

**International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) 2014**  
**Human mobility and development: emerging trends and new opportunities for partnerships**  
**Inter-sessional Workshop**  
**MIGRATION AND FAMILIES**  
**7 and 8 October 2014**

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Mr. Director General, Your Excellencies, NGO Representatives, Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, It is an honour to represent Save the Children in this Inter-sessional Workshop on *Migration and Families* in the framework of the International Dialogue on Migration Organised by the IOM and share the podium with so many eminent speakers.

Save the Children has been pioneering the work on protecting Children on the Move with programmes focusing on protecting migrant children in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Balkans, and Latin America. Our full spectrum focus means that we work in emergency and in developing contexts and as well as in industrialised countries. And in our programmes we find that children on the move are *especially* vulnerable in all such diverse circumstances.

We work in partnership with many agencies represented here today: Save the Children chairs the Inter-Agency Group on Children on the Move which brings together regional and International Organisations, including UN Agencies *and IOM*, working on children in the context of migration.

It is for this reason that we believe the theme of this IDM which focuses on *Human mobility and development: emerging trends and new opportunities for partnerships* and the focus of this inter-sessional workshop on *migration and families* are crucial.

Today's meeting is significant: it is a time when the international community is discussing a new global development framework of post-2015; and a time when many poor and vulnerable populations have suffered the consequences of a severe economic crisis and are confronted with forced displacement due to political and environmental reasons. In the coming decades, an unprecedented number of children and families are expected to migrate and shift population dynamics further, driven by demographic factors, economic disparity, violent conflict, state failure, natural disasters.

It is estimated that 33 million international migrants worldwide are under the age of 20 and 11 million are children between the ages of 15 and 19 years. The number of children who are 'on the move' is growing dramatically. Increasingly migration flows are mixed and bring together people who have differing motivations, objectives and needs, but where refugees and migrants often travel together.

This increase and the challenges linked to it are before our eyes. Let me give you an example. According to SC's data, between January and 31 August 2014, alone, approximately 113,000 migrants have reached Italy's southern borders, including 18,000 minors (8,000 with families). Syrians account for about 24,000, including 4,000 women and 7,000 children (6,214 accompanied). In the corridor between Central America and the US, over 66,000 unaccompanied minors arrived at the southwest border of the United States as of 31 August 2014.

Families are fundamental to support the development and well-being of children. Migration plays a key part in human development and it can benefit families and children enormously. It is a route out of poverty or violence. It can open new important opportunities.

The children we work with and consult with in our programmes are very clear in explaining their reasons to migrate. A young girl we consulted with put it very simply: “*Children and families – she told us- migrate to find a better life, to have a normal life*”.

These words explain very clearly what we see daily in our programmes: Migration is often a route to safety or survival. But we also see every day that once children move, particularly in the absence of protection services and support, they become highly vulnerable to violence, discrimination, abuse and various forms of exploitation either during their journey, or once they reach the new destination. Children and families are mostly aware of these risks. However, starting a dangerous journey is often seen as the only possible survival strategy.

### **At home**

So creating a system that promotes the rights of children on the move starts with reducing the need for migration that is unsafe and risky and needs to start at home. It does not mean trying to stop the movement of people. But children tell us that to help prevent unsafe journeys, what is needed is a strong system of protection and support that starts at home, by supporting families and children and improving access to opportunities for parents, for adolescents and young people.

This means that a range of social and economic development interventions that include *partnerships* to bolster national child protection systems and foster educational, training and employment opportunities for children and adolescents in countries of origin are required. This involves *collaboration* between countries of destination, transit and origin to develop *and finance* appropriate structures that provide young people with opportunities to flourish.

### **At home: Migration and its impact on children when they are Left Behind**

Migration has different impacts on vulnerable family members, particularly children and adolescents both when children migrate themselves and when they are left behind by their parents.

Our work shows that on the one side, remittances from migration can have a positive impact on children’s ability to access services at home such as education and health as well as access to essential goods. However, this also comes at a cost. Family separation can have a negative impact on children’s emotional and psycho-social development, affecting their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.

Our work in Romania, for example, has shown that children’s separation from their parents has a negative emotional impact. Globally, more studies are now looking at the consequences of such separation in the long term both on children’s development and on the human capital of a country.

Too often, restrictive migration policies stop children from reunifying with their parents following regular channels. The consequence is that younger children are denied their right to family life and many adolescents often end up migrating in precarious and irregular circumstances in order to reunite with their parents, because migration policies prevent them from using safe and regular channels. They risk their lives and are in danger of violence and exploitation.

**It is therefore crucial that Governments and the international community take into full consideration the impact and consequences of migration control policies, particularly restrictive family reunification policies, on children and their families. Migration management policies should reflect, respect and fulfil the rights of children irrespective of their migration status, in line with States’ obligations to protect children and preserve family unity under UNCRC and other international human rights standards.**

### **In Transit**

In our programme we hear stories of children whose experience of crossing borders is extremely traumatic. Some of them are with their families but some go through such ordeals on their own. Many of them tell us of losing friends and family members during the border crossing, or during their journey through the desert or at sea. They experience violence, torture, abuse and exploitation at the hands of

smugglers or traffickers but also violence by the hand of State officials, border police and military personnel.

**So it is absolutely crucial that *together*, governments, agencies and civil society identify an operational framework for providing protection and assistance to migrant children who have endured trauma and violence while in transit, including for migrants that find themselves in crisis situations.**

**At Destination : Children in irregular migration still criminalised, deported and detained**

We know that for the many children we work with, arriving in a new country, while opening new opportunities, can also be a very daunting experience.

The fear of arrest and the inhuman conditions of detention have a profound impact on children and their families and the traumatic experience of detention features constantly in what children tell us about their travel.

There is compelling evidence that detention can have permanent negative effects on children's physical and mental health.<sup>1</sup> Yet, many States continue to detain children because of their irregular migration status. The UNCRC provides that the detention of children, including children in the context of migration, should be avoided. The CRC Committee has affirmed that migrant children should never be detained and family reunification should never be used as an excuse to place children in detention facilities with their parents. States should instead find alternative solutions for the entire family.<sup>2</sup>

**So Adequate, well-coordinated and well-funded reception policies are key for these children.**

**At Destination: Best interests of the child, best-interests determination procedures, largely absent from migration decision-making**

Save the Children's programmatic experience shows that considerations on the best interests of the child are too often absent from migration decision-making, despite the requirements of the UNCRC.

Too often authorities lack the necessary awareness of child rights and ability to act in a child sensitive way. Even in decisions regarding family unity, the best interests of the child are not systematically assessed, if at all. Family tracing, assessment and procedures for reunification and monitoring for unaccompanied children are rarely in place and the adequate coordination mechanisms between countries are often lacking. The right to family unity may be extremely affected in the context of international migration. Children born in destination countries to irregular migrant parents may be denied their right to family life due to the deportation of one or both parents.

**To prevent these violations, a child's rights based approach to migration requires that the best interest of the child be given primary consideration over migration control policies or administrative considerations.**

**Cooperation and collaboration mechanisms**

With mixed migrations flows becoming increasingly the norm, the collaboration of agencies with different mandates of protection within countries and cooperation between actors in different countries becomes vitally important. **Transnational coordination and cooperation mechanisms** between countries, involving state and non-state actors are fundamental to ensure that children are protected through all stages of their migration journey.

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<sup>1</sup> See International Detention Coalition for a review of the research on the impact of detention on children and Young migrants. E.g. IDC (2011) There Are Alternatives. A Handbook for Preventing Unnecessary Migration Detention. <http://lawministudio.com/idcoalition/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/There-Are-Alternatives.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UNCRC Committee General Comment 6

But for this to happen such collaboration and cooperation need to be embedded in *systems of protection that place the human rights of migrant children at the centre.*

**At the same time, national child protection systems** are critical to address both prevention and response throughout the migration process. Coordination between national authorities, agencies and across sectors are key to allow for non-discriminatory access to services and appropriate protection for all children, including non-nationals.

Equal attention should be given to the growing numbers of **child migrants and their families who are stranded in crisis situations.** Strengthening humanitarian assistance and appropriate protection to these children and families is especially important in a context where the system is not equipped to respond to such an unprecedented flow of migrants and refugees in various parts of the world. It is essential to consolidate relevant principles and practices under existing refugee, humanitarian and human rights law and appropriate procedures for asylum, resettlement and humanitarian admission to reflect States' obligations under the UNCRC and Refugee Law.

**Later today, we will be discussing what such mechanisms of international cooperation and collaboration could look like in an interactive side event co-sponsored by the Inter-Agency Group on Children on the Move, Terres des Hommes and the Permanent Missions of Mexico and Italy and Save the Children. I would like to invite all of you to attend this very important debate.**

**Mr. Director General, Your Excellencies, NGO Representatives, Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The next 12 months will be an important opportunity for the international community to increase and improve the protection of the most vulnerable children and their families, with the negotiations of the new development framework that will replace the Millenium Development Goals.

**It is critical that all the agencies involved in this debate, really champion a focus on children and migration within this debate, with a focus on the protection of children and explicit targets for migrant children.**

We need to work together, migration and protection agencies and actors, to ensure that children involved in migration are better protected and they can truly benefit from migration. This requires that we work towards a common migration and development agenda that places the rights of children at the centre. This is an opportunity for partnership. Let's ensure that we take such opportunity so that the rights of children on the move are really respected and fulfilled.

Many thanks