

First informal, thematic session on “Human Rights of all migrants”
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Panel 2. Social Inclusion and Cohesion
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Many thanks for the opportunity to speak on this panel on social inclusion and cohesion. It is an important aspect of the migration discussion and I will be honing in on the right and access to education as a key factor in ensuring social inclusion and cohesion.

Save the Children work and have a presence at every stage of a migrant child’s journey - from the country of origin, through transit and in destination countries protecting them when they move alone or with their families.

Based on our experiences, we cannot stress enough the urgency to bring change and the Global Compact offers a historic opportunity to translate the aspirational words of the New York Declaration and existing international obligations into a concrete plan of action.

First, I would like to briefly frame the issue of children on the move within the current political context

Against a backdrop of increasing global migration and displacement, we are witnessing growing public fears of migrants and refugees and the emergence of policies and practices aimed at restricting population movement.

What I am mentioning here is a **global** phenomenon. We are witnessing a ‘shrinking of space’ afforded to both refugees and migrants, manifest in the emergence of multiple policies and practices aimed at controlling and occasionally criminalising population movement. Collectively, many of the measures add to a context in which migrating children face increasing risks that are not at all in their best interest.

In the context of unsafe migration flows, children are in a situation of double vulnerability - as children and as children affected by migration. Around the world, nearly 50 million children have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced¹ – and this number is far from capturing the total numbers.

¹ UNICEF (September 2016), Uprooted: The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children

For all children on the move it is key that their stay is regularised as fast as possible. Normalisation is the key interest of the child. But not happening. We see children living in limbo for months and years with no solution in sight. Not in their best interest, and they realize that and try to avoid coming in such a situation.

Against this context, it is central to recognize that first and foremost all children, regardless of their legal status or categorisation, should be treated and protected first and foremost as children, entitled to all the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments.

Let me focus particularly on the right to education and why it matters a big deal for the topic of our discussion today.

There is no doubt that inclusion and integration are the cornerstone of a stable and well-functioning society while on the other hand exclusion breeds discontent, undermine social cohesion and ultimately increases the costs for transit and host countries alike as well as migrants themselves.

Access to economic, social and cultural rights, including education is a key necessity for migrant children, their survival and development and is a precondition for their integration into the host society.

Ensuring migrant's right to access quality education, as provided for in the UN CRC is not only a legal requirement but yields economic and social benefits for migrant children and the society in which they live. Education is a long-term investment for society.

Yet many migrant children have never been to school at all or have seen their education interrupted, often for years.

The challenges of providing education to children on the move are multiple and varied, but with sustained attention and sufficient political will we believe that they can be overcome.

Inclusion is the key word in this context and can be obtained by developing plans and policies that ensure that children on the move are able to access education.

Legislative and policy barriers that impede access to education for undocumented migrant children persist in many countries. Often there is a simple lack of political will or even a political decision to obstruct the education of certain groups, including CoM. In Europe for instance, according to UNICEF, only 10 EU Member States explicitly recognize the right of undocumented children to basic education. An additional five states explicitly exclude them from free schooling.

These barriers should be tackled as a matter of priority; they are violating children's right to education, pushing these children further on the margins of society and depriving them of the only option they have to regain a sense of normalcy and hope for the future.

Legal frameworks that explicitly recognise the right to education for migrant children provide a more solid protection framework for migrant children, allowing them to claim their right and to seek redress in case of violation. A good practice in this regard is the 1998 Immigration Act in Italy which integrates the right to education in national legislation. Also worth mentioning is a new law in Italy on the protection of UAMs, including a guarantee to the right of education.

For migrant children to learn and stay in school, proactive measures are needed to respond to their specific needs, through individual assessments and tailored responses.

For example, In Thailandⁱ, an innovative model has successfully engaged migrant communities, schools and local policy makers in the pursuit of realizing Thailand's Education for All policy for disadvantaged and marginalized migrant children. It has led to impressive gains for marginalised children with an increase of student engagement by 75%ⁱⁱ. This model actively profiles migrant children, integrates and enrolls students who are undocumented, support children in learning the local language before and during enrolment in Thai schools and strengthens practical implementation of the education policy at school level.

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants contains an explicit commitment to ensure all children are receiving education within a few months of arrival. The earlier children gain access to learning opportunities in the new country, the more motivated and able they will be to integrate, feel part of the society including through the acquisition of the language, values, norms and skills for their personal development.

Governments must come together to urgently deliver a new deal for migrant children and their families, with a human rights protection agenda and the best interest of the child at the core. This is not only a collective responsibility, it is in all societies' common interests.

While we all recognize that migration – whatever its form - is a transnational phenomenon, responses so far have been entrenched within national borders. And this is a major part of the problem. The Global Compact represents a significant opportunity to foster greater solidarity and responsibility-sharing through effective cooperation frameworks ensuring protection of children on the move.

In 2015, the world agreed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals – a global agenda that has as a core principle to leave no one behind, and actionable commitments to children. The global compact should contribute to the advancement of all the SDGs and be informed by the ambition of the 2030 Agenda to come up with a practical, measurable and transformative plan of action with specific goals, targets and indicators.

Save the Children, Terre des Hommes and a broad coalition of organisations, including UN agencies have come together to promote the initiative for child rights in the Global Compacts. The initiative aims to ensure that the global compacts on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration reflect a common approach that operationalises the protection of the rights of all children on the move through practical examples of good practices and the development of harmonized child focused goals, targets and indicators . To that end, the initiative will hold a Global Conference on children on the move on 12 and 13 June in Berlin bringing together various actors to present these recommendations and discuss how to ensure these become a reality and are translated in the Compacts. We call on UN Member states and other stakeholders to join us and support this initiative by championing the rights of children on the move and their operationalisation throughout the Compact process.

Every part of society should contribute to their development and their realisation, particularly civil society and migrants themselves.

Thank you.

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