



UNICEF Statement at the Puerto Vallarta Stock-take on the Global Compact for Migration 4 December 2017

There is a positive story of migration that has helped individuals, communities, economies and countries grow and transform. And yet, the realities for millions of migrants are often very different. Kamis, for example, who is 10, fled Nigeria with his mother in the hope to find safety and an education. Things did not work out as planned. After travelling for 6 months from Nigeria through Niger to Libya, Kamis and his mother have been detained in Libya. There is no safe or regular way forward or backward for him. In fact, there is no way out at all.

Kamis is not alone. Around the world there are 50 million children who have been uprooted from their homes, including 28 million driven from their communities by conflict.

Without safe and regular pathways to migrate, children and families have often no choice but to turn to smugglers, traffickers and to take dangerous informal routes. This state of affairs must not continue. Migration does not have to be unsafe and dangerous. The policies, practices and attitudes that put migrant children at risk can and must change. The Global Compact is the opportunity to do so.

Children are directly and profoundly affected by migration policies, labour mobility schemes, remittances or return decisions. To improve the lot of all migrants, the Global Compact for Migration must pay specific attention to the youngest and most at risk. Children are not just another vulnerable group. Children matter.

Many national, regional and local governments around the world have already chosen to take positive measures to protect and care for migrant children. Some of these good practices are captured in UNICEF's new report *Beyond Borders*. Many more have been shared already during the discussions.

Through international and national cooperation,

1. We can choose to invest in strong and inclusive national child protection systems to protect migrant children from exploitation and violence, and strengthen cooperation between countries to ensure children are protected throughout their journey. Starting with channeling investments towards training a social workforce that can implement standards of care and protection for all children, including migrant children.

2. We can choose to invest in reception and care capacities and promote community-based alternatives to detention, such as regularly reporting requirements, guarantors or bailees.
3. We can choose to remove some of the legal and practical obstacles which put family unification on hold or out of reach for too many children, including narrow definitions of family or financial thresholds.

And we can choose to implement returns with a focus on the individual – the child and their best interest determination, the mother, the father – and design reintegration measures that address her or his needs and benefit the community sustainably.

4. We can choose to open our schools and health centers to migrant children and put in place ‘firewalls’ between immigration enforcement and public services - to keep every child learning and healthy and ensure access to justice and housing without fear of detection, detention or deportation.

And we can choose to improve the conditions for remittance transfers so more children can be sent to school or to the doctor.

5. We can continue to invest in education, skills, governance and social welfare and protection measures in countries of origin.

Meanwhile, we must continue to improve data collection on the flows and welfare of migrants to ensure they are not left behind. We must address the push factors behind migration including conflict, violence, climate change and extreme poverty in countries of origin. And we must work to support the inclusion of migrant children and their families and combat xenophobia everywhere.

The Global Compact for Migration can help take existing good national and regional practices and examples to scale. And, by doing so, fully realize the rights of child migrants, no matter where they are, where they are from or where they are going.

The opportunity to do so is now. Seizing this opportunity is a matter of choice – a political choice. This is not only the right thing to do for children. It is also in Member States’ own best interests.

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Since 2015, UNICEF has been asking governments and partners to embrace six essential policies outlined in the UNICEF Agenda for Action for Children Uprooted:

1. Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence
2. End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating, by introducing a range of practical alternatives;
3. Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status;
4. Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services;
5. Press for action on the underlying causes of large scale movements of refugees and migrants;
6. Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.