

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

Smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and contemporary forms of slavery, including appropriate identification, protection and assistance to migrants and trafficking victims

Intervention during Panel 3

‘Appropriate identification, protection, and assistance to migrants and trafficking victims’

The Compact provides an historic opportunity both to celebrate the benefits of international migration and to identify ways in which the international community might begin to address the challenges. At the centre of our debates we need to place the concerns of children:

In 2015–2016 alone, at least 300,000 children migrated unaccompanied; the majority are presumed to have used the services of smugglers and too many ended being trafficked.¹ A joint UNICEF-IOM study about to be released will show that children are **disproportionally** more likely to be exploited, abused and trafficked along their journey than adults.² Almost a third of identified victims of trafficking being boys and girls.³

For UNICEF, a ‘Child is a Child’ – the Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to all children, no matter their migration status, the way they migrated, or lack of nationality.

Inter-Agency Issue Brief #5 captures many of the specific considerations involved in protecting children from trafficking, as well as other perils of unsafe migration. Today, we would like to put two additional considerations towards the Global Compact on Migration: First, the importance of protection systems, and second, the role of cross-border cooperation on child protection.

1. Child protection systems

The inter-agency brief recognizes the importance of child protection systems. Efforts to protect children from trafficking and exploitation as well as abuse by smugglers need to be integrated into existing child protection systems and address the specific needs of children on the move. We should not create parallel systems.

This includes:

- More **systematic cooperation between immigration officials and child protection actors** to better identify and assist child victim of violence, exploitation and abuse.
- Strengthened capacity for **alternative care** and **guardianship arrangements** to ensure that unaccompanied children have their best interests considered, receive child-friendly information and have access to legal assistance.
- Due consideration for the **agency and voice** of children on the move in designing responses to identify children at risk and provide services for child victims.

¹ United Nations Children’s Fund, *A Child Is a Child: Protecting children on the move from violence, abuse and exploitation*, UNICEF, 2017, p.11, [link](#).

² IOM and UNICEF, 2017, *Harrowing Journeys – Children and Youth on the Move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation*, [link](#)

³ UNODC, 2016, *Global report on Trafficking in Persons*, [link](#)

2. Cross-border cooperation on child protection

For systems for children on the move to be effective, they need to be able to speak to one another across borders.

This includes for example:

- Putting in place designated authorities and liaison officers, as well as procedures for the **handover of guardianship across jurisdictions** in the case of unaccompanied and separated children;
- **Strengthening cooperation on family tracing** for trafficked and unaccompanied children to inform decisions on durable solutions;
- **Setting up joint case management systems** to enable authorities to access information from other countries about decisions taken on behalf of a child and any recommendations made for the child's future;

The bottom line is: cooperation across borders needs to go beyond law enforcement, but encompass protection.

A number of States and regional bodies have taken such measures and have agreed to common standards, principles and mechanisms to better protect children on the move across borders. Promising examples of cross-border cooperation include PROTECT Children on the Move, an initiative of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and the set of common standards adopted by the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to better protect and care for children on the move.

These existing initiatives and instruments could serve as an entry point for scaling up cross-border cooperation mechanisms to protect children on the move. The Compact offers a unique opportunity for this, in line with paragraph 52 of the New York Declaration, which calls for [I quote]“non-binding guiding principles and voluntary guidelines [...] (especially unaccompanied and separated children) who do not qualify for international protection as refugees and who may need assistance.”

In closing, let me say that UNICEF continues to be ready to support Governments to care for children on the move everywhere in the world.

Thank you.