



DATA BRIEF

**CHILDREN ON THE MOVE**  
KEY FACTS & FIGURES

unicef   
for every child

## 10 Key Facts

1. As of 2016, **28 million** or **1 in 80 children** in the world were **living in forced displacement** - this includes 12 million child refugees and child asylum seekers, and 16 million children living in internal displacement due to conflict and violence.<sup>1</sup> **15,000 people are displaced every day** within African countries.<sup>2</sup>
2. Between 2005 and 2015, **the number of child refugees** worldwide, under UNHCR's mandate, **more than doubled** from 4 million to 9 million.<sup>3</sup>
3. Around **9 out of 10 refugees** remain in their region of origin as of 2016.<sup>4</sup>
4. In 2014, **28 per cent** of all detected **trafficking victims** were children (20 per cent girls and 8 per cent boys).<sup>5</sup>
5. At least **300,000 unaccompanied and separated** children who moved across borders were registered in 80 countries in 2015 and 2016.<sup>6</sup>
6. Worldwide, there have been more than **26,000 migrant deaths** since 2014. In 2016, there were an estimated **700 child deaths** on the Central Mediterranean route alone.<sup>7</sup>
7. Around the world, **almost 1 in 10 children** live in countries and areas affected by armed conflicts, and more than 400 million live in extreme poverty.<sup>8</sup>
8. **Over 100 countries** are known to **detain children** in immigration detention.<sup>9</sup>
9. Refugee children are **five times more likely to be out of school** than other children.<sup>10</sup> Only 50 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in primary school, and less than 25 per cent of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary school.<sup>11</sup>
10. An **adolescent boy from sub-Saharan Africa** with secondary education and travelling in a group along the Central Mediterranean route, **faces a 73 per cent risk of being exploited**, while the risk for a boy from another region drops to 38 per cent.<sup>12</sup>

## The Figures behind UNICEF's 6-Point Agenda for Children on the Move

UNICEF's engagement on issues regarding children on the move is built on the premise that **a child is a child, independent of his or her migratory status**. This core principle underpins UNICEF's 6-point Agenda for Children on the Move.

### 1 Protect uprooted children from exploitation and violence



Refugee and migrant children are extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse, to being preyed upon by smugglers and even enslaved by traffickers.

- Children risk their lives on their journeys to safety:
  - Worldwide, there have been **more than 26,000 migrant deaths since 2014**; the precise number of children among them is not known. Of 4,600 migrants who died during 2016 on the Central Mediterranean route in 2016 alone, **700 were children**.<sup>13</sup>
- Children can experience exploitation and abuse:
  - In 2014, **28 per cent** of all detected **trafficking victims** were children (20 per cent girls and 8 per cent boys).<sup>14</sup>
  - Three in four children who crossed the Mediterranean in the second half of 2016 experienced abuse amounting to trafficking. In a recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) survey, over three-quarters of the 1,600 children aged 14–17 who were interviewed on arrival in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route, reported experiences such as being held against their will, or being forced to work without pay at some point during their journeys. These are indications that they may have been trafficked or otherwise exploited.<sup>15</sup>
  - **Adolescents and youth** on the move via the Central Mediterranean route, face greater risks of abuse than adults – **77 per cent reported exploitation**, compared to 69 per cent of adults aged 25 and older.<sup>16</sup>

### 2 Keep families together and give children legal status



Limited opportunities for families to move together can force children to migrate alone in order to reunite with their families.

- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of unaccompanied children moving in recent years:
  - At least **300,000 unaccompanied and separated children** who moved across borders were registered in 80 countries in 2015 and 2016, **a near fivefold increase** from 66,000 in 2010 and 2011. While this number dropped slightly in 2016, the total number of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) on the move worldwide is still likely to be much higher.<sup>17</sup>
  - On the dangerous Central Mediterranean Sea passage from North Africa to Europe, more than 90 per cent of children who arrived in Italy from 2016 to November 2017 were unaccompanied, up from 75 per cent in 2015.<sup>18</sup>
- There are **no global numbers on family reunification** following separation due to migration or displacement. This is because families use many different visa categories, depending on their circumstances, to reunite with family members. These include family reunification schemes for refugees, or family sponsorship for migrant workers.
- The number of children born into statelessness is rising:
  - At least 70,000 new stateless children are born every year in the 20 countries hosting the world's largest stateless populations. **At least a third of the estimated 10 million stateless people around the world are children**.<sup>19</sup>

### 3 End the detention of refugee and migrant children by creating practical alternatives

Detention is harmful to children's health and wellbeing, and can undermine their development.

- While the global number of children currently in detention because of their migration status is unknown, **over 100 countries are known to detain children** for migration-related reasons.<sup>20</sup>

### 4 Help uprooted children stay in school and stay healthy

After fleeing their homes, many refugee and migrant children miss out on education – and many do not have access to health care and other essential services.

- Refugee children are **five times more likely to be out of school** than other children.<sup>21</sup>
  - Only 50 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in primary school.<sup>22</sup>
  - Less than 25 per cent of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary school.<sup>23</sup>
- In 2015, there were **27 million children out of school** in 24 conflict-affected countries. By one calculation, emergencies and protracted crises have disrupted learning opportunities and the quality of education for 75 million children aged 3 to 18, in 35 crisis-affected countries.<sup>24</sup>
- In countries affected by conflict, **girls are two and a half times more likely** to be out of school than boys.<sup>25</sup>
- There is limited available data on undocumented migrant children's access to health services. Data on access to essential services, including health, nutrition, and water and sanitation, are critical to ensure the well-being of children on the move.

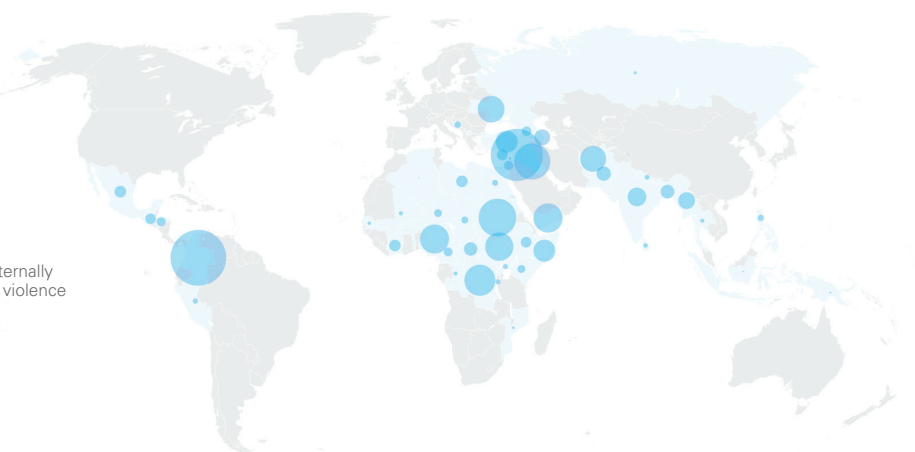
#### Conflict displaces even more people within their own borders than beyond them

Number of conflict-related internally displaced persons, 2016

The bubble size indicates the number of internally displaced persons (in millions)



Countries with people internally displaced by conflict and violence



**Note:** Based on the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's annual monitoring of internal displacement, Colombia remains among the five countries with the highest number of people displaced by conflict. While internal displacement is a major issue within Colombia, the available data reflect all people who were estimated to have been displaced over the course of more than five decades of conflict, even if they are deceased or no longer believed to be displaced, meaning the estimates are likely to be significantly overstated. These data should be interpreted with caution.

**Source:** Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Internal Displacement Database, 2016

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF 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.

## 5 Press for action on the causes that uproot children from their homes

Protracted conflicts, persistent violence, extreme poverty and disadvantage drive millions of children from their homes.

- Around the world, almost **1 in 10 children live in countries and areas affected by armed conflicts**, and more than 400 million live in extreme poverty. Poverty and conflict are two core drivers for children moving from their homes.<sup>26</sup>
- In 2016, **23 million children** were living in internal displacement – 16 million as a result of conflict, 7 million due to natural disasters.<sup>27</sup>
- As of 2015, over half a billion children lived in extremely high flood occurrence zones; nearly 160 million live in high or extremely high drought severity zones.<sup>28</sup>

## 6 Combat xenophobia and discrimination

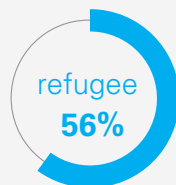
Uprooted children are often the victims of discrimination, racism and xenophobia – during their journeys and in their final destinations.

- In 2017, UNICEF and IOM found that sub-Saharan Africans are especially vulnerable to xenophobia and discrimination. **Over 80 per cent of adolescents and young people** from sub-Saharan Africa, who were surveyed after travelling the Central Mediterranean route towards Europe, **reported exploitation**, compared to around 55 per cent of those originating from elsewhere.<sup>29</sup>
- An adolescent boy from sub-Saharan Africa, who has secondary education and travels in a group along the Central Mediterranean route, faces a 73 per cent risk of being exploited. If the boy came from another region, the risk would drop to 38 per cent.<sup>30</sup>

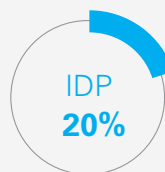
### Data and Knowledge Gaps

Reliable, timely and accessible data and evidence are essential for understanding how migration and forcible displacement affect children and their families – and for putting in place policies and programmes to meet their needs. Despite greater efforts over the past decade, we still do not know enough about uprooted children: who they are, where they come from, where they are going and why; how they fare along the way, what their vulnerabilities are, and what they need. A lack of both quantitative and qualitative data limits our knowledge of children's motivations and of the impact of migration throughout the life cycle. *A Call to Action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data*<sup>31</sup> highlights key recommendations to improve data collection and make better use of existing data.

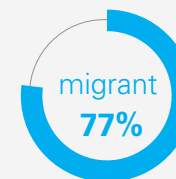
#### Age-disaggregated data on migrants and forcibly displaced people are incomplete:



Only around **56%** of **refugee** data have information on age<sup>32</sup>



Only **20%** of countries and territories with data on conflict-related **internally displaced persons** (IDPs) disaggregate the data by age<sup>33</sup>



Overall, **77%** of countries and territories have age-disaggregated **migrant** stock data, including only **57%** in **Africa**<sup>34</sup>

## Key Terms

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- **Children on the move or children uprooted:** International child migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as internally displaced (IDP) children.
- **Migrants:** Individuals who move, or have moved across an international border, or away from their habitual place of residence within a state – regardless of their legal status, whether they move voluntarily or involuntarily, why they move, or how long they stay. This includes, among others, refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>35</sup>
- **Refugees:** 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 opinions.<sup>36</sup>
- **Asylum seeker:** Individuals who seek safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and await a decision on their application for refugee status.<sup>37</sup>
- **IDPs:** Individuals or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.<sup>38</sup>
- **Stateless person:** A person not considered a national by any state, who as such lacks the rights that come from national diplomatic protection of a state and may not be entitled to return in the event that he or she leaves.<sup>39</sup>

## UNICEF Flagship Publications

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- **Uprooted:** The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children (2016)
- **A Child is a Child:** Protecting children on the move from violence, abuse and exploitation (2017)
- **Harrowing Journeys:** Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation (2017)
- **Beyond Borders:** How to make the global compacts on migration and refugees work for uprooted children (2017)
- **Child Alerts:** [Central America \(2016\)](#); [Central Mediterranean \(2016\)](#); [Rohingya \(2017\)](#)

## Endnotes

1. Some had been displaced that year, others earlier. United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, Eurostat and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *A call to action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data*, New York, 2018, p. 2, <[https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Migration\\_advocacy\\_brief.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Migration_advocacy_brief.pdf)>.
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8. United Nations Children's Fund, *Danger every step of the way - A harrowing journey to Europe for refugee and migrant children*. Child Alert, June 2016, p. 5, <[https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/childrenonthemove/files/Child\\_Alert\\_Final\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/childrenonthemove/files/Child_Alert_Final_PDF.pdf)>.
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13. For the total number of missing and dead migrants, see International Organization for Migration, 'Missing Migrants Project'. The number of children was estimated by UNICEF assuming that the proportion of children among the victims was the same as among the migrants who arrived safely at the destination taking the same route.
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22. Ibid.
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27. Some had been displaced that year, others earlier. United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, Eurostat and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *A call to action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data*, New York, 2018, p. 2, <[https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Migration\\_advocacy\\_brief.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Migration_advocacy_brief.pdf)>.
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