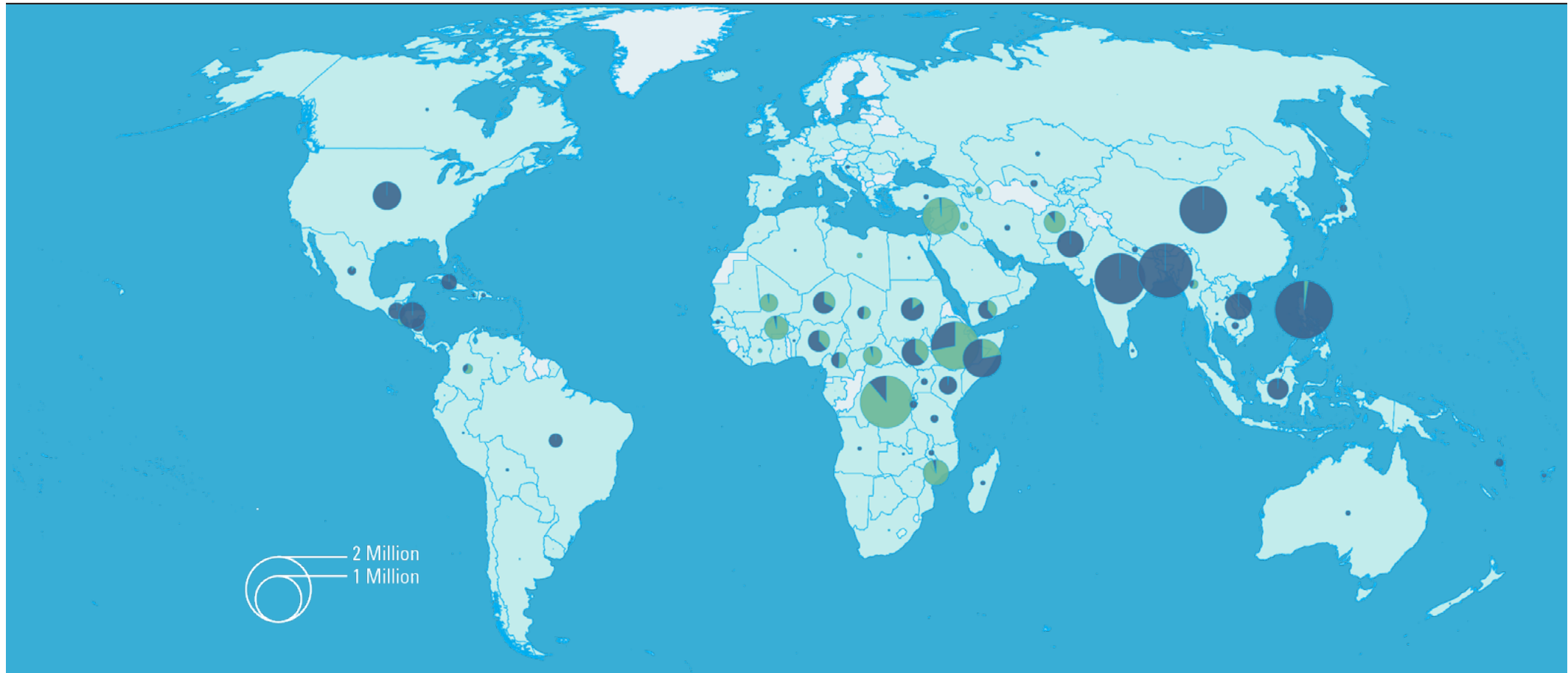
Source: Estimation based on United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020](#), 2021; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Global Internal Displacement Database](#), 2021; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, [dashboard](#), 2021.



FACT 5: In 2020 alone, there were an estimated 14.6 million new internal displacements of children globally. Disasters drove three of four of these displacements

Conflict and violence resulted in 4.6 million new displacements of children within their own country, and almost 10 million displacements due to natural disasters. The majority of conflict-related new internal displacements occurred in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, while the bulk of those due to disasters, mostly weather-related events such as storms and floods, took place in Southern and South-Eastern Asia. The number of internally displaced children is likely to dramatically increase over the next 25 years, with climate change estimated to place 1.2 billion people at risk of internal and cross-border displacement by 2050.⁵

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN BY CAUSE OF DISPLACEMENT, 2020



Conflict related Disaster related

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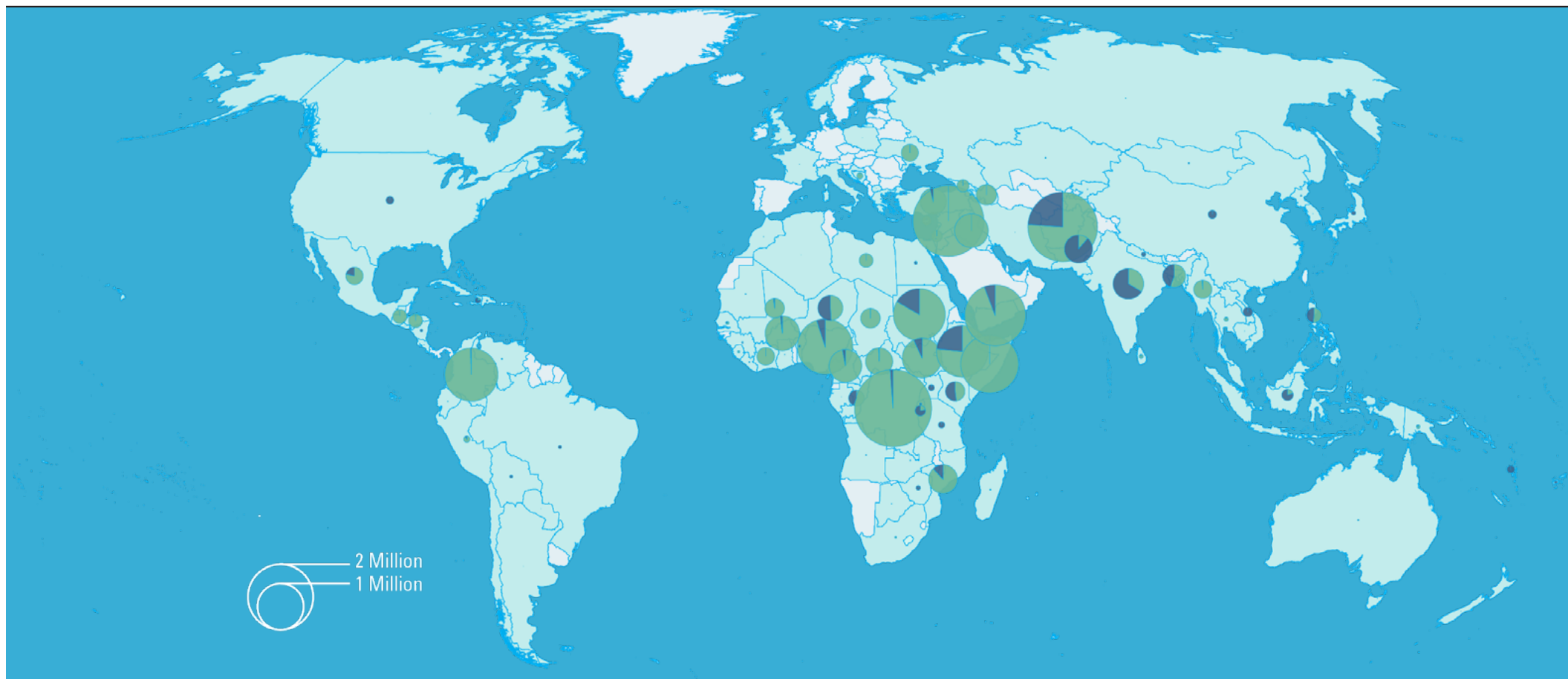
Source: Estimation based on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Global Internal Displacement Database](#), 2021.

5. Institute for Economics and Peace, [Ecological Threat Register 2020: Understanding ecological threats, resilience and peace](#), IEP, 2020.

FACT 6: Conflict and violence are the main reasons children are displaced within their own country

Displacements due to conflict and violence typically last far longer than those caused by disasters due to the often protracted nature of conflicts. This results in more children living in internal displacement at any given time than being newly displaced during a year. At the end of 2020, there were an estimated 23.3 million children who had been internally displaced; the vast majority of them (20.4 million) because of conflict and violence – which is twice the number of children displaced across borders as refugees. Most of these conflict-related internally displaced children lived in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan.

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN (DISPLACEMENT STOCK) BY CAUSE OF DISPLACEMENT, 2020



Conflict related Disaster related

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Source: Estimation based on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Global Internal Displacement Database](#), 2021.

FACT 7: The proportion of child refugees among children living outside their country of birth has increased by more than 60 per cent since 2005

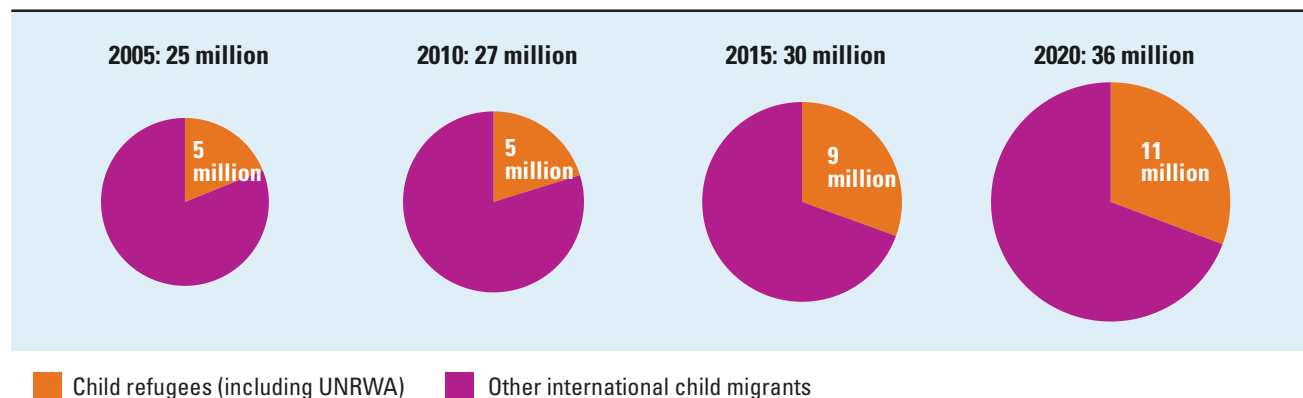
From 2005 to 2020, the global number of child refugees⁶ among children living abroad more than doubled from 5 million to 11 million, representing an increase of 132 per cent. By comparison, the total number of international child migrants rose by only 42 per cent. The proportion of adults who are refugees is less than 6 per cent, meaning the burden of this precarious existence is disproportionately borne by children.

FACT 8: The refugee population is much younger than the foreign-born population, with children accounting for nearly half of all refugees

Children are disproportionately represented among refugee populations, comprising 46 per cent of refugees, versus a 13 per cent share of migrant stock.⁷ This is primarily due to the fact that non-forced migration is often driven by those seeking better opportunities for work and education and is therefore predominantly linked to young adults and those of working age. In addition, as immigrant populations age with time, their average age increases. Forced displacement, on the other hand, impacts the population more randomly and is therefore more similar to the general age structure of the population – in fact, children and women are usually even slightly over-represented in displaced populations.

6. This figure reflects refugees and refugee-like populations under UNHCR mandate and Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA.
7. Migrant stock refers to the foreign-born population and includes refugees.

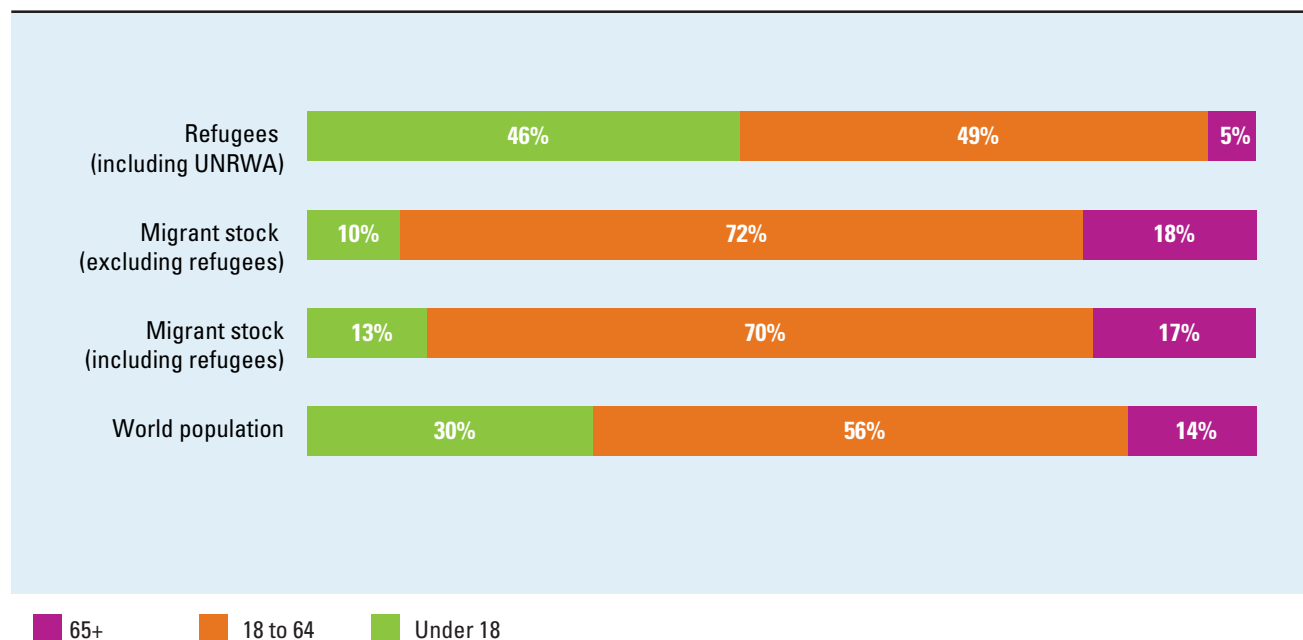
FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE AND SHARE OF REFUGEES, 2005 TO 2020 (IN MILLIONS)



Note: Without Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in West Bank and Gaza since they are not considered 'international migrants'.

Source: Estimation based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [International Migrant Stock 2020](#); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [GlobalTrends: Forced displacement in 2020](#), 2021; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, [dashboard](#), 2021.

FIGURE 8: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF REFUGEES, INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND TOTAL POPULATION, 2020 (PERCENTAGE)



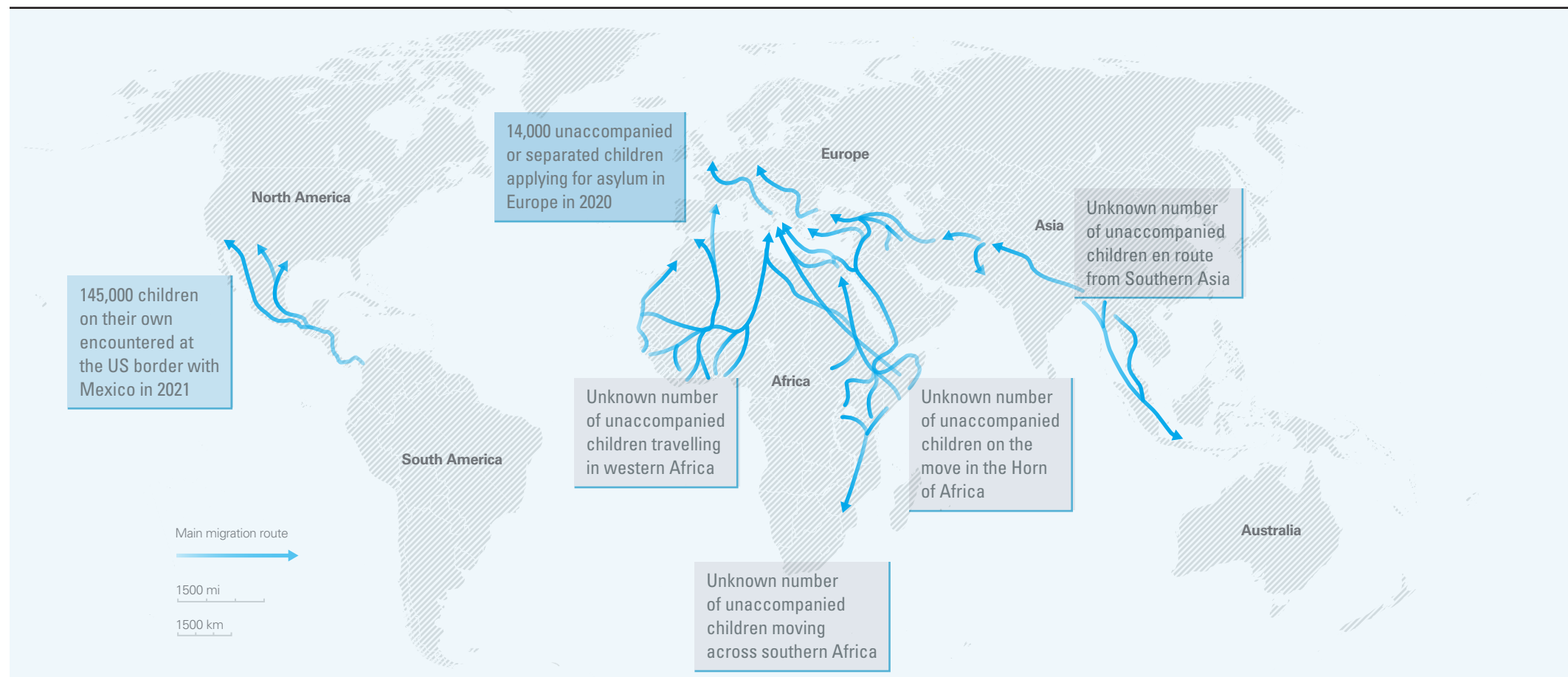
Note: Without Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in West Bank and Gaza since they are not considered 'international migrants'.

Source: Estimation based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [International Migrant Stock 2020](#); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [GlobalTrends: Forced displacement in 2020](#), 2021; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, [dashboard](#), 2021; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [World Population Prospects: The 2019 revision](#), 2019.

FACT 9: Crisis and conflict drive more children to travel alone

The number of children travelling unaccompanied (that is, without a parent or legal guardian) along the world's major migration routes is largely unknown – but data from major arrival points suggest an alarming number are in this dangerous situation. In Europe, 14,000 unaccompanied or separated children were among asylum seekers in 2020⁸ and at the US border with Mexico, a large and increasing number of children are arriving unaccompanied – 145,000 children in 2021.⁹ The flow of children travelling alone fluctuates with specific crises and conflicts, as seen with the 2015 migration crisis in Europe, when around 103,000 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in European countries – almost half of them from Afghanistan (46 per cent). Given recent events, the already high numbers of minors leaving Afghanistan on their own are likely to increase. During the pandemic, the number of asylum applications decreased globally by 1 million in 2020, but the share of unaccompanied or separated children applying for asylum proportionally increased from 1 per cent (25,000) to 2 per cent (21,000) of total asylum applications in 2020.¹⁰

FIGURE 9: GLOBAL MAJOR MIXED MIGRATION ROUTES AND WHAT IS KNOWN AND UNKNOWN ABOUT UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN ON THE MOVE



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Source: Eurostat Statistical Recovery Dashboard, 2021; U.S. Customs and Border Protection, fiscal year 2021; Conant, Eve, 'The World's Congested Human Migration Routes in 5 Maps', *National Geographic*, 19 September 2015, and UNICEF, *A Child Is a Child*, 2017.

8. Based on data from 32 countries reporting to Eurostat.

9. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, data from fiscal year 2021 (October 2020 to September 2021).

10. UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020*, 2021.

WHEN PARENTS MIGRATE ON THEIR OWN

Millions of children around the world are deeply impacted by migration without leaving home. The children of parents or primary caregivers who migrate for work without their families face their own set of risks, challenges and opportunities. The impacts of this decision on a child's life can be simultaneously beneficial and harmful – remittances often provide a vital lifeline to food, shelter, health care and an education. However, separation from parents can also introduce other disadvantages and potential dangers.

Little is known about the number of children in this situation or how and where they need support to thrive. There are no official global estimates on these children, and data on undocumented and seasonal migration are limited. The few national estimates available demonstrate that millions of children are likely impacted. An estimated 9 million children in the Philippines, or one in three, have at least one parent living abroad. In Moldova, 37 per cent of households with children have at least one member who has migrated for work. In China, 61 million children (22 per cent) live in households where both parents have migrated to urban areas.

These children must be recognized for the unique ways in which migration shifts their lives, and be included in conversations about the intersection of migration and childhood. This entails the vital first step of collecting the data and evidence that capture their numbers and experiences.

Source: UNICEF, 'Children "Left Behind"', working paper; UNICEF, [COVID-19 Impact on the Remittances: Assessment of coping mechanisms of families with children from the Republic of Moldova](#), 2021.



WHAT IS MISSING FROM THE DATA ON CHILDREN ON THE MOVE?

These data make a clear case that children are moving on a massive scale – and many are doing so in highly volatile situations. But these numbers are often derived from estimation with many assumptions and are far from complete. Some estimates will fall short, while others will overestimate. This means the real scale of migration and displacement is unknown. **While data are incomplete in many aspects, some key points – and solutions – are summarized below.**

Large data gaps on migrant and displaced persons obscure some of the most basic information about children on the move



4 IN 10

countries with data on refugees do not provide reliable data on age



ALMOST 9 IN 10

countries and territories with conflict-related internally displaced persons do not disaggregate the data by age



3 IN 10

countries and territories do not have age-disaggregated migrant stock data

UNPD, *International Migration 2020*, 2020; IDMC, *Number of IDPs by Age at the End of 2019, 2020*; UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2019, 2020*.

Missing populations

For many populations of children on the move, there are simply blank areas on the global map that obscure the details of their movement. Data on migration flow – the number of persons moving during a given year from one country to another for a substantial amount of time – are not available for many countries, and when they are, they are often not disaggregated by age. This means large portions of children's journeys may be missing, while also making it difficult to track integration in host countries or re-integration in the case of returns.

Children travelling on their own are one of the most vulnerable migrant and displaced groups in the world. But data about them are generally available only for European countries, limited to those who have applied for asylum, and for selected other countries or situations (such as unaccompanied minors apprehended at the United States-Mexico border or those arriving via the Mediterranean Sea in Italy, Spain or Greece). For most other countries, the scale of this phenomenon remains largely unknown, which makes protection measures almost impossible and leaves an untold number of unaccompanied travelling children at great risk of serious harm.

Similarly, information on mixed migration movements – usually referring to flows of people travelling together in a generally irregular manner and over the same routes but for different reasons – is sparse and only available for selected regions and routes. More is known about mixed migration movements in western Africa towards Europe than for most other regions in the world. But even here, information about the number of families and children, their motivations and aspirations are captured in non-representative interviews and selective tracking. Other large mixed migration routes can be found across the Horn of Africa, in parts of Southern Asia, and along the Central America corridor.

DATA AT WORK to protect children and young people who move in the Horn of Africa

UNICEF Innocenti synthesized findings from three sister studies on the experiences of migrant children and young people in Ethiopia, Somaliland and Puntland, and Sudan in order to address the evidence gap on child and youth migration in the Horn of Africa. Surveys conducted in 2019 and 2020 involved 1,290 migrant children (aged 14–17 years) and young people (aged 18–24 years) in multiple settings. These were supplemented by 224 qualitative interviews with multiple stakeholders across the three countries.

By learning directly from migrant and displaced children, the research affirmed that migrant children and young people's access to many services is poor, and the priority needs they identified (education, financial support, support finding a job) are not being met. Cost and location of services, exclusion based on language, and the lack of identity documents were noted as key barriers.

In addition to its empirical findings, the study also identified a number of methodological adaptations and approaches to data collection and analysis to ensure strict compliance with ethical guidelines for responsible research and UNICEF's 'do no harm' principle of evidence generation.

This work provides a vital multidimensional understanding of migration – appreciating that it is neither linear nor straightforward, and while it carries risks, it is not necessarily perceived as negative or dangerous by migrants themselves. Policies and programmes therefore need to be highly adaptive, recognizing the lived experience of children and young people who move and, most importantly, working with them to reduce the risks inherent in unsafe forms of migration.



Lack of data on well-being and development of children on the move

Data that reflect the life, development and well-being of migrant and displaced children are sparse, including about living conditions, safety and protection needs, health conditions, and access to health care and education. Even with regard to regular migrant children, much of this is unknown because, although they may be part of official data collection efforts, relevant data are not disaggregated by migratory status. This means these children are often invisible in national statistics. For many displaced children – and in particular, those in mixed migration movements – this information is not collected systematically and is only known for selected situations and migration routes.

DATA AT WORK to measure migrant children's integration and well-being

The European Commission and OECD joined forces to comprehensively measure, monitor and compare integration outcomes of migrants and their children across all OECD and EU countries, as well as selected G20 countries. Of 74 indicators, around 20 cover young people with a migrant background – defined as either native-born children of migrant parents or migrants who arrived at a very young age. Since they were raised and educated in their parents' host country, these children's integration outcomes are considered a yardstick of host countries' integration efforts.

Child-specific indicators are organized by five themes: i) contextual indicators (immigrant household composition, age distribution, regions of parental origin); ii) education and skills at various ages (early childhood education and care; reading skills, sense of belonging and well-being at school at age 15; early school leaving and transition to the labour market); iii) living conditions (relative child poverty); iv) civic engagement (voter participation) and v) social integration (perceived discrimination).

The European and national household and social surveys are the main data sources, as well as [PISA](#), the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, which measures 15-year-olds' ability to use reading, mathematics and science skills to meet real-life challenges, conducted every three years.

More information at OECD/EU, '[Settling In 2018: Indicators of immigrant integration](#)', and OECD, '[PISA 2018, Results \(Volume II\): Where all students can succeed](#)', 2019.



DATA AT WORK to measure children's risk of exploitation

Not every migrant and refugee face the same risk of exploitation or abuse – data provide a powerful resource to predict these risks and relevant factors. In 2017, UNICEF and IOM collected testimonies from 22,000 migrants and refugees, including more than 11,000 young people aged 14 to 25 years, in Italy, Greece and other entry points in Europe. Their analysis, captured in [Harrowing Journeys](#), enabled the identification of important risk factors for children travelling across the Mediterranean Sea, associated with origin, age, education level and travel arrangement. While certain characteristics offered some protection, others increased an individual's vulnerability.

The data revealed that a male migrant on the Central Mediterranean Route had a 71 per cent probability of experiencing exploitation. The longer his time in transit, the higher his risk of experiencing exploitation. If he came from sub-Saharan Africa, his risk escalated to 83 per cent, compared to 49 per cent if he were from any other region (e.g., the Middle East or South Asia).

Any migrant and refugee without an education faced increased risk of being exploited, independent of place of origin and age. Those travelling alone were more likely to experience exploitation than children in a group.

These significant findings demonstrate what good data can do: Generate insightful analysis to pinpoint the most vulnerable children on the move and pave the way to better protections and outcomes in their journeys.



DATA AT WORK to assess internal displacement's impact on education

How does internal displacement impact children's education – both among displaced children and also among children from host communities? In many settings, the answers are unknown. To bridge this knowledge gap, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) has developed a survey tool that captures children's school experiences in displacement contexts around the world.

A global initiative, the data collection tool was designed to collect standardized data in any country or displacement context, whether conflict- or disaster-related. The research itself – localized case studies conducted among 300 respondents, half from the displaced and half from the non-displaced local community – asks questions about school attendance, direct and indirect costs of education, satisfaction with the quality of education, barriers to education, and more. Reflecting the experiences of children on the ground, findings are intimately tied to local settings. While the results are not statistically representative at the national level, they are indicative of the impacts of internal displacement on a specific group of people (displaced and non-displaced).

These data are comparable across countries and contexts, and over time. They highlight areas where more support is needed and can help humanitarian actors and other stakeholders working on displacement prioritize and tailor interventions. Findings in Colombia and Somalia, for instance, are being used by OCHA in humanitarian needs overviews, and in Nigeria, the Norwegian Refugee Council is using results to inform its humanitarian operations.

To date, case studies have taken place in nine countries with high levels of internal displacement, with two more planned for 2022.

WHY ARE THESE CHILDREN MISSING FROM THE DATA?

Data collection, analysis and use to capture the realities of children on the move are hindered by a number of challenges.

Lack of effective data collection and timely data sources

Many countries do not have a fully functioning registration system to record migrants and refugees. Estimates of children on the move are often based on census data. Population censuses are costly and usually conducted only every 10 years, and migrant and displaced populations are often left out, especially in developing countries. Even when collected data are quite detailed, they become easily outdated and data points are spread far over time.

Data gaps also exist due to incomplete data collection. For example, not all countries were able to conduct a census during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and vital information on children who have migrated or been displaced is missing. This leads to significant gaps in the availability of 2020 migrant stock data between regions: High-income countries show the highest coverage (e.g., 87 per cent for Europe and Northern America), compared to 43 per cent coverage in Central and Southern Asian countries, and 56 per cent in Northern Africa and Western Asia countries. Published data on migrant stock and critical trends therefore rely heavily on modelling and extrapolating the available data based on a number of different assumptions.

The mobile nature of migrant populations and small sample sizes present challenges for inclusion of migrants in many household surveys, which act as a vital lifeline for many vulnerable populations to assistance and services. A limited number of countries conduct specific migration surveys, but these are often not performed on an annual basis and may miss important shifts in the lives of migrant and refugee children.



DATA AT WORK to reflect Venezuelan children's experience in Colombia

One of the largest displacement crises in the world, more than 5.6 million Venezuelan refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants have been reported by the joint UNHCR-IOM Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. Nearly a third, or 1.8 million, are registered in Colombia, and an estimated 38 per cent are children, according to national statistics. How are these girls and boys coping in their new environment, compared to their Colombian peers? Data analysis of Colombia's 2019 Quality of Life household survey found serious deprivations to their well-being:

- School absenteeism among Venezuelan migrant children was six times higher than among Colombian children, with survey findings showing changes in place of residence as the main hurdle to education
- Nearly 8 in 10 children were not registered in the national health system, primarily due to a lack of proper identification or to financial constraints
- Just one in four migrant children attended regular health check-ups, compared to three in four Colombian children
- Pregnancy among adolescent Venezuelan girls was double that of Colombian girls



DATA AT WORK for children on the move in Greece

At the end of 2019, an estimated 42,500 migrant children were present in Greece. More than 4,000 of them arrived alone, per national statistics. The Hellenic Statistical Authority and UNICEF Greece Country Office are working together to support these children through improved quality of data and statistics, with a strong focus on equity and inclusion.

Disaggregated data on arrivals are now being collected from the Reception and Identification Service, which oversees more than 10,000 children currently residing in 28 open accommodation sites and six reception centres. It is capturing sex, country of origin, age group (0–5, 6–11, 12–14, 15–18 years) and whether a child is unaccompanied and separated.

A national online web-based database has replaced the manual system and now provides a vital snapshot of the situation of unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, visualizing key indicators for ease of use. Using a child-centric approach rather than a referral-centric one, the bi-weekly dashboard captures systematic, disaggregated data on location, age, sex, country of origin, and type of accommodation for unaccompanied children. Fostering data harmonization, it allows multiple users to work together in the same environment based on their assigned roles and access rights. The safe, secure storage system provides automatic analysis of key indicators based on an agreed analytical framework.

Lack of disaggregation

Migratory or displacement status is rarely included in administrative data systems and in many other data sources, resulting in a large gap in data and statistics on migration and displacement.

In addition, lack of disaggregation by age makes it more challenging to generate child-specific data. Age coverage of refugee data is patchy at best. Among countries and areas reporting on refugees, 42 per cent do not collect or provide reliable information on age. Low-income countries and those with large refugee populations usually have a comparatively high age coverage due in large part to UNHCR registration being undertaken. In countries where government agencies are responsible for registration and reporting of refugees, the availability of age-disaggregated data can be worse. This includes a vast majority of European and Northern American countries that do not report these numbers or that provide insufficient data on their refugee population by age.

Other gaps exist concerning refugee populations outside of camps – those living in rural areas and, increasingly, in towns and cities. Here, even basic information on their sheer number is often missing, not to mention key demographic information or their living conditions. UNHCR and UNICEF are currently working together to fill these gaps, by improving statistical estimation methods of the size of these invisible child refugee populations.

The situation of internally displaced children is even worse. Only around 14 per cent of countries report their population of internally displaced persons disaggregated by age. This means the true impact of internal displacement on children remains largely unknown. UNICEF and IDMC estimate the number of these children based on the national population's age structure. This method provides a rough estimate but is not enough to provide the necessary level of detail to support programmatic work.



Lack of standardization

Data on migration and displacement also suffer from lack of standardization. For example, to compensate for poor data availability, both birth and citizenship are used as criteria for determining immigration status when calculating the international migrant stock. But in a substantial number of cases, these terms do not coincide. In countries with *jus sanguinis* (e.g., France and Germany), a child's nationality is determined by that of the parents, irrespective of where she or he was born, meaning children of immigrants will have foreign citizenship despite being born in the country. These children will be counted as migrants. In countries determining nationality by birthplace of the child (e.g., the United States), these same children would not appear as migrants in the statistics, but as second-generation immigrants, they may have the same or very similar experiences as children who migrated into the country. This leads to an undercounting of children impacted by migration and displacement and renders their specific needs and challenges invisible. It can also inhibit meaningful cross-country comparison.

Differences in how age is reported pose another challenge in calculating comparable age-disaggregated data. Countries may report the age of migrants or displaced persons by single age, five-year age groups, or by even broader age groups covering large and diverse age ranges – raising the concern that infants, for instance, will face vastly different challenges during migration than adolescents.

DATA AT WORK to leverage SDG indicators and protect forcibly displaced children

Data disaggregation by relevant groups plays a key role in promoting children's well-being. It helps us monitor progress toward achieving the SDGs, understand children's living conditions and welfare, and inform policy and programme development. In 2020, UNHCR and the Joint IDP Profiling Service published an analysis of 57 publicly available datasets to determine how they could be used to identify forcibly displaced populations. In particular, the study showed how these data could be leveraged when performing disaggregation for the 12 SDG indicators by forced displacement identified by EGRIS.

The report identified several key technical challenges, including: i) studies only covered targeted segments of forced displacement populations; ii) sampling universes did not include the forcibly displaced; iii) lack or inconsistency of identifying variables, resulting in difficulties identifying the forcibly displaced in studies covering multiple populations; and iv) low sample sizes in the absence of booster samples of this specific population.

With the adoption of the new international statistical standards, International Recommendations on Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (IRIS) and International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS), consistent identification of forcibly displaced people, including children, is expected to improve. So too is comparability of data disaggregated by displacement, including on particularly vulnerable groups, such as children on the move.





DATA AT WORK to ease integration of unaccompanied child refugees in Norway

Around 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees have been granted permanent residency and have settled in Norway since the 1990s. By using a combination of administrative registers, Statistics Norway is able to monitor their demographic developments and living conditions, compared to other refugees, other immigrant groups, and the rest of the population. This has enabled detailed annual studies reflecting the experiences of child refugees arriving on their own and how they can be supported to thrive in Norwegian society.

Data from the Central Population Register (CPR) forms the basis for all Norwegian population statistics – including unaccompanied child refugees who settle in Norway. CPR captures information such as place or country of birth and date of immigration for people not born in Norway but does not have a variable on refugee status. To close this gap, Statistics Norway links CPR data with data from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration about all persons who have been granted residency in Norway, including detailed information about the grounds for settlement (or reason for immigration). Then, using a 'reason for migration' variable, population data are linked to national education, employment and income registers, enabling detailed insights into how different groups integrate in Norwegian society, including unaccompanied refugee children.

The linked data can be broken down by important variables such as sex, age, years of residence, country background, and reason for migration, and are driving policy and programmes to ensure these children are not being left behind.

Lack of data sharing and integration between data systems

Within countries, national statistical authorities and line ministries working on data, migration, displacement, and children's issues often operate in silos, which obscures the situation of children on the move by weakening the quality, availability and accessibility of data. A notable lack of cross-border or cross-country collaboration, insufficient data sharing, and data use hampers our knowledge of children on the move.

A synergistic approach – whether within a country, a region or globally – in partnership with international organizations, civil society, NGOs and the private sector is needed for strategic, robust data collection that can be leveraged to the benefit of all children on the move.



3 A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Strategies,
solutions and
good practices to
improve data work
for children
on the move

Protecting children on the move by closing the data gaps is a shared global responsibility and key to inclusive and sustainable development. The statistical community must come together and build new partnerships, pursue data innovations, and establish new measures to end the invisibility of migrant and displaced children, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic reverses progress for vulnerable children in countries around the world.

To this end, IDAC plans to embark on various efforts to address data challenges and support the child migration-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the GCM and GCR objectives.

Better collection, availability, sharing and utilization of data are vital to protecting the rights of children on the move and ensuring policies and programmes reach every child in need. These priorities are captured in IDAC's three strategic areas, as laid out in its Action Plan.

Around the world, some international aid agencies, NGOs and countries themselves are already making important investments in life-changing initiatives to improve data on children on the move. The good practices highlighted here from IDAC members demonstrate what is possible when strategic actions are taken. Every one of these initiatives is improving children's lives and furthering overall sustainable development efforts, providing vital direction and inspiration to the global community's efforts to support migrant and displaced children. Progress is being made – but this is just the beginning. Much more needs to be done to ensure children on the move are seen, protected and given the chance to thrive.



IDAC ACTION PLAN, 2022-2024

A collective vision to
promote better data and
improve the evidence
base for the protection
and empowerment of
children on the move



OBJECTIVE

1

Strengthen national data systems and capacities to protect migrant and forcibly-displaced children



HOW

- » **Guidance and tools on child-specific migration and displacement data, indicators and methods**
- » **Implementation of the Integrated Data Ecosystem Assessment and Strengthening (IDEAS) project to identify gaps and needs in national data systems, build country capacity, and advance data sharing and analysis**
- » **Technical support through workshops, webinars, and in-country consultations**
- » **Partnerships with relevant groups such as the Expert Group on Refugees and IDP Statistics (EGRIS), as well as the Expert Group on Migration Statistics and the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement**



IDENTIFYING GAPS AND NEEDS IDEAS at work

UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR, UNSD and UNESCAP developed the IDEAS project to help countries strengthen their national data systems and capacities. By comprehensively mapping existing data and approaches to collect, analyse, share and use data, IDEAS identifies gaps and good practices to generate recommendations on improved availability, quality, visibility and usability of data on children on the move.

IDEAS helps countries assess how migration data are collected, shared and disseminated and address collection of child-related data and themes, such as access to services, detention, child protection and education. The exercise has wide government buy-in, involving national statistics office, line ministries and other key stakeholders. These focal points identify not only which data are collected and available and the topic-specific indicators crucial for migrant and forcibly displaced children, but also identify how the data ecosystem works. A set of recommendations to enhance national data capacity is then generated, along with a roadmap on follow-up activities such as trainings and technical assistance.

To date, the IDEAS project has been implemented in Thailand (2019) and Jordan (2020). Under the lead of IDAC's Working Group 1 on national data capacity-strengthening (see p. 35), and subject to availability of resources, IDAC will work on innovative approaches to implement the project in other countries in light of COVID-19 travel restrictions that prevent in-person interviews.

IDENTIFYING GAPS AND NEEDS

Improving data governance in Thailand

Thailand hosts approximately 3.6 million international migrants, including an estimated 500,000 children, per UNPD figures. A middle-income country, it acts as a country of origin, a destination, and a transit country for millions of migrants. Though Thailand has a relatively advanced data ecosystem, decentralization and fragmentation hamper data sharing and integration. Data on international migration come from a variety of sources and lack disaggregation. These gaps were identified following Thailand's participation in the IDEAS pilot in 2019, which brought more than 20 national ministries and agencies, academics, and NGOs involved in migration and displacement data work to the table.

In response, Thailand has developed the Data Governance Framework, which makes use of a data catalogue – a system for identifying and centrally managing digitalized data sources and metadata. The National Statistical Office collects these data from the 20 ministries dealing with international migration and children on the move. Data are being collated into a centralized big data management system that allows the government to identify gaps, assign appropriate agencies to produce official statistics, and make improvements to the quality of official statistics. This work is also enabling data to be accessed, used and shared across government agencies.

These foundational measures are paving the way towards a more comprehensive and coherent data system that prioritizes the needs of Thailand's most vulnerable groups, including children on the move.



LEVERAGING DATA PARTNERSHIPS EGRIS FOR IDAC

EGRIS was established by the UN Statistical Commission in 2016 to develop international recommendations, standards and guidance to improve statistics on forced displacement. Comprised of representatives from 45 national statistics authorities and 25 regional and international organizations, EGRIS has developed international recommendations on refugee statistics ([IRRS](#)) and on internally displaced persons statistics ([IRIS](#)). These recommendations outline internationally agreed statistical frameworks for countries to improve the production, overall quality, coordination and dissemination of nationally owned statistics on refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons. Although the recommendations do not specifically address the challenges in collecting official statistics on forcibly displaced children, both IRRS and IRIS include relevant recommendations that support improving data on refugee and IDP boys and girls.

EGRIS' important work supports not only IDAC's objective to improve coordination among the national, regional and international levels but also among national actors involved in the production, analysis and dissemination of official statistics on migrant and displaced children. In addition to relevant recommendations for data on children on the move, EGRIS has advanced groundwork in capacity-building and knowledge-sharing among Member States and other partners representing the good practices and lessons learned and will help guide the work of IDAC Working Group 1 on national data capacity-strengthening (see p. 35). By identifying the 12 priority SDG indicators most relevant to forcibly displaced persons, EGRIS is also an important contributor to IDAC Working Group 2 (see p. 35) on child-specific data and indicators.

OBJECTIVE

2 Promote and establish collaborative, innovative methods for child-specific data work



HOW

- » Broad-based, external efforts such as publications, webinars and annual conferences to facilitate information exchange, sharing of good practices and experiences, and promotion of new and innovative methods
- » Strong partnerships and collaborations between members and with other relevant groups to share knowledge, expertise and good practices

COUNTRY COLLABORATION Making the internally displaced in Nigeria visible to protect the most vulnerable

With about 2.7 million people living in displacement in 2020 ([per IDMC](#)), Nigeria faces complex issues surrounding displacement and migration. Crisis has driven many of the country's 1.4 internally displaced children from home, but one group – known as the Almajiris – leave at a young age to attend Islamic boarding schools. Typically originating in poor rural northern Nigerian households, many Almajiris end up in dangerous cycles of displacement; some live on the streets, some become radicalized and recruited by violent Islamist insurgency Boko Haram. [Hundreds of Almajiris reportedly faced harsh deportations](#) during COVID-19 lockdown measures.

Nigeria's National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons is ready to prioritize these children, beginning with improved data on this largely invisible group. While the Commission has made some data available on internally displaced children, these are not representative enough. Little is known about the Almajiris' security, or physical and mental health. Efforts are underway to collect more data that cover all Nigerian states where internally displaced populations live, but more investments and closer analysis are needed. With IDAC support, the National Bureau of Statistics intends to design a primary data collection exercise for internally displaced children so that children like the Almajiris are no longer left out of the picture.



KEY KNOWLEDGE-SHARING LEVERAGING INTERAGENCY COORDINATION TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN IN MIXED MOVEMENTS

GLOBAL

IOM's [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) (DTM) plays a vital role in gathering and analysing data about displaced and mobile populations. In 2017, UNICEF and IOM joined forces to launch the DTM [Children on the Move](#) project to capture children's needs and risks. The agencies work closely together to mainstream child protection in DTM's global system and processes, while also developing tools, indicators, guidelines and training modules to better analyse data related to children on the move. This evidence helps drive timely and informed child protection and education humanitarian responses.

The project's Interagency Data and Analysis Helpdesk has received over 210 support requests from 28 country offices, six regional offices, and headquarter-level staff from nine humanitarian agencies/thematic groups since 2018.

For example, in 2021 UNICEF Ethiopia requested support to develop a social cohesion index using DTM data. The resulting severity scoring methodology measured social cohesion between host communities and internally displaced persons, and between affected populations and the government across approximately 3,500 locations. This information helps pinpoint locations and regions where programmatic interventions to boost social cohesion are most needed.

REGIONAL (EUROPE)

In 2015, migration and refugees flows into Europe hit a peak, including hundreds of thousands of children – 103,000 of whom arrived alone and applied for asylum. UNHCR, IOM, and UNICEF moved quickly to leverage their collective knowledge and ensure children were not left out of data collection efforts, collaborating to improve data quality, exchange, and harmonization.

To address a need for data on children as part of mixed migration flows, the agencies regularly produce information products that compile and analyse data from more than 15 countries of arrival and transit. Joint fact sheets provide analytical overviews of accompanied and unaccompanied children, including their nationalities, sex, and age disaggregation, presence in reception centres, and profiles and experiences, ensuring these children have a voice. Other fact sheets serve as advocacy instruments by addressing specific topics such as [access to education](#) or [forms of care for children](#). Using survey data conducted with adolescents (aged 14–17 years) who recently arrived in Europe, [analyses](#) of profiles of migrant children, focused on their vulnerabilities and the risks faced during the journey ([Harrowing Journeys](#) report, p. 19) have also been issued.



VITAL PARTNERSHIPS Closing data gaps to support children and youth on mixed migration routes in Tunisia

Approximately 60,000 international migrants live in Tunisia, [per UNPD estimates](#), but a lack of systematic data collection means data and research on mixed migration are limited. Many migrant and displaced children and youth are missing from the data – and missing out on critical services. To fill these information gaps and create empirical data to inform mixed migration programming and advocacy, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and Save the Children (SCI) recently completed [a research project](#) to generate a clearer picture of these displaced children.

The study assessed multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data, drawing from MMC's [4Mi project](#) and conducting interviews with child protection and mixed migration specialists, caregivers, and foreign and foreign-born children (both accompanied and unaccompanied) in Tunisia.

Available online in English, French and Arabic, the study's analyses and outcomes have mobilized stakeholders such as Tunisian associations, international NGOs in Tunisia, UN agencies and government authorities to take action to better protect this vulnerable population. Findings demonstrate the importance of including caregivers in research, both as a source of data and as an angle for analysis, differentiating the care status of children in analysis, and the importance of establishing a referral system during data collection.

MMC and SCI plan to replicate this work along the East Africa Migration route, in Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, and in West Africa and North Africa, to generate further data on these displaced and migrating children and youth, many of who remain largely left out of data collection efforts.



HARNESSING INNOVATION Going beyond traditional approaches – big data for big impact

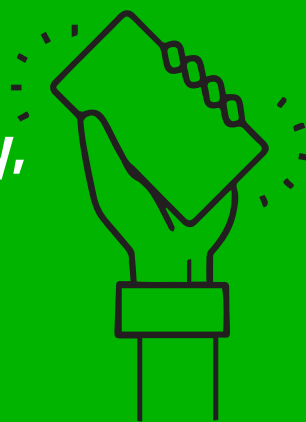
Social media platforms, cell phones, satellite imagery, and innovative analytical tools based on artificial intelligence and machine learning have great potential to offer important insights into the experiences and needs of children on the move. They can complement traditional data sources and help overcome common challenges associated with traditional methods, such as limited timeliness or level of geographical detail, high costs, coverage of hard-to-reach populations, and measurement of temporary forms of human mobility. The Data Innovation Directory, created by IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, leverages these non-traditional data sources and innovative methods for migration-related policy and research purposes. The directory links to more than 60 initiatives, such as deploying Facebook ads for sampling migrant groups, mobile phone data to estimate national and regional migration movements, and Google search data for migration forecasting.

Social media data can play an important role in protecting children on the move. For instance, these enormous amounts of data can generate close to a real-time understanding of public sentiment on migration and counter the spread of misinformation and xenophobic rhetoric before these reach bigger audiences.

The Data Innovation Directory was created as part of the Big Data for Migration Alliance, which develops, guides and facilitates initiatives to further harness the potential of new data sources to better understand migration-related phenomena, including children on the move.

OBJECTIVE

3 Improve data visibility, availability, accessibility and usability



HOW

- » Mapping of existing data sources and data gaps and needs to generate disaggregated, high-quality and comparable data
- » Promotion of data sharing and strategic use of existing data
- » Planned online data hub for children on the move to feature a comprehensive data portal and key resources related to data on migrant and displaced children, including publications, guidance materials and expert networks
- » Ensure data are child-friendly – accessible to children on the move themselves.

DRAWING THE MAP Steps toward a global data hub for children on the move

In June 2021, IDAC Secretariat members and IDMC launched an internal mapping exercise of available data sources related to children on the move. The goal was to take stock of existing datasets and databases – both public and private – and identify gaps and potential areas where IDAC could add value. Participating agencies were asked to complete a questionnaire on the frequency of data collection, topics addressed, number of countries involved, geographic coverage, and quality of data in terms of disaggregation (by age, sex, and country of birth/nationality).

Preliminary findings indicate that although a large amount of data is available on international migrants and internally displaced persons, data gaps persist, specifically regarding global flows of children. A key challenge is data comparability, given organizations' varying definitions, measures and indicators. Monitoring challenges – e.g., lack of data availability, lack of data disaggregation (by sex, gender, etc.) – also persist. Where data are available on children, the socioeconomic status of parents is generally lacking. Findings also showed that data based on household surveys may not accurately represent children's views. Information is also limited on child-specific needs (nutrition, education, health, security) and the well-being and development of those on the move.

Regarding coverage, there is no clear flow data available that cover children, since in some cases children are not identified in the permits of principal applicants. There is also difficulty identifying unaccompanied minors as most are not always asylum seekers, so the numbers are underestimated. Information on the most vulnerable populations within countries/regions, such as homeless children, is lacking as well.

These findings will guide IDAC's next steps as it seeks to connect the dots across organizations and, subject to availability of resources, develop a comprehensive online data hub on children on the move.



STRATEGIC USE OF DATA Children born into displacement in Sudan

Following two civil wars and the conflict in Darfur, an estimated 2.3 million people are internally displaced in Sudan (per IDMC). Many children are born into displacement. Evidence on these girls and boys is scarce – and too many are being left out of national and local government plans.

Although IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) has been collecting data on internally displaced people and other mobile populations since 2010, these data have been primarily used for short-term programme delivery, and not for longer-term planning or a child-focused analysis.

To address this gap, in 2020, DTM conducted a demographic and child-focused analysis using the 10-year registration database for internally displaced persons in Sudan. This work served two important purposes: i) to compile the existing IRIS-based international indicators for estimating internally displaced children, and (ii) to determine if population projections and demographic estimates of internally displaced persons would be possible.

In addition to providing data for the IRIS indicators, the work enabled projections of the displacement population from the date registration data to be collected up to the present time. Projection results were consistent with the new stock data collected in 2020. These preliminary findings offer the Sudanese Government and humanitarian and development actors the ability to project future displacement numbers and fortify long-term programming and planning that consider displaced populations, including children.



DATA FOR A WIDE AUDIENCE Promoting integration of children on the move in Europe

To support the growing number of migrant children arriving in Europe and alleviate pressure on national migration management and child protection systems, new statistical requirements became mandatory for EU Member States in 2020. Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, now collects monthly statistics on children applying for asylum, quarterly data on children subject to asylum decisions, and quarterly statistics on children subject to returns. Among other breakdowns, the statistics are disaggregated by citizenship, age, sex and most importantly, by unaccompanied minors.

A dedicated page on children in migration and special datasets reflecting cross-cutting statistical topics in Eurostat's database ensure this information is widely disseminated and publicly available. Migrant Integration Statistics, an online publication typically released every third year, includes children in its data and examines the integration of migrants in the EU, focusing on several key components of children's well-being.

Policy initiatives such as the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee, supports Member States in efforts to guarantee access to quality key services for children in need, including for migrant children. The European Social Scoreboard of Indicators, which includes children in its updated indicators, is further driving Eurostat's work to improve the dissemination of statistics that include migrant children and ensure they are routinely included across EU policies and systems.



IDAC WORKING GROUPS

Four IDAC working groups are translating IDAC objectives into concrete outputs to improve the lives of children on the move. The groups will identify challenges related to child-specific migration and displacement data and generate practical solutions in the form of public goods (e.g., publications, guidance materials, and services such as capacity-building trainings and strategic partnerships).

Working Group 1 (WG1)

focuses on strengthening the data systems and capacities of national statistical institutions to collect, analyse, store and make available high-quality, disaggregated and reliable data on children on the move

Working Group 3 (WG3)

seeks to improve the availability of data on internally displaced children, including estimates of their numbers by age group, gender, disability status, and other relevant intersectionalities

Working Group 2 (WG2)

aims to develop child-specific indicators and metadata most relevant to children on the move to help achieve the SDGs and commitments made under the GCM and GCR

Working Group 4 (WG4)

promotes collaboration towards innovative methods and solutions for child-specific data among technical experts, data owners and implementing agencies

Working groups will align activities with key migration and displacement statistics expert group frameworks, such as EGRIS and the Expert Group on Migration Statistics.

THE POWER OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Quality, reliable, accessible statistics on children on the move must not neglect their greatest stakeholder: the girls and boys living these experiences themselves. This means including children's voices in data work, through informed consent, qualitative methodologies (e.g., focus group discussions, life histories, key informant interviews) and participatory research methods, where children themselves identify and explore the vital issues to their well-being. Citizen-generated data that ensure that a multitude of voices and perspectives are heard must also be captured. And children must be able to access the data themselves. This not only means prioritizing open data policies, but also closing the damaging information gaps in technological access that disproportionately affect vulnerable children, including many migrants and refugees. Data have the power to provide children with the ability to hold governments accountable when programmes and policies fall short.



In sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 26 per cent of the world's refugee population resides,

9 OF 10
82 PER CENT

children do not have household access to computer and lack Internet access

Source: UNESCO, 'Startling Digital Divides in Distance Learning Emerge', 2020.



BUILDING A BETTER DATA ECOSYSTEM **TOGETHER**

Concerted efforts to close the data gaps on children on the move are urgently needed. Currently, there is no regional or international mechanism specifically dedicated to these children; rather, children on the move are dealt with as a subgroup of migrants, refugees, internally displaced, unaccompanied minors, children 'left behind', etc. National data and statistical systems in general do not have a focus on migrant or displaced children because data are often not disaggregated.

The uncertainties and gaps in the evidence base have direct repercussions on the lives of migrant and displaced children, who often face damaging gaps in their protection amid the insecurity and uncertainty of their living conditions. These children have the right to have their needs identified and met.

Sound foundational data on children on the move should be the minimum standard across countries. To that end, an approach that grows from the bottom up to build a common framework for improving these data is vital. IDAC offers a unique space for fostering an exchange of expertise and knowhow, peer learning, and co-creating solutions. But the work that IDAC needs to do will require investments – human, financial, technical – if we are to achieve its objective of protecting children on the move and ensure global commitments to sustainable development are realized.

There has never been a more crucial time for international and domestic investment in better data approaches and partnership-building that can revolutionize data and statistical production, particularly on hard-to-reach subgroups like migrant and displaced children.

Become an advocate for children on the move! Write us at IDAC@unicef.org to find out how you can support our work on behalf of migrant and displaced children



A COOPERATIVE PLATFORM

IDAC's cross-sectoral membership is a key component in its goal of ending the invisibility of children on the move. IDAC offers a space for voices in governments, international organizations, civil society, academics and think tanks to be heard in equal measure. Its mission is driven not by individual organizations or affiliations, but rather by a shared concern for every migrant and displaced child who remains in a precarious situation because they are not being seen, counted and represented in programme and policy design and implementation.



IDAC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

Member States

- » Asia (2): Nepal, Thailand
- » Europe (8): Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom
- » Latin America (3): Colombia, Mexico, Peru
- » Middle East and North Africa (3): Egypt, Jordan, Morocco
- » Sub-Saharan Africa (3): Cameroon, South Africa, Nigeria

UN and other international organizations

- » African Union Commission
- » Eurostat
- » IOM
- » OECD
- » UNDP
- » UNESCAP
- » UNESCO
- » UNHCR
- » UNICEF
- » UNFPA
- » UNPD
- » UNSD
- » WHO

NGOs, think tanks, academia

- » AidData
- » Australian National University
- » Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
- » IMPACT – REACH initiative
- » International Security and Development Center
- » Joint IDP Profiling Service
- » Joint Research Centre – Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography
- » Mixed Migration Centre
- » Migration Policy Institute
- » Save the Children
- » Texas A&M University
- » WorldPop – School of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Southampton

Secretariat

- » UNICEF (Chair)
- » IOM
- » UNHCR
- » OECD
- » Eurostat

Advisory board

- » African Union Commission
- » Department of Statistics in Jordan
- » Statistics Netherlands
- » Statistics Norway
- » Statistics South Africa
- » Statistics Sweden
- » UNESCAP
- » UN Population Division
- » UN Statistics Division

WHAT ARE THE DATA CHALLENGES IN YOUR CONTEXTS AND HOW IS IDAC POSITIONED TO ADDRESS THEM? FOUR IDAC MEMBERS EXPLAIN.

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) is the country's official data-producing agency and publishes work on the migration dynamics of women, children and the elderly. It also conducts the census.

"Past census data have provided important information. We know, for instance, that more than one in five migrant children aged 7–17 years in South Africa are not attending school – but they leave out many key areas pertaining to child migrants' well-being. In the upcoming 2022 Census, we aim to provide more disaggregated data by migratory status. Data on South Africa's child migrants are incomplete, statistics on undocumented children are nearly non-existent, and information on unaccompanied minors are scattered across various national data sources. IDAC membership offers the chance to build our capacity through workshops – in our case, how best to access and analyse child migration data from admin sources at our Department of Home Affairs and Department of Basic Education and generate disaggregated data on refugees and asylum-seekers by age and sex."

– **Diego Iturralde**, Chief Director Demography and Population Statistics, Statistics South Africa

The **Mixed Migration Centre** (MMC) is a leading source for independent and high quality data, information, research and analysis on mixed migration.

"MMC works with a very hard-to-reach population. Information gaps are large and often difficult to fill, particularly when reaching children travelling on mixed migration routes on a wider scale and understanding their journeys, experiences and needs. Without good data, how can we know we are responding in the right way, and contribute to better programmes and policies for children on the move? MMC hopes that IDAC will allow us to pool resources and share lessons learned and knowledge to find better ways to learn about the conditions children face on mixed migration routes. This way, we can respond more effectively to their needs."

– **Jane Linekar**, [4Mi](#) Global Coordinator at MMC

UNESCAP's Statistics Division works with countries to strengthen national statistical systems, which includes counting migrants and children.

"We don't really know how many migrant children there are, what their age profile is, where they are leaving from and where they are going, both in terms of the existing population (the stock) and those who are on the move (the flows). This is even worse for internal migration. To meet the needs of these children, we need to know who they are. Leveraging national statistical systems and including children on the move in national strategies can lead to sustainable change. IDAC presents a great opportunity to share experiences and knowledge, allowing countries to learn from each other. We have the power to increase the visibility of this issue on the national, regional and international agenda and develop, establish and implement important data collection norms and standards."

– **Petra Nahmias**, Chief of Population and Social Statistics Section, Statistics Division, UNESCAP

WorldPop works with governments, UN agencies and other groups to improve the demographic evidence base for low- and middle-income countries.

"Because data collection on migration and displaced populations is often disconnected from wider demographic data collection, child migrants are consistently missed when decisions are made about service allocation, health care delivery, and disaster relief. In places like South Sudan and north-eastern Nigeria, we have seen how integrating multiple forms of data (censuses, surveys, satellites, cell phones) can provide a more complete picture of changing populations and capture child migrants who had been previously overlooked. IDAC presents an important opportunity to bring relevant agencies, government ministries, universities and private companies together and improve the data on migrant children in resource-poor settings."

– **Andy Tatem**, Director of WorldPop, University of Southampton, UK



ANNEX



100 YEARS OF EXPANDING PROTECTION, SUPPORTED BY DATA

Protecting the well-being of children on the move is enshrined in several policy, legal and institutional frameworks. These frameworks represent international, organizational, regional and country-level commitments to children's rights. Evidence and data have come to be recognized as vital components of the institutional instruments that protect and empower all children, regardless of migratory status.

International frameworks



Every child around the globe is protected by a robust legal framework, nearly 100 years in the making

Regional frameworks



Geography will shape migrant and displaced populations' choices and challenges, making regional collaboration an essential part of effective solutions

Organizational frameworks



Organizational-level efforts emphasize the power of data and the critical role they play in shaping well-informed policies that effectively respond to children's protection needs

1924:

Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child is adopted by the League of Nations and identifies a few basic rights to which children are entitled

1959:

Declaration of the Rights of the Child acknowledges a child's right to education and health care, among other rights

1989:

Convention on the Rights of the Child forms the foundation for a robust, internationally agreed upon recognition of children's rights, covering the civil, political, social and cultural rights of children. Signatories are bound to respect and protect the rights of children within their territories with no discrimination

2014:

The **Brazil Declaration** represents the governments' of Latin America and the Caribbean pledge to enhance protection of refugees, displaced and stateless persons in the region. It highlights the rising numbers of displaced children and adolescents and the vulnerabilities many face, while also recognizing their rights and protection needs, including alternatives to child detention

2012-2017:

Data for Children Strategic Framework highlights UNICEF's commitment to data on children in its mandate to uphold children's rights, highlighting the value of investments and activities in data work and the changes needed to make better use of data resources. Emphasizes the value of quality, reliable data to inform decision makers and ensure better outcomes for children

2018:

Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) adopted to promote international cooperation to address refugee situations across countries. Stresses the importance of reliable, comparable, and timely data to inform policymakers to improve the conditions of refugees

2018-2019:

ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration reaffirms ASEAN's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Member States' responsibilities to adopt migration policies that guarantee the child's best interests. Encourages further strengthening of the evidence base on children in migration by improving and investing in data collection and analysis of accurate, reliable, comparable, and disaggregated data

2021:

EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee adopted by the European Union, proposing actions to protect and guarantee children's rights. An important new dimension is the involvement of children themselves in the development of policy initiatives to ensure their voices are heard and their needs sufficiently addressed

1948:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights entitles all children to "special care", assistance and social protection

1973:

Convention 138 of the International Labour Organization sets 18 as the minimum legal age for taking part in hazardous work

2012:

Framework for the Protection of Children reasserts UNHCR's commitment to safeguarding children in displacement contexts to ensure a better future for them and their communities. Engages actors at all levels to ensure effective responses to child protection needs and durable solutions in line with the child's best interests

2015:

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** reaffirms States' responsibilities towards children, including children on the move. Urges UN Member States to secure the rights of children and to facilitate safe, orderly and responsible migration for all. Emphasizes that the rights of migrant and displaced children cannot be fulfilled without adequate information about their age, sex and origin

2018:

Migration Policy Framework for Africa – a revision of the 2006 AU Migration Policy Framework – presents policy guidelines for African Union Member States and Regional Economic Communities to manage migration, including improved data and research on migration to drive evidence-based policymaking. Calls on AU Member States to uphold the rights of migrant children under national laws

2018:


Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) adopted by Member States. Objective 1 highlights States' commitment to "collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data" to support evidence-based decision and policymaking

2020:

Data Strategy for Action by Everyone, Everywhere approved by the UN Secretary-General to strengthen the individual agency and collective capabilities across the UN to make better use of data and unleash their full potential. Serves as a framework to catalyse change and adopt better data approaches to generate improved outcomes for the planet and all people, including children, to ensure delivery of the SDGs by 2030

2021:

Migration Data Strategy emphasizes IOM's investment in the issue of data, with the goal of improving the evidence base to enable better migration management and improved outcomes for societies and migrants, including children. Sets three priorities: Improve the global evidence base on migration; strengthen national data capacities; and guarantee more evidence-based IOM- and UN system-wide programming, operations and policy advice



LIST OF ACRONYMS

DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EGRIS	Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
IDAC	International Data Alliance for Children on the Move
IDEAS	Integrated Data Ecosystem Assessment and Strengthening
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRIS	International Recommendations on Internally Displaced Persons Statistics
IRRS	International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPD	United Nations Population Division
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
WHO	World Health Organization

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IDAC PLEDGES TO...



Strengthen data systems and capacities



Promote and establish collaboration and innovation



Improve data visibility, availability, accessibility and usability

**FOR BETTER LIVES FOR
CHILDREN **ON THE MOVE****

SECRETARIAT:

