CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

30 million children live outside their country of birth and among them are 12 million refugees and asylum seekers part of mixed migration flows. Tens of millions of children are also left behind by migrating parents. Making migration safe and empowering for children and young people is not only a challenge, but a tremendous opportunity. Well-managed migration that both addresses the drivers and mitigates against the risks of migration will be key to the achievement of the SDGs.

The close link between sustainable development and international migration is also reflected in the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees. Both the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Migration recognize migrants as integral members of our societies and key contributors to sustainable development and inclusive growth. Similarly, the Global Compact on Refugees aims at leveraging the development potential of refugees for their host communities. The 2030 Agenda and both Global Compacts are deeply intertwined—progress on the former cannot be achieved without implementation of the latter. The Global Compacts offer a roadmap to ensure that migrants are not left behind.

While SDG target 10.7 is often considered the key entry point to migration in the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda as a whole is very relevant to migrants and migration. For instance, target 8.8 on migrant workers, target 10.c on remittances and SDG 16 on trafficking in persons and legal identity illustrate the many ways in which sustainable development and migration intersect. A dedicated focus on children on the move is critical to meet the SDGs commitment to leave no one behind. Too often, migrant children are statistically invisible, excluded from national systems and discriminated against. Ensuring their inclusion, protection and empowerment will be key for them to contribute to the 2030 Agenda as they make their way into adulthood.

INVESTING IN THE SDGS TO WELCOME, PROTECT AND EMPOWER CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

As 2020 marks a five-year milestone towards achieving the SDGs and “decade of accelerated action” from now until 2030; this is an opportunity to advocate and support Member States in accelerating progress for all children, including children in the context of migration, across the SDG agenda and ensure that migration policies are child-sensitive.

- **SDG 3 – Health:** Migrant and displaced children often face additional challenges when it comes to inclusion in health systems. Difficulties related to legal documentation, missing health records, fear of deportation, language and economic deprivation are some of the barriers that Member States should address. On top of that, there’s increasing evidence about the impact of migration experiences on mental health.

- **SDG 4 – Education:** Children affected by migration face additional barriers to accessing early childhood development, primary and secondary education and skills training. Challenges include lack of capacity in schools, language barriers and lack of recognition of certifications across borders. In crisis-affected communities, education is often the first service suspended and the last service restored. UNICEF encourages Member States to remove barriers to education for migrant and displaced children, ensure safe places of learning, and increase funding to education, including trained staff, to close the access gap and enable schools to foster inclusive learning.

- **SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Three-quarters of the children who arrived in Italy across the Central Mediterranean route during the second half of 2016 report being held against their will or forced to work without pay. UNICEF encourages Member States to strengthen child protection systems, to build the capacity of frontline workers to identify child victims of trafficking, and to facilitate cross-border cooperation to eradicate forced and child labour and enact labour migration policies that enable migrant workers to move with their families.

- **SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities:** The success or failure of millions of migration stories is decided at the local level. It is here – at school, in the neighbourhood park – that newcomers and long-term residents interact, get to know each other, and eventually become community members. Local governments can make a real difference in the lives of uprooted children due to their in-depth understanding of the concrete challenges and opportunities these communities face, often putting in place innovative solutions.

- **SDG 13 – Climate Action:** With the risk and frequency of natural disasters increasing, millions have been uprooted. Today, over 500 million children live in extremely high flood-risk zones and nearly 160 million children live in high or extremely high drought-risk zones. Developing child-sensitive adaptation and resilience strategies and integrating displacement considerations into disaster preparedness can protect the most vulnerable, including internally displaced children.

- **SDG 16 – Peaceful Societies:** Tens of millions of children are uprooted from their homes by protracted conflict and face gender-based violence, human trafficking and other risks. Expanding safe and regular migration pathways, allowing families to migrate together, strengthening child protection systems, ending child immigration detention and providing identity documents can keep migrant and displaced children safe and contribute towards achieving target 16.2 and target 16.9. These actions also support SDG 5 – Gender Equality targets to end trafficking and sexual violence.

- **SDG 17 – Partnerships:** The very nature of migration means that no one state can manage it alone. Effective collaboration between governments, private sector and civil society can develop and scale-up solutions to the issues mentioned above. Objective 23 of the Global
Compact for Migration calls for a revitalized global partnership for safe, orderly and regular migration, including to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda in geographical areas from which irregular migration systematically originates. Another key component of this SDG is data, including partnerships and capacity-building to strengthen collection and dissemination to support targets 17 and 18.

KEY ASKS

UNICEF urges governments and partners to take the following actions as part of their SDG implementation:

1) Implement a six-point Agenda for Action for Children Uprooted:
   • Protect migrant children from exploitation and violence by investing in strong local, national and regional child protection systems, including (i) training of social workers; (ii) appointment of qualified guardians; (iii) legal assistance; (iv) case management; and (v) partnerships with civil society and faith-based organisations; and (vi) cooperation across borders.
   • End the detention of children because of their immigration status by introducing non-custodial practical alternatives, such as foster care, supervised independent living, or other family- or community-based living arrangements.
   • Keep families together and reduce statelessness by allowing families to migrate together; by preventing family separation in transit; by facilitating family reunification, including in destination countries; and by providing all children with a legal identity and registering them at birth.
   • Provide comprehensive care and access to services for migrant and displaced children through strengthening the capacity of education and healthcare systems (supporting target 3.8 for universal health coverage), enacting referral mechanisms, and implementing firewalls between services providers and immigration and law enforcement authorities.
   • Protect migrant children from discrimination and xenophobia by speaking out against discrimination, regulating hate speech, enacting hate crimes legislation and strengthening the role of human rights institutions. Lift overall barriers to inclusion and invest in specific policies and programmes to ensure that migrant and displaced children belong in their communities (supporting target 10.2 on the inclusion of all).
   • Address the causes that uproot children from their homes through policy and financial investments across all SDG areas such as social protection, youth employment, climate action, peace and justice.

2) Include key priorities for children in the context of migration (i.e., six-point Agenda for Action) in all SDG implementation and monitoring efforts at the country level, such as national development strategies, plans and budgets; Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks; and voluntary national reviews, in partnership with children and young people.

3) Develop and roll out national implementation plans of the Global Compact for Migration that include the child-sensitivity guiding principle and the child-specific commitments of the Compact, in partnership with children and young people.

MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

UNICEF urges governments to collect age and sex-disaggregated data, and to report on all children in national reviews, including nonnational children. Reports on SDGs should cover key issues relating to children impacted by migration, and the data collection and analysis efforts should be coordinated both within countries and across borders, as stressed in a Call to Action for better data by UNICEF and partners. Safeguards should always be in place to ensure that data collected about / from migrant and displaced children is never shared with migration or law enforcement authorities or used for migration enforcement purposes.

INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

• Invest in in the implementation of the child-specific commitments in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees.
• Investments for children, adolescents and youth under all other SDGs will benefit migrant & displaced children, as long as they target all children in the country regardless of status (as opposed to only the children of the country).
• Invest in inclusive child protection/education/health systems that address the needs of all children in the country, as well as the specific needs of migrant and displaced children. This will lead to strong inclusive systems that leave no child behind.
• A precondition to the above two asks would be to invest in collecting, analysing and sharing disaggregated data, including monitoring SDGs for migrant & displaced children.

ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

UNICEF urges governments to enable participation by young migrants in designing and implementing migration policies and programmes and to involve them as partners in the SDG monitoring and review process. Participation is key as children’s first-hand experiences can inform and strengthen national priorities to implement the SDGs, including target 10.7 on well-managed migration, target 10.2 on inclusion and target 10.3 on ensuring equal opportunities. Supporting platforms such as the UN Major Group for Children & Youth, which organises the Youth Forum at the Global Forum on Migration and Development, provide an opportunity for young migrants to engage on the global decision-making progress. Likewise, tools such as a Report On The Move give young refugees and migrants a voice and access to information about their rights while allowing UNICEF and partners to collect data. Governments should work with the public and other partners to foster societies and communities inclusive of migrants, starting with educating children, adolescents and youth on inclusivity. UNICEF encourages national partners to implement SDG-focused learning through the school curricula. The World Largest Lesson is an excellent resource to bring the SDGs to the classroom through multilingual educational content, including teaching materials on SDG 10 and target 10.8 (see specific lessons: Children on the move and Migration is Part of Shared History). UNICEF’s Uprooted campaign aims at bringing communities together by empowering migrant and displaced children and crafting positive narratives about child and youth migration with key target audiences.