



**Statement delivered by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary
at the Fifth Thematic Consultation on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and
Regular Migration: "Smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and contemporary
forms of slavery, including appropriate identification, protection and assistance to
migrants and trafficking victims"
Vienna, 05 September, 2017.**

I represent the **Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary**, an ECOSOC-accredited international congregation of Catholic sisters present in 14 countries. Ten years ago we took a Corporate Stance against Human Trafficking, recognizing it as an egregious form of modern day slavery, and a grave violation of human rights and dignity which preys on the vulnerability of those who are most marginalized and left behind in the global economy. Our members and collaborators are committed to working towards the elimination of human trafficking in all its forms, engaging with others in local, regional and global anti-trafficking networks.

As recent reports by UNODC, UNICEF and IOM have highlighted, **children and unaccompanied minors** constitute a growing percentage of victims of human traffickingⁱ. Experience from our members on the ground confirms the heightened vulnerability of **girls in situations of poverty to abuse, exploitation and victimization** at the hands of smugglers and traffickers.

We would like to highlight two particular areas of concern where there is need to **strengthen protection measures for children and unaccompanied minors**.

1. **Birth registration** is the right of every child. It is the first step toward protection and access to services serving as a "*passport to protection*" (UNICEF). Yet this fundamental right of a child remains a luxury in many areas. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 37% of children under the age of 5 in rural areas have had their birth registeredⁱⁱ. Lack of legal identity makes it difficult to trace unaccompanied minors, to reunite children separated from their families and to identify victims of human trafficking. Access to services is denied and the risk of statelessness is increased.

We call for the Global Compact on Migration to promote safe migration by requiring the universal implementation of this fundamental right, replicating best practices such as the use of mobile phone technology to achieve this goal.

2. **Cultural values** (*such as respect for elders and trust in strong kinship ties*) as well as **traditional cultural practices** (*such as early marriage and child fostering*) are open to abuse by smugglers and traffickers, making girls in marginalized communities even more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking. In the African context, the gap between customary law and constitutional law hinders attempts to redress gender inequality and implement gender-responsive child protection policies and programmes.

We call for more attention to be given to identifying and addressing cultural factors associated with vulnerability that are being exploited by smugglers and traffickers in the context of irregular migration. We recognize the need for Governments to implement existing anti-trafficking legislation and strengthen cooperation with faith based and child-centered NGOs involved in the areas of prevention and protection; . .

5 September 2017

ⁱ “Uprooted : The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children.” UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2016

ⁱⁱ UNICEF database 2016.