An unsettled past, an uncertain future
Pilot Study: Children on the Move using the Southern Route in Eastern and Southern Africa
Summary of Findings
December 2020
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1. Introduction

An increasing proportion of the world’s youth desire to move permanently to another country, with the willingness to move abroad highest in sub-Saharan Africa at 44 per cent. Children on the move have the right to safe passage. When this is assured and their rights and well-being are supported, these girls and boys can benefit from resources, institutions and opportunities that may be unavailable in countries of origin, while also making valuable contributions to their new places of residence.

However, a safe journey is far from what many children on the move will experience. Migration patterns within and from the Eastern and Southern Africa are highly dynamic, responding to climatic and environmental pressures, political, economic and social factors, including conflict and instability, as well as national and international immigration and refugee policies. In recent years, population movements in the region have become more intense and more treacherous, and there are critical emerging issues such as the normalization of acute violence, kidnapping and ransom demands associated with smuggling activities, and widespread incarceration of children on the move.

As there is no systematic tracking and data collection of these children and their well-being, they become invisible and often fall outside the scrutiny of formal institutions and child protection services. Robust knowledge on children on the move, particularly those moving in mixed migration flows (or mixed movements) is vital in order to understand how many children are moving, why they are moving, their experiences, the risks they face and their protection needs along the way.

A lack of reliable information is keenly experienced in relation to children using the 4,000-km Southern Route, characterized by migrant flows from the Horn of Africa, down the Eastern Corridor via Kenya towards South Africa (Figure 1). Critically, there is a shortage of data that is collected directly from children in documenting their individual experiences and the personal, family, community and structural factors that influence their decisions to migrate.

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3 Throughout this report, children on the move refers to migrants and refugee children. MMC uses ‘refugees and migrants’ when referring to all those in mixed migration flows, unless referring to a particular group of people with a defined status within these flows. See the following publication for additional information: http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/terminology_MMC.pdf
5 The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMs), Smuggled South, An updated overview of mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa with specific focus on protections risks, human smuggling and trafficking, Briefing Paper 3, March 2017.
7 Mixed migration flows (or mixed movements) refers to flows of people travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, over the same routes and using the same means of transport, but for different reasons. The men, women and children travelling in this manner often have either been forced from their homes by armed conflict or persecution, or are on the move in search of a better life. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and may include asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless people, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation. UNHCR, Mixed Migration, Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration, https://www.unhcr.org/asylum-and-migration.html
8 Save the Children and RMMs. Young and on the Move. Children and youth in mixed migration flows within and from the Horn of Africa, 2016.
The study on Children on the Move using the Southern route in Eastern and Southern Africa is a regional research initiative led by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office and implemented by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) of the Danish Refugee Council. It is designed to understand more about the drivers of children in mixed migration flows, and about the experience of children as they travel from Eastern and Southern Africa to and within Southern Africa, and in particular to South Africa. Results from the research project coincide with global momentum to strengthen the support and protection for children on the move; the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018 mark key milestones to move this agenda forward.
2. Objectives of the study

The study provides UNICEF, other agencies and governments within the region with a better understanding of child migration, and a platform for joint work to support and protect children on the move, building upon the key findings arising from the research. The study also supported the development, piloting and testing of new data collection instruments, tools and methodologies to gather information on children on the move.

How the Information was gathered

Providing a clear profile of children on the move is a challenging task in view of the clandestine nature of their journey, their irregular status and the strategies they are forced to deploy in order to reach the country of destination. This is particularly true for children who are smuggled and trafficked or for children who migrate independently.

Using the MMC’s unique mobile phone-based survey tool – the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) methodology – data collectors were able to access migrant and refugee communities to gather in-depth data in a context where irregular movements are changing rapidly. 4Mi uses a network of specially trained interviewers (called monitors) stationed at key migration hubs through which migrant movements occur. Monitors use a custom-designed smartphone application to conduct interviews and submit real-time data on the profiles of migrants, drivers of migration, journey conditions, protection risks and destination countries. Monitors are often recruited from the same migrant communities and so have privileged access to migrants who then feel safe to share their experiences.

Over a period of 8 months, April to December 2018, 28 monitors in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia interviewed 870 children on the move (455 girls and 415 boys) in Southern Africa aged between 13 and 17 years. The monitors used a specialized child protection-focused survey, as well as a survey adapted for use with adults who traveled with children, and strict child safeguarding measures.

Sampling began with a mapping of migrant hotspots through a desk review, informed by consultations with key stakeholders in each country. Interviewers were then deployed to the selected locations and study participants were identified using snowball sampling strategies, whereby monitors recruited study participants based on their own network.

Research ethics review and approval was obtained in-country before the start of data collection. A critical incident protocol was developed to ensure study participants benefited from appropriate support to meet acute protection needs, informed by key principles such as do no harm and the best interests of the child.

Limitations

While every effort was made to ensure as representative a spread as possible regarding sex, age, and profile of respondents, the study did not provide a representative sample of the population of children on the move in the region, and results should be interpreted with caution. Children with disabilities and their needs were not explicitly identified. Some findings have been omitted due to small sample sizes and data quality concerns. As a pilot methodology, survey questionnaires underwent very limited testing and require further testing and refinement. The data presented here do not include the small percentage of children that refused to answer certain questions.

9 More information on the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) methodology are available through the following link http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi/
10 28 monitors (18 males and 10 females) were recruited and trained for this project: 15 monitors in South Africa, 7 in Zimbabwe, and 6 in Zambia. The study was originally designed to also include Mozambique, but due to delays in government approvals this area was dropped from data collection.
11 The child survey is the focus of this research summary.
12 Spaces where migrants are known to live, work, gather and socialize. This includes workplaces, specific neighbourhoods, busy bus stations, faith-based locations such as churches or mosques, social areas such as restaurants or coffee shops.
3. Key Findings

The information collected by this significant study provides an initial understanding of why children are migrating on southern route and their often-traumatic experiences. Children leave their country of origin due to a variety of factors including conflict, and for economic and personal reasons. It is clear these children face a variety of protection risks on the way, including detention, kidnapping, and an inability to communicate with caregivers they may have been separated from. During the journey, children may experience the very things they felt compelled to leave behind, such as a lack of access to basic services and violence.

Many countries treat irregular entry as a crime and unaccompanied children are therefore often subjected to the same violations as undocumented adults, facing detention, deportation and violence. However, children, by virtue of their level of physical and emotional development and social status, are recognised as especially vulnerable to the protection risks and child rights violations they face. For this reason, human rights principles insist that while guaranteeing the human rights of all children in the context of migration, children on the move must be treated as children first and foremost.

**Girls on the move in Eastern and Southern Africa**

Girls can face more disadvantages than boys in their departure countries, such as a lack of access to quality education and risk of child marriage and gender-based violence. When on the move, the risk to girls is greatly exacerbated. They are more likely to be deported, kidnapped by criminals, face longer in detention with less access to basic commodities, and are more likely to have started their journey alone. All of these are risks in themselves but also increase girls’ risks as well. For example, a girl who is kidnapped by criminals will then face an increased risk of violence.

**Girls and education:** Of the children on the move who had never attended school, the majority (61 per cent) were girls. Before the start of their migration journey, a higher proportion of boys (58 per cent) were full-time students than girls of the same age (50 per cent). Three in ten girls and boys chose their destination country on the basis of access to (better) education (28 per cent of girls, 30 per cent of boys).

**Choosing a destination country:** In choosing the destination country, a greater proportion of girls prioritized factors such as access to (better) medical care (33 per cent of girls, 21 per cent of boys), greater general security (26 per cent of girls, 16 per cent of boys), a good social welfare system (24 per cent of girls, 21 per cent boys), and reuniting with family (15 per cent girls, 9 per cent boys).

**More girls used a smuggler, were deported, and were kidnapped by criminals:** Girls were more likely to have started their journey alone (24 per cent of girls versus 19 per cent of boys). Girls were nearly twice as likely to use a smuggler/transporter (13 per cent) compared to boys (7 per cent). Of children who had previously attempted migration, girls were deported at a higher rate (76 per cent) than boys (63 per cent). Of the children kidnapped or held against their will during their migration journey, more girls than boys were kidnapped by criminals (52 per cent of girls and 43 per cent of boys).

**Girls in detention:** The Committee on the Rights of the Child affirms that children should never be subject to immigration detention. However, not only are children routinely detained in relation to their migration status (17 per cent of all children on the move), but the average number of days in detention was significantly higher for girls (27 days) than for boys (17 days).

Even though children's right to education, leisure and play should be respected and promoted in case of detention, the reality is children do not even have access to basic services. More girl migrants than boys lacked access to blankets and warm clothes (63 per cent of detained girls vs 61 per cent of detained boys), clean toilets and washing facilities (53 per cent of girls vs 39 per cent of boys), and clean drinking water (40 per cent of girls vs 35 per cent of boys) while in detention.

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13 Save the Children and RMMS. Young and on the Move.
15 General Comment No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, para. 7. This goes a step further than Article 37 (b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which affirms that the detention of a child shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.
3.1 PROFILES OF CHILD MIGRANTS

According to self-identifying questions from the survey, children interviewed include those who are migrating on their own (unaccompanied), and children who are accompanied by adults (sometimes related to the children), siblings and/or other relatives.

One third of the children on the move interviewed were younger adolescents aged 13–14 years (34 per cent), while two thirds were adolescents aged between 15 and 17 years (66 per cent) (Figure 2). Slightly more girls were interviewed than boys (52 per cent girls; 48 per cent boys) (Figure 3).

The top nationalities of the children on the move were the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) at 24 per cent, Somalia at 17 per cent, Zimbabwe at 13 per cent and Mozambique at 11 per cent (Figure 4). Previous data collected over the past decade suggested that the bulk of migrants and refugees travelling from the Horn of Africa through the Southern route are from Ethiopia and Somalia, however only 6 per cent of the interviewees were from Ethiopia. There had previously been no evidence of Eritrean migrants on the southern route however 17 children from Eritrea were interviewed as part of this survey.

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17 Unaccompanied children are described as “separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so”. The UNHCR definition is “An unaccompanied child is a person who is under the age of eighteen, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is, attained earlier and who is “separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so.”

18 RMMS, Smuggled South, 2017.
The top four countries of departure reflect the top nationalities, and are DR Congo (19 per cent), Zimbabwe (14 per cent), Somalia (13 per cent) and Mozambique (11 per cent). Other countries of departure included Zambia (8 per cent), Malawi (6 per cent), Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho (all 5 per cent), Burundi (4 per cent), Botswana (3 per cent), and Djibouti, Eritrea, Republic of Congo, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda (all 2 per cent or less).

**Education and employment**

Adolescents in Africa are facing complex institutional and structural challenges, including a lack of access to quality education, unemployment and poverty despite working.19

The majority of the children on the move interviewed had some form of basic (i.e. primary or secondary) education (85 per cent), most notably primary education (53 per cent). However, considering the age of the children, less than a third (32 per cent) had a secondary education and 15 per cent had no education. There were also clear gender disparities with more girls out of school and less girls receiving primary education (Figure 5). Girls face a range of challenges in accessing education including child marriage, with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest child marriage rate in the world with around 4 in 10 girls married before age 18.20

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19 UNICEF, Annex 1 on the investment case for adolescents and young people in Eastern and Southern Africa
Figure 5: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17, by highest level of education ever attended (by sex)

More than half of the children on the move interviewed were full-time students before the start of their migration journey (53 per cent). Girls were more likely to report working than boys (13 per cent of girls versus 11 per cent of boys) – either combining work with being a student or working full- or part-time (Figure 6). However, employment in such an age group needs to be caveated by the fact that in Eastern and Southern Africa, 27 per cent of boys and 24 per cent of girls aged 5 to 17 years are subject to child labour, and that the transition into work of the most disadvantaged youth is often the most direct, moving from school – if they go to school – into the irregular and informal work that lasts a lifetime.

Figure 6: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 by main activity before start of migration journey (total and by sex)

Note: Other and do not know responses less than 5% not displayed in chart – applies to all other graphics.

22 International Labour Organization (ILO), Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a better working future, 2017
Migration experience prior to current migration journey

Half of children on the move had a prior experience of migration internally; almost a quarter had prior experience of migration outside of their home country (Figure 7), of which 66 per cent were now trying to reach a different country (71 per cent of boys, 63 per cent of girls). Previous migration outside of the home country to a different destination than the current journey was mainly to Southern Africa (63 per cent), the Middle East or Gulf States (20 per cent) or to Europe (6 per cent). Far more girls than boys had previously attempted migration to the Middle East (27 per cent of girls compared to 12 per cent of boys who had previously migrated to a different destination country) – possibly linked to the “Maid Trade.”

Seven in every 10 children who had attempted migration were deported, with girls being deported at a higher rate (76 per cent) than boys of the same age (63 per cent) (Figure 8).

The children interviewed listed their main reasons for leaving home as violence and general insecurity, personal/family reasons, economic reasons, lack of freedom/discrimination in country of origin, lack of social services, and migrating because others were also migrating (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 years according to reasons for leaving home country (%)

Note: Other reasons were varied and could not necessarily fit into the prescribed choices. These reasons include ‘for school’ and ‘I don’t know’. The response ‘I don’t know’ could not be considered as ‘refused’.

Violence and general insecurity was a prevailing reason for migration for nationals from Burundi, DR Congo, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Sudan and Somalia (Figure 10). This supports previous research which shows that conflicts and widespread violence are one of the primary drivers for migration for Burundian, Congolese and Somali children who migrate on the Southern route towards South Africa. The youngest children age 13 were also the most likely to want to leave due to violence and general insecurity (59 per cent compared to 49 per cent total).

Figure 10: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 years wanting to migrate due to violence and general insecurity, by nationality
3.2 ORGANIZING THE JOURNEY

Almost 9 in 10 (87 per cent) of the interviewed children on the move reported having received assistance from someone to organize their recent migration journey. The sources of assistance reported by children included friends or relatives (79 per cent); smugglers (11 per cent); a community member such as teachers, village elders, religious leaders or someone from the village who had migrated (10 per cent); an employment agency or broker (someone from outside the community offering travelling opportunities) (3 per cent), or an official government agency or government officials (1 per cent).

This journey is expensive and it has cost my family a lot of money

18-year-old Ethiopian boy

(Figure 11). Younger adolescent migrants aged 13–14 years were more likely to receive assistance than older adolescent migrants aged 15–17 (94 vs 83 per cent).

Figure 11: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 years who received help to organize current /most recent migration journey, according to the individual/institution who provided support (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Assistance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government agency or government official</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment agency or broker offering travelling opportunities</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment agency or broker offering travelling opportunities</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smuggler</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends or relatives</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Migrant smuggling plays an important role in facilitating movement along migration routes to and through Southern Africa. There are many associated risks including confiscation of documentation and separation from caregivers by smugglers (see below). Girls were nearly twice as likely to use a smuggler/transporter (13 percent) than boys of the same age (7 percent). Of the 10 per cent of children who used a smuggler, the majority departed from or were nationals of Eritrea, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Figure 12).
Article 7 of the CRC gives children the right to birth registration and a nationality. However, many children are at particular risk of abuse and detention because they have uncertain legal status, have no documentation or travel on false documents. Only 22 per cent of the children on the move interviewed travelled with their birth certificate and 13 per cent with their passport. Of the 58 per cent of children with no documentation at all, 56 per cent were nationals of just two countries: DR Congo (34 per cent) and Somalia (22 per cent). This is unsurprising when you consider that only 3 per cent of children under age five have their births registered in Somalia, and 25 per cent in DR Congo (the sub-Saharan Africa average is 43 per cent). Slightly more girls than boys had documents on departure (42 per cent of girls compared to 41 per cent of boys), and were more likely to have retained that documentation at the point of interview (85 per cent of girls compared to 73 per cent of boys).

Heightening their vulnerability, younger adolescents were more likely to have no documentation upon departure (66 per cent of 13-year olds compared to 48 per cent of 17-year olds).

24 UNICEF, Uprooted, 2016
An unaccompanied or accompanied migration journey

One in five children started their migration journey alone (21 per cent) or were accompanied by someone who was not their primary caregiver (16 per cent) (Figure 13). Of those travelling with a primary caregiver, this was a parent in 68 per cent of cases. In other cases, the primary caregiver was a sibling or other relative, friend or neighbor; in 3 per cent of cases this primary caregiver was another child.

Figure 13: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 years who started their migration journey accompanied by primary caregiver, by someone other than caregiver, and unaccompanied (%)

Girls were more likely to have started their journey alone (24 per cent of girls versus 19 per cent of boys). The proportion of children migrating alone also increases with age: 7 per cent of 13 year-olds compared to 38 per cent of 17 year-olds. Children on the move whose country of departure was Djibouti were more likely to start their migration journey unaccompanied (50 per cent), followed by migrants from Zimbabwe (36 per cent), Eritrea, Malawi and Mozambique (about 3 in 10) and Ethiopia and Zambia (1 in 4).

3.4 ON THE WAY

Documentation en route

Of the 42 per cent of children who had some type of documentation at the start of their migration journey, 21 per cent were no longer in possession of their documentation at the time of the interview. Meaning two thirds of children (66 per cent) either had no documentation to start with or had parted with it along the way.

The most common reason for not being in possession of the documentation children had at the start of their migration journey was loss (41 per cent) followed by taken by smuggler (23 per cent) and stolen (19 per cent), with girls more likely to have had their documentation taken by a smuggler or stolen (Figure 14). When smugglers detain migrants against their will, they often use keeping passports or other identification documents as a means of control.²⁷

²⁶ However, it should be noted this is a small sample of only two children departing from Djibouti
²⁷ RMMS, Smuggled South, 2017
Communication methods

Having access to social media was important for keeping in touch with friends and family – critical for engaging in reunification processes if children become separated from their caregivers. However, only 28 per cent of children on the move had access to social media during migration. The most commonly used platforms were WhatsApp (84 per cent) and Facebook (53 per cent). Of those who had access to social media, most of them used their own or someone else’s mobile phones to access it (99 per cent). Of those with access, nearly 1 in 4 used it to communicate with smugglers and/or to find information on the migration route (Figure 15). Older children were much more likely to access social media during their journey (43 per cent age 17, 8 per cent age 13).

Girls were more likely to access social media during their migration journey (30 per cent of girls compared to 26 per cent of boys). Almost a third of girls who used social media, used it to communicate with smugglers, compared to just 1 in 10 boys; and to access information about the migration route (29 per cent of girls vs 16 per cent of boys).

Figure 15: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 years who used social media during their migration journey, by purpose of use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of Use</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with friends and family</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access information about migration route</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with smugglers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share stories about my migration journey with other users</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14: Currently not in possession of documentation, by reason why, by sex (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confiscated by Immigration Authorities / Police</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken by Trafficker / Smuggler</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transit countries

Children provided a list of 18 countries of transit. The top five countries of transit are Zambia (38 per cent of children), Tanzania (28 per cent), Zimbabwe (20 per cent), Mozambique (19 per cent), and Kenya (18 per cent) (Figure 16). The other transit countries were Botswana, Burundi, DR Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Senegal.

Figure 16: The top 5 countries of transit listed by children at the point of interview

The top three nationalities of the 17 per cent of children on the move who transited through a refugee camp or transit centre during their current/ or most recent migration journey are from DR Congo (27 per cent), Somalia (24 per cent), and Burundi and Ethiopia (both 10 per cent). The most common countries of departure for children transiting through a refugee camp or transit centre were Somalia (18 per cent) and Botswana and DR Congo (both 12 per cent). Children departing from Djibouti, Lesotho, Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Uganda reported not transiting through a camp/centre.

Girls are more likely to have transited through a refugee camp or transit center (19 per cent versus 15 per cent boys). Girls and boys were equally likely to have left the camp due to violence and safety issues (39 per cent and 37 per cent respectively). However, boys were more likely to leave due to a lack of long-term opportunities (32 per cent boys, 14 per cent girls), parents/caregivers decided to leave (25 per cent boys, 19 per cent girls), and because they felt discriminated against by other refugees (17 per cent boys, 11 per cent girls).

Figure 17: Reasons for migrating onwards from a refugee camp/transit centre by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents/caregivers decided to leave</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discriminated against by other refugees</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleeing from marriage</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was being recruited to take part in armed rebellion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/safety issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of long-term opportunities, particularly for education and employment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 This refers to countries that the children listed as having crossed through to reach the country of interview
Children on the move at risk

Migrating and displaced children are at risk of some of the worst forms of abuse and harm at every stage of the migration journey – from when they leave home, throughout the journey, and upon reaching their destination (if they do). Often dependent on human smuggling, they can easily fall victim to traffickers, though as the role of the smuggler is increasingly aligned with criminal activities, the definitional difference between smuggling and trafficking is being tested.

Many children are subjected to extreme forms of abuse and deprivation during their journeys, and there is evidence that discrimination, violence and exploitation affect all groups of children on the move.

Migrant smuggling on the Southern route has become more violent in the last decade; the children interviewed felt unsafe and many experienced violence (Figure 18).

Separation from caregivers

A direct link has been established between family separation and recourse to dangerous and often irregular means of migration. Of the 541 children (62 per cent) traveling with their primary caregiver, 1 in 5 (21 per cent) reported being separated for at least 24 hours during their journey (43 per cent girls and 57 per cent boys), most commonly by smugglers (Figure 19).

For almost a third of children (27 per cent), detention by immigration officers was the cause of caregiver separation. However, it is important to note that in compliance with obligations under article 9 of the CRC, States have to ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will. As children should not be detained because of their immigration status, when parents are detained, non-custodial measures are the best solution.

Half of the immigration detention cases reported as the cause of separation from primary caregivers (15 out of 30) happened to children whose departure country was Botswana. Indeed, for all children departing Botswana who were separated from caregivers this was the sole cause.

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29 Smuggling in migrants: The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident. Source: Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime 2000.

30 Trafficking in persons: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Source: Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime 2000.

31 RMMs, Smuggled South, 2017

32 RMMs, Smuggled South, 2017

33 RMMs, Smuggled South, 2017

34 IOM, International Migration Law Information Note
Immigration detention is described as a widespread practice in the main destination and transit countries, to contain and curb flows of irregular migrants. The immigration status of children moving across borders often takes precedence over their protection needs and children travelling without legal status are frequently subjected to extended and harsh periods of immigration detention. Detained migrants face harsh conditions in detention including physical violence, poor nutrition, lack of access to water and sanitation and extreme overcrowding.

Out of the 92 children that were reunited with their primary caregivers, 33 per cent received assistance from other migrants, 16 per cent from smugglers/brokers, 15 per cent from local authorities, and 13 per cent from local and international NGOs. While 82 per cent of children were later reunited, this leaves 20 children (16 girls, 4 boys) who at the time of their interview remained separated; 15 of the separated children (11 girls, 4 boys) had no idea where their caregivers were. These 20 children are added to the 328 girls and boys who started their journey without travelling with a primary caregiver, totaling 40 per cent of all children.

Of the children separated from their primary caregiver, only 26 per cent of those now reunited were able to communicate with their primary caregivers while apart. Of those that were still separated at the time of interview, even fewer were able to communicate with their primary caregivers (20 per cent of children). Communication is a major challenge for both boys and girls, and this was across the different age groups and nationalities.

**Detention of child migrants**

As discussed above, the detention of children on the move is a violation of their rights, but the use of immigration detention is described as a widespread practice in the main destination and transit countries, to contain and curb flows of irregular migrants. The immigration status of children moving across borders often takes precedence over their protection needs and children travelling without legal status are frequently subjected to extended and harsh periods of immigration detention. Detained migrants face harsh conditions in detention including physical violence, poor nutrition, lack of access to water and sanitation and extreme overcrowding.

In total 17 per cent of children were detained in relation to their migration status, by the police or immigration or border authorities, in any of the countries they have been. Older adolescents were more likely to experience detention than younger adolescents (11 per cent of 13 year-olds compared to 20 per cent of 17 year-olds).

Many faced significant deprivations while in immigration detention (Figure 20). Less than 1 in 5 children (boys and girls) had access to a social worker or a lawyer during detention. The average number of days that children were detained for was 22 days (17 days for boys and 27 days for girls).
Kidnapping

A total of 107 children (12 per cent) reported being kidnapped or held against their will by smugglers, criminals, or any individuals including other migrants or family members, at some point since the start of their current migration journey. Boys and girls were equally likely to undergo this traumatic experience. Most of those experiencing kidnapping (86 per cent) reported being held by smugglers and criminals. Those most likely to be kidnapped were nationals of Somalia (29 per cent), Mozambique (17 per cent) and DR Congo (14 per cent). Two thirds of children had had someone pay for their release (64 per cent).

Lack of access to services

During the journey the majority of children on the move reported receiving assistance in the form of food (80 per cent) and clean drinking water (70 per cent). However far fewer received access to clean toilets/washing facilities (46 per cent), shelter (42 per cent), clothes/shoes and bedding (both 18 per cent), or cash (13 per cent). Less than 1 in 5 children received legal assistance, psycho-social support, and access to safe spaces. Just 1 in 5 children received medical care (Figure 21).

Overall, more boys than girls reported having challenges in accessing these services, and documentation gave limited guarantees of accessing services, with just 9 per cent of children saying it helped them.

“I have no information about services and I am afraid of being arrested

16-year-old Eritrean girl in Harare, Zimbabwe
3.5 Destinations

Countries on the Southern route that were previously strictly described as transit countries are now increasingly becoming countries of destination (Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia). South Africa, although primarily described as a destination country, is also used for onward migration to Australia, South America, the US or Europe.

The main reasons for children on the move choosing the destination countries included access to better education, good social welfare system, greater general security, reuniting with family to access to better medical care and better chances of getting a job and sending remittances home (Figure 22).

"I am still anxious and don’t know whether I will reach my destination"

13-year-old Ethiopian boy

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Figure 21: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 years who reported receiving assistance at any time since the start of their migration journey, by type of assistance reported (%)
Despite these hopes for a more secure future, when and if these children reach destination countries, the threats they face do not disappear. Just as experienced on their journey so far, upon arrival children on the move will likely face risks of deportation, incarceration, violence, and lack of access to basic services and protection.

The children interviewed showed resilience in light of their harsh and uncertain experiences. While 26 per cent of children reported no positive experiences during their journey, some children felt they had benefitted (Figure 23). This is important, because child mobility can not only be understood as a source of increased risk of exploitation and abuse, but also as a source of opportunities, and children are increasingly seen as actors, rather than merely victims. In this sense, child mobility is both a matter of migration and of child rights. There is need for more integrated and informed programmes which seek to understand the holistic experience, motivations and needs of children and young people on the move.

**Figure 22: Reasons for choosing destination country, percentage of children**

- Other: 14%
- Reuniting with family: 12%
- Greater general security: 21%
- Good social welfare system: 22%
- Access to (better) medical care: 28%
- Access to (better) education: 29%
- Better chances of getting a job and sending remittances home: 46%

**Figure 23: Proportion of children on the move aged 13-17 years who reported positive experiences during their journey (%)**

- I met new friends, companions: 29%
- I feel closer to my destination / goal: 36%
- I have a sense of achievement: 24%
- I have a sense of pride: 10%
- I feel that this journey has made me a stronger person: 13%
- I have acquired new skills, such as a new language: 5%
- I was able to access social services, legal assistance, medical services: 22%
4. Protecting Children on the Move in Eastern and Southern Africa

Understanding the rationale that underpins children’s decisions to undertake a perilous migratory journey is a critical consideration for putting in place policies and programmes to meet their needs. The results and lessons learned from this research are beneficial in strengthening the protection of children affected by migration in countries of origin, transit and destination.

The research will inform UNICEF’s continued support to governments and partners to make sure that the commitments to child rights including, through the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child as well as the Global Compacts for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and Global Compacts on Refugees translate into tangible results for children in the region. UNICEF will continue working on systems strengthening approach with a focus on inclusion of children on the move in national systems and continuum of care for those moving across borders. This provides opportunities to support the full development of children on the move and to address the specific challenges they face along migration routes.

**UNICEF’s global agenda for protecting children on the move**

UNICEF adopted a Six-Point Agenda for Action for Children Uprooted in 2016 that signal the overarching direction of UNICEF’s engagement on issues of migration and displacement in diverse contexts.

The policy asks were further elaborated in the Global Programme Framework for Children on the Move (2017) and cut across UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018 – 2021) Goal Areas. UNICEF’s six-point agenda, which puts the rights of children at the center of international cooperation in the context of migration and displacement include:

1. Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence
2. End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating
3. Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status
4. All refugee and migrant children keep learning and have 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
An unsettled past, an uncertain future

Pilot Study: Children on the Move using the Southern Route in Eastern and Southern Africa

Summary of Findings

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