

We are confronted today with the largest population movements we have ever seen since the Second World War, with about 60 million people forced to flee their homes across the world, as a result of disasters, armed conflicts, growing levels of insecurity, 50% of whom are children. Moreover globally, around 24 million children worldwide below the age of 14 years were international migrants in 2013. In this context ensuring the protection of children on the move, particularly unaccompanied and separated children, should be at the core of the humanitarian response to address the specific vulnerabilities and risks faced by children on the move, especially when they cross borders.

Children migrate for various reasons. Some are asylum seekers fleeing war, armed conflicts, discrimination or persecution in their home countries, whereas others are victims of trafficking and slavery. Some seek education and employment opportunities; others do not choose to leave, but are sent away by their families to escape poverty or armed conflict. Whatever the reason for their journey, many children may find themselves extremely vulnerable abroad. Children on the move, especially unaccompanied children, are at high risk of death, abuse, exploitation, violence and trafficking during the journey.

The situation in many countries of transit is dismal. There is no camp management in place in informal camps, with dire conditions in some and inadequate facilities across, putting children further at risk of violence and abuse. There is significant disparity in the quality of the reception and accommodation of children within countries of transit, and a lack of procedural safeguards and operating procedures for the identification and registration of unaccompanied and separated children, allowing for the detection and protection of vulnerable children who have been or are at high risk of exploitation and abuse.

Moreover, disappearances of children from reception centres and other temporary accommodations is a common problem in transit and reception countries. In some cases, children fade voluntarily in order to escape from the authorities and reach the country or region to which they were originally heading. Outreach to this targeted group of children is therefore critical to increase their protection along the route and ensure their access to information and to essential services.

Every boy and girl on the move has the right to a 'best interest assessment' and an individual screening for their specific protection needs, regardless of their migration status or that of their parents. The child's best interests should be the primary consideration in any decision on referral, relocation, resettlement or return. The immediate deportation, forced return, or detention of a child are all violations of children's rights and as such, should never feature in States' policies.

Cooperation, including through additional funding for protection, between countries of origin, transit and destination is required to strengthen child protection systems within countries of origin and transit as well as cross-border coordination mechanisms to ensure a continuum of protection for the many children who are crossing borders, often alone. It is vital that support and protection services for children, provided by national authorities or civil society organisations are available throughout the migratory route to ensure the physical integrity, security and protection of the rights of children and their families in case of threats or violations of their rights while on the move.

To conclude, we would like to emphasize that migration is the reality of our times but unsafe migration is the key challenge we need to tackle upfront. Addressing a global phenomenon such as migration with a child rights lens require a global partnership that involves the collective effort of humanitarian, migration and protection actors working together to ensure that the needs and rights of children on the move irrespective of their status are fully respected and fulfilled.