

CHILDREN AND YOUTH ON THE MOVE

DRC Recommendations at the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges



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Children and youth are on the move, fleeing conflict, persecution, and other situations of violence, poverty, natural disaster and environmental degradation. As a protection and displacement organisation working in 40 countries, DRC encounters children on the move in areas of origin, transit and destination, including in Yemen, Libya, Turkey, and Greece.



Photo: Axel Fassio

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), applicable to all children irrespective of status, is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty. The CRC sets out the rights provisions and comprehensive guidance on protection, care and proper treatment of children, including measures on non-discrimination, non-refoulement, best interest determi-

nation and access to asylum procedures and durable solutions. *However*, within the larger phenomenon of mixed movements of refugees and migrants, children and youth, and in particular unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are largely invisible. The specificities of children and youth on the move, the protection risks they face, their needs and vulnerabilities,

and not least their preferred solutions are, to a large extent, unknown.

As the UNHCR High Commissioner convenes the annual Dialogue on Protection Challenges, under the theme *Children on the Move*, **DRC** puts forward the following recommendations and calls for action:

• **The Full Cycle of Mixed Movements¹**

Governments, UN agencies and NGOs should work together to ensure a systemic approach to the protection and care of children across all phases of mobility, which connects responses to the full cycle of children on the move, in areas of origin, transit and destination. Key to supporting coordinated efforts to address the protection risks and needs of children on the move are: 1) Effective coordination mechanisms throughout the full cycle of mixed movements - across borders, in regions and beyond, and amongst Governments, UN Agencies & civil society; 2) Strengthening links between humanitarian and development programming that take into consideration children and youth on the move.

• **Youth and Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC)**

The diversity of children and youth on the move, in particular the vulnerabilities and protection risks and needs of UASC must be acknowledged and responded to by Governments, UN agencies and NGOs. This includes a specific focus on female and male youth in data collection, analysis and response.

• **Child Participation**

All actors should ensure that children in areas of origin, transit, and destination are consulted and able to participate in matters that concern them. Frontline authorities and humanitarian organisations should listen and respond to the needs of children on the move in laws, policies and programmes.

• **Data and Analysis for Action**

To ensure a greater understanding of the complexities of children on the move, the visibility of children and youth in data, monitoring and analysis should be enhanced. The collection and utilization of children and youth specific data and research should be prioritized with the goal of understanding the patterns and risk linked to child and youth mobility, especially for children who do not seek asylum and move under the radar. Efforts must be made to coordinate data and analysis, not just in terms of numbers and figures, but to identify and understand the drivers, trends, and impact on children, to inform strategy and evidence-informed action. Data and information must be comparable and consistent across contexts and actors should work towards systematic, collaborative and

disaggregated data collection following the mixed movements of children.

• **Strengthening Child Protection Systems**

Governments, UN agencies and NGOs should increase efforts and resources to strengthen and operationalize national child protection systems, in compliance with international child rights obligations. This requires building child protection capacity of State authorities and local and national partners, particularly in areas with high mobility along displacement and migration routes, at transit and destination points.

Ongoing, regular changes to immigration laws and enforcement challenge and constrain the effectiveness of child protection systems to reach children and youth on the move, facilitate access to rights, and meet their protection needs. UASC are particularly impacted by this tension between the best interest of children and immigration policies and enforcement.

The lack of legal identity and documentation results in serious risks to children and youth on the move, including statelessness, arrest and detention, and barriers to accessing services. Efforts to further support the provision of birth registration in places of birth and access to documentation throughout the full cycle of mobility are needed to enhance the realisation of children's rights.

• **Reception of Children on the Move**

Government authorities must employ child-friendly and protection-sensitive approaches to the reception of children on the move, to ensure that children's rights are protected, their best interest guaranteed, and the principle of 'Do no harm' adhered to. This includes prioritizing identification, prompt registration and initial assessment, documentation, family tracing and reunification, appointment of a guardian or advisor, care and accommodation arrangements, and access to health and education. All personnel working with children must have the appropriate skills and capacities to identify and respond to the specific protection risks of children on the move.

• **Avoid detention of children**

In transit and upon arrival at destination, it is of particular importance that children and youth have access safe and expedited

reception and alternatives to detention, guaranteeing the immediate and long-term physical and mental health and well-being of children. This is particularly true for UASC but also children detained with their parents or care givers.

• **Access to Information and Solutions**

Governments, UN agencies and NGOs should strengthen access to age-specific and appropriate information as a means of self-protection for children on the move, including: 1) Piloting innovative models that facilitate children's access to updated, reliable, age-specific and relevant information on risks of displacement and migration, the use of irregular routes, how to mitigate risks, and how to obtain their rights and access services; 2) Integrate learning sessions on self-protection mechanisms in displacement and migration settings, including through education and child protection in emergencies programmes. Access to solutions information should clearly state opportunities for asylum, resettlement, integration, and return and be appropriately communicated and available to children across borders, thus facilitating children and young people's informed decision-making.

• **Early Warning and Child Protection Monitoring Mechanisms**

Governments, UN agencies and NGOs should support the establishment and functioning of community-based protective mechanisms, including monitoring, sensitization, response and early warning on child protection issues related to displacement and migration.

In September 2016, UN Member States adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which reaffirmed the international community's commitment to addressing the specific needs of children on the move. **DRC** supports these efforts and reiterates the need for a better understanding of the drivers of children and youth on the move and the protection risks they encounter en route, in transit and at destination. It is of utmost importance to ensure the inclusion and participation of children in finding solutions to their situation and develop more comprehensive and effective strategies and responses their protection risks and needs.

1. Builds on: RMMS and Save the Children, *Young and on the Move: Children and youth in mixed migration flows within and from the Horn of Africa*, September 2016