

Statement on Children and the Global Compact on Migration by the three co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs – Luxembourg, Jamaica and Bulgaria

Mr. Co-Facilitator,

On behalf of the three co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs, Bulgaria, Jamaica and my own country Luxembourg, I would like to underline the unique opportunity this Compact presents to make a positive difference in the lives of millions of children. As we discuss the differentiation between irregular and regular migration, migrants and refugees, implementation, follow-up and review, let us not forget why we are here.

We are here because – collectively – by adopting the NY Declaration we agreed to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of *all* children, *regardless of their status*; to work to provide for basic *health, education and psychosocial development* and for the *registration of all births on our territories*; to ensure that *all children are receiving education* within a few months of arrival; and to provide children with a *nurturing environment* for the full realization of their rights and capabilities (paragraph 32 of the New York Declaration).

We are here because in 2016 Member States recognized and agreed that children in the context of international migration are vulnerable, especially children in irregular situations and those who do not have access to international protection.

We are here because in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we committed to leave no one behind, to achieve universal health coverage and access to quality healthcare and education, and to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children.

We are here, because as signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all of us in this room – distinguished Excellencies, Ambassadors and colleagues – are obliged to protect the rights of *every child in our countries* – not just *of* our countries – to ensure all children are registered at birth and issued birth certificates, that data is shared for the purpose of *protecting children only* and that measures are put in place to ensure that children and parents can report safely to police or other authorities as victims or witness of crimes. That the protection of

Statement on Children and the Global Compact on Migration by the three co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs – Luxembourg, Jamaica and Bulgaria

family life is granted to *every child* without any discrimination. That a child's health is not undermined as a result of discrimination and that *all migrant children* have equal access to quality and inclusive education and receive school certification.

Increasing access to critical services for all children, including irregular or undocumented children, and *expanding* protection for all children, is possible without compromising legitimate State interests, without undermining national security and without creating pull factors for irregular migration. It is also cheaper and often more cost-effective than denying or delaying access to critical services.

Member States around the world – including members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs - are already providing access to birth registration, education without discrimination and health care beyond emergency healthcare. Inclusive child protection systems and robust guardianship systems already exist; effective alternatives to detention for children exist – and work.

Protecting children is everyone's responsibility; to make it a reality the Compact needs to include measures that close the specific protection gaps of children in vulnerable situations, especially those in irregular situations and those who do not have access to international protection. They need robust procedures to assess their best interests, referral and assistance mechanisms and access to solutions when return is not possible as proposed in the draft.

Finally, children and young migrants should be fully engaged as partners in the implementation, follow-up and review of the Compact. Their voice, their feedback and their experience are invaluable. We look to UNICEF and other child-focused agencies to support the implementation of measures that concern children and facilitate the active participation of children and young people.

Each and every child that receives education, grows up health and happy, is an investment in our common future. A shared investment in a global public good.