

Children have become an important part of large-scale population movements both within and between countries and are likely to be increasingly affected in the next decades as a result of globalisation, socio-economic shifts and climate change. Yet, in debates on both child protection and migration, children who move are largely invisible. As a result, policy responses to support these vulnerable children are fragmented and inconsistent.

Introduction

The [I International Conference on Protecting and Supporting Children on the Move](#) was organised in Barcelona in October 2010 by the Global Movement for Children (GMC), with the support of Generalitat de Catalunya, Intervida, Oak Foundation and Save the Children UK.

It aimed at **analysing and debating the current status** of the issue of children on the move and presenting some key recommendations on the way forward to initiating the revision of policy and programmatic responses to the protection and support of these children.

The Conference reached **broad consensus on the usefulness of a new approach** and called for joint coordinated action in promoting a more comprehensive approach to public policies in various areas directly affecting children on the move.

As a result, several UN Agencies, international NGOs and independent experts came together in London in January 2011 to form the **Global Working Group on Children on the Move** (GWG COM). At present, members of the GWG are:

- ILO, UNICEF, UNHCR as UN plus IOM as inter-governmental organisation;
- Najat M'Jid as UN Rapporteur;
- ENDA Tiers Monde, Intervida, MAEJT, Plan International, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes and World Vision as civil society;
- Oak Foundation as foundation.
- Olivier Feynerol and Mike Dottridge as independent consultants.

The Global Movement for Children acts as the coordinator of this Global Working Group (GWG) to help achieve the **five objectives** set out in the GWG's plan of action:

- Facilitate coordination and collaboration among key international actors;
- Mainstream children on the move in research and data gathering;
- Increase the visibility of children on the move in key policy-development spaces and events;
- Promote the development of child protection mechanisms in the corridors where most children move (within and between countries);
- Ensure that children who have experienced mobility influence policies and strategies on children on the move.

Background

An estimated **214 million persons** worldwide are international migrants, along with an estimated **740 million internal migrants**. Youth make up a disproportionate share of migrants from developing countries; about **one third is between 12 and 25 years old**. This includes millions of children under the age of 18.

In the coming years an unprecedented number of young people are expected to follow this massive exodus and shift population dynamics further, **driven by**:

- demographic factors
- economic disparity
- violent conflict, state failure
- natural disasters
- resource and environmental pressures, especially climate change.
- and in search of access education or employment, a driver of migration that is likely to become stronger in the coming years

There are a myriad of reasons why children move. For many, **leaving their home communities promises the chance of a better life**

. Among other things, they may be **running away from**

:

- violence and abuse in the home or at school
- the announcement of an arranged marriage
- cultural practices

However, once children move against their will, and /or in absence of protection services and actors, they become highly vulnerable to worst forms of child labour, exploitation and other abuses, either during their trip or once they reach the new destination.

Who are Children on the Move

Children on the move is an umbrella definition for **persons under the age of 18 who have left their place of habitual residence and are either on the way towards a new destination** , or have already reached such destination. Children on the Move may be:

- across State borders or within countries;
- movement can be of a seasonal or more permanent nature;
- movement can be voluntary or forced;
- they can be accompanied by parents, peers or others, or not;
- and children who are, for instance: internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees, migrants, trafficked persons or child soldiers.

During movement, a child can float from one sub category to the other. For example, an internally displaced child can be recruited by armed forces or moved across borders for the purpose of exploitation. The risks and opportunities differ per trajectory and conditions of movement.

Ways Forward

Based on the conclusions reached at the I International Conference on Children on the Move and the work carried out by the Global Working Group so far, the following are the main ways forward towards protecting and supporting Children on the Move:

1. **Prevention**: the root causes of child migration must be addressed
2. Ensure immigrant **children's rights are protected** and respected throughout the migration process (pre-mobility, mobility and post mobility)
3. Strengthen and expand **child protection systems**
4. Enabling **children's participation** to influence policies and strategies.
5. Enhancing and **expanding lines of research**
6. **Promote joint and coordinated action** from all actors