

Statement on Children and the Global Compact for 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, namely Bulgaria, Jamaica and Luxembourg, I welcome the Co-Facilitators' continued commitment to uphold the best interests of the child through a range of concrete and practical measures proposed and retained in the current draft. We specifically commend you for your constructive efforts to clarify critical proposals that are relevant to children, reflecting the insights shared by Member States during the first two rounds of negotiations.

The GCM *must* deliver on our collective promise in the New York Declaration *to protect the human rights of children and address their particular vulnerabilities*. We therefore welcome the proposed new framing of Objective 7, as it recognizes the distinctions and intersectionality between different types of vulnerabilities. When it comes to children, all four intersecting forms of vulnerabilities are critical: personal characteristics; the reasons why migrants leave their countries of origin; the circumstances in which migrant's travel; and the conditions they face upon arrival.

Firstly, while recognizing their resilience and agency, children are vulnerable simply by virtue of being a child – their personal characteristic. We thus welcome measures 7e and 7f, calling for robust procedures for all children in legislative, administrative and judicial proceeding, as well as specialized procedures to identify, refer, care for and support family reunification for unaccompanied and separated children.

Secondly, regarding vulnerabilities linked to the reasons why children leave their countries of origin, in our view, Objective 2 does not yet sufficiently recognize child-specific drivers such as domestic violence, recruitment by extremist groups or violent gangs, child marriage, lack of educational opportunities or family reunification. To be effective, efforts to minimize adverse drivers of child migration must start by acknowledging these drivers in the first place.

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Thirdly, the GCM provides an important opportunity to close protection gaps and improve the circumstances in which children travel. For one, children need expanded access to safe and regular avenues to migrate, such as pathways for low-skilled families to move together or simpler, faster and less discriminatory family reunification procedures, including for low-skilled or temporary migrants. Further, to reduce risks for children *en route*, investments in *inclusive* child protection systems in countries of origin, transit and destination must increase; effective cooperation between child protection authorities across borders and along migratory routes must be strengthened; measures to facilitate cross-border case management, screening and referral of children must be put in place; consular officers must be trained in child rights and child-friendly procedures; and returnee children must receive long-term and meaningful reintegration support.

Fourthly, concerning the conditions that make migrant children vulnerable upon arrival, we welcome the suggested language on equal access to *necessary* services in Objective 15 -- it highlights the crucial link between service provision and the exercise of children's rights, and provides for safe access to such services in practice. Every child *in* our countries has a right to be registered immediately after birth, to acquire *a* nationality, to be protected from all forms of violence, and to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and education. The revised GCM draft rightly acknowledges that these rights cannot be realized in practice if children – and their parents – fear that their personal data will be reported to immigration enforcement authorities; if they are scared about being apprehended in schools, hospitals and courts; or if they do not know how to access complaint and redress mechanisms. *All* children matter, from early childhood to adolescence. And *all* children – aged 0 to 18 years – should enjoy *all* the rights enshrined in the UN CRC, without discrimination or differentiation by age, or distinction of any kind. Recognizing the critical importance of taking a lifecycle approach, we also warmly

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welcome the inclusion of early childhood development in Objective 15g, as well as the new reference to ending child labor in Objective 6f.

To conclude, we cannot forget about a crucial factor that compounds children's vulnerability at destination: lack of access to sustainable solutions and secure status. We welcome the provisions in objectives 2 j & l, 5 f & g and 16 g, but would recommend a more explicit call for pathways out of irregularity. For children, regular status represents stability, guarantees the realization of their human rights and provides a sense of belonging.

Mr. Co-Facilitator,

The Group of Friends stands ready to continue supporting your work to make the Global Compact for Migration truly work for *all* children everywhere.