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EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration in Eastern and Southern Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean Regions (2020 - 2023)



COMPENDIUM OF GOOD PRACTICES FOR THE EFFECTIVE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN MIGRATION

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Sport and other psychosocial activities can help manage emotions and provide tools for the lives of children and adolescents on the move. In Tijuana, Mexico, through implementing partners, UNICEF brings sports and educational activities in shelters for children on the move to promote their emotional and physical well-being.

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Introduction

The EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration (2020 - 2023), is a 33-month programme (October 2020 – July 2023) funded by the European Union (EU) and co-funded and implemented by a partnership between the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The overall objective of the Action is to contribute to the effective protection of children on the move and the realization of their rights through child protection systems that provide quality integrated services, alternative care and mental health and psychosocial support.

Children on the move is a compound concept that has gained traction on the operational level in the international community, the term describes children who have been directly or indirectly affected by migration and displacement, moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, either internationally across borders or within the same country, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers. Although not exhaustive, the definition includes child migrants; children in need of international protection, such as refugees and asylum-seekers; internally displaced children; children indirectly affected by migration and displacement, such as children who stay behind while parents or caregivers migrate; stateless children (in the context of migration and displacement) and child victims of cross-border trafficking.¹

Implemented in two regions and four countries (South Africa and Zambia in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) and El Salvador and Mexico in Latin America and the Caribbean Region (LACR)), the overall programme objective was structured around four outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Child protection systems include gender-responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities.
- Outcome 2: Child protection systems have integrated gender-responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanisms addressing gender-based violence and other structural problems.
- Outcome 3: Child protection systems provide alternative care options, emphasising community and family-based alternatives.
- Outcome 4: Exchanges of gender-sensitive good practices and lessons learnt across two regions/ four countries serve as evidence for the protection of children on the move in different contexts, based on empirical evidence and data.

In this framework, the programme promoted the documentation and sharing of lessons learnt and good practices, at regional and international levels, towards strengthened national child protection systems, inclusive of children on the move, and the use of alternative care options to replace immigration detention. This document presents selected good practices, identified in the four participating countries and organised around the different outcomes of the programme.

UNICEF and UNHCR hugely thank the European Union for its support to accelerate action to protect children on the move in South Africa, Zambia, El Salvador and Mexico, contributing to breaking them free from immigration detention practices and developing necessary frameworks and resources at regional and country levels to continue doing so. UNICEF and UNHCR look forward to continued collaboration with the EU and using the significant momentum generated through the Action to further achieve results for children on the move.

Outcome 1 - Child protection systems include gender-responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities

South Africa: The Inter-departmental Protocol on the multi-disciplinary Management of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children



Why is the intervention important?

As one of the largest economies in Africa, South Africa remains a major migration destination and attracts thousands of migrants seeking refuge and/or better life opportunities, from countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Eswatini. UNICEF estimates that more than 642,000 migrant and refugee children lived in South Africa as of 2017, making it the country with the largest child migrant population on the continent. The number of children, including those unaccompanied, migrating to South Africa has significantly increased over the past years.² South Africa's response to this influx has been guided by provisions of both international and domestic laws on the protection of migrant and separated children.³

However, children migrating to South Africa, particularly those unaccompanied, do not benefit from the well-being improvements they expect. On the opposite, as marginalised migrants, they face several challenges in accessing government welfare, health, and education services. They are often exposed to situations of grave vulnerability and get to live extremely risky lives.⁴ The documentation and legal status of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children (USMC) has an impact on their ability to access the child protection system and the services they need. As a result, many unaccompanied children remain undetected, which increases their risk of statelessness, abuse, neglect, and under-development.

Although in South Africa there are policies, legislative directives, and regulations that support the need to provide care for USMC, these are not fully implemented, which undermines the support

that the children need. With several government departments playing key roles in the national child protection system,⁵ some of the existing practices are inconsistent with the legislation, coordination is weak and, in some cases, there are no clear guidelines around the process. On the civil society front, great strides have led to platforms that meet to deliberate on topical issues regarding USMC, such as the National Inter-Agency Working Group on Care and Protection of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children.⁶ However, what has been missing is a guiding document on the multi-disciplinary management of USMCs, to improve the care and protection of this group of children.

What was the intervention?

Under the leadership of the Department of Social Development (DSD), the EU programme has supported the development of the gender-sensitive Inter-Departmental Protocol for the Multi-Disciplinary Management of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children (USMC) in South Africa. This initiative gained momentum following the training on Best Interests Procedures organized in 2022, which underscored a severe lack of coordination within the social workforce.

The document clarifies and standardises the roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms of different government departments, civil society organizations and foreign embassies. The most relevant government departments in this regard are the Department of Social Development (DSD), the South African Police Services (SAPS), the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), the Department of Health (DoH), the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DOJCD), the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). The protocol harmonises the institutional arrangements and defines how different stakeholders collaborate at district, provincial and national levels, to provide services to and effectively care for unaccompanied and separated migrant children, including asylum seekers and refugees. Also, it fosters inter-departmental cooperation and coordination, including information-sharing and networking between departments, agencies and other stakeholders.

The USMC Protocol complements the guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) already existing in respective departments and organizations for the delivery of services to USMC,

while helping to improve reporting and tracking progress.

What is the expected impact?

The steps taken to improve coordination and integration between different government departments and stakeholders address key structural barriers that children on the move face including difficulties in obtaining proper documentation, challenges with legalising children's status in South Africa, and difficulties related to contact with families and possible reunification. Thanks to the protocol, the USMC benefit from functional referral pathways and multi-sectoral care and protection, undertaken by, and through, intra- and inter-departmental coordination and management. Promoting a multi-layered support system and processes within existing structures, the protocol improved inter-departmental cooperation and assisted social workers in identifying the relevant counterparts, performing transparent referrals, and ensuring an improved cross-sectoral collaboration in the provision of adequate services to children on the move and responding to the intersected vulnerabilities of those who are unaccompanied or separated.

The multi-sectorial approach, involving government departments and non-state actors, promotes the provision of adequate and coordinated activities for the reception, care, protection and assistance, rendered to USMC based on their best interests. The implementation of the protocol proved to coordinate challenges between security services, child protection services, and other government or non-state institutions to avoid inconsistent application of fundamental rights and principles (the right to life, survival and development; principles of non-discrimination; best interests; child participation; family preservation and family unit; non-refoulement; and confidentiality, among others).

While ensuring the continuity of care, the protocol will help to further strengthen the protection of children on the move and to act in their best interests.

What you should know...

Considering the complexity of challenges USMC face in South Africa, it is clear that all stakeholders have a role to play. While the Department of Social Development plays a leading role in ensuring that

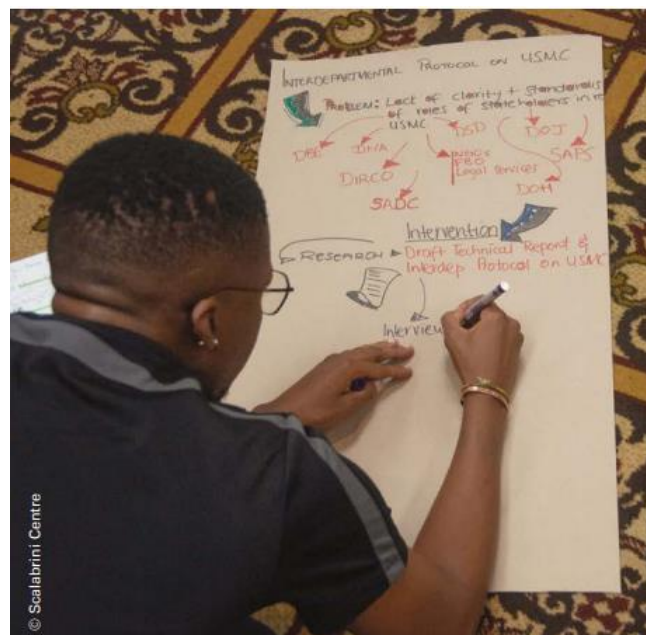
USMC are protected and safe, it cannot achieve this without the active role and support of other departments and non-governmental organizations. In this framework, the gender-sensitive Inter-Departmental Protocol has become an imperative response to tackle the challenges of children on the move accessing alternative care and protection services, addressing the lack of resources for child protection in South Africa and improving the coordination within the social workforce. Accountability is ensured by a monitoring tool being developed by the Centre for Child Law at the University of Pretoria. The use of joint operations, steering committees and information-sharing platforms to enhance the delivery of integrated services to USMC will ensure that their rights are upheld and that institutions deliver on their designated mandates.

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Useful links

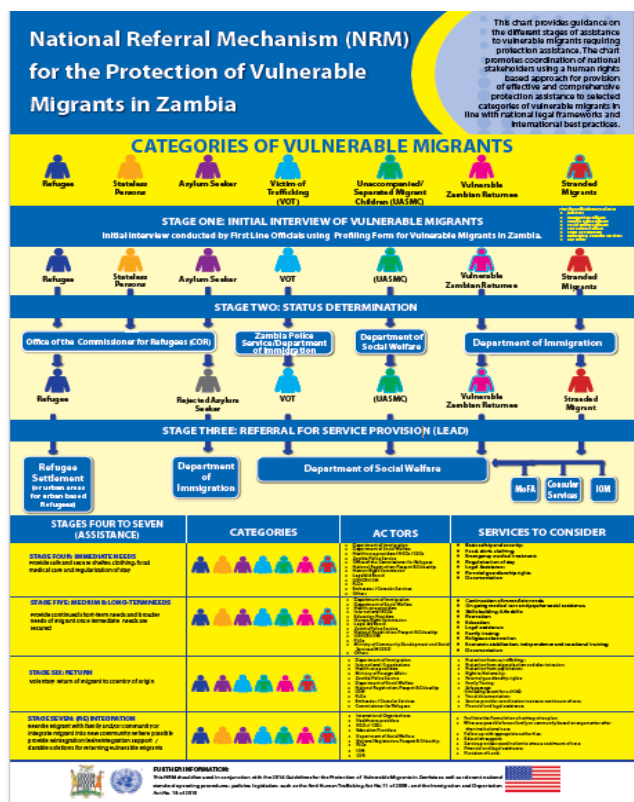
[Gender-Sensitive Inter-Departmental Protocol on Multi-Disciplinary Management of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children \(USMC\) in South Africa](#)



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Outcome 1 - Child protection systems include gender-responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities

Zambia - The child-sensitive National Referral Mechanisms for the Protection of Vulnerable Children on the move



Why is the intervention important?

Zambia continues to experience complex migration flows relating to both internal and external movements, as a country of origin, transit and destination. Situated in the centre of Southern Africa, the country is a preferred route for migrants in mixed flows moving through the southern migration route, towards South Africa.⁷

Children, women, and young people cross into Zambia from neighbouring countries to engage in informal agriculture, construction, and small trading businesses or to access education and primary health care facilities. People on the move are often at risk of being exploited, abused and trafficked, particularly when engaging in irregular cross-border trading activities and seasonal work.

After COVID-19, along with a resurgence of once-traditional migration routes, the Commissioner of Refugees Office recorded an increased number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving from the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region, seeking asylum in Zambia,⁸ or with intentions to move further to South Africa. Despite a known under-reporting due to a weak Information Management System (IMS), this complex movement of groups of vulnerable migrants, mainly

from Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea, continues to be recorded along the borders with Malawi and Mozambique and it has been increasing since 2020. Hundreds of them were reportedly detained and some (including children) were found dead in transit through hazardous means.⁹ Zambia's legal framework does not protect children from being detained for immigration-related purposes: like adults, they risk detention if found in the country irregularly or in possession of expired travel documents.

What was the intervention?

With funding support from the EU, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) and the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security (MoHAIS), working together with UNICEF and UNHCR, successfully contributed to reducing child immigration detention, by supporting legislative reviews, strengthening case management, bridging immigration, justice and child protection actors around referral and coordination mechanisms and developing the technical capacities of child protection system stakeholders.

In collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Save the Children International, UNICEF supported the MCDSS and the MoHAIS to develop a child-specific and child-sensitive National Referral Mechanism (NRM), that promotes the provision of child-friendly services for the rights and well-being of children in migration flows, including those unaccompanied and separated. The mechanism, launched and operationalised in 2023, mapped the available child-friendly services and promoted multisectoral coordinated care for vulnerable children on the move to increase their access to child-sensitive and responsive services. The revised NRM provides critical guidance to the Departments of Social Welfare, Immigration, Foreign Affairs and Labour: it assists first-line officials in screening vulnerable migrant and asylum-seeker children, recognising their vulnerabilities and needs, and referring them to the appropriated government ministries and services, civil society and UN Agencies. In line with national legal frameworks and international best practices, it includes procedures to strengthen the coordination of national stakeholders across different stages of assistance. It also comprises tools to facilitate the reception, service provision, safe return and reintegration of vulnerable children on the move, fostering engagement with Consulate Offices in Zambia and the initiation of a possible naturalisation process for stateless/at-risk of statelessness persons. As an example, the

government of Zambia mandated the use of the NRM for referring trafficking victims to care by law enforcement, immigration officials, and other front-line officers.

By incorporating a multisectoral approach through integrated case management and district-level cross-sectoral coordination, the child-sensitive NRM in Zambia is an example of a successful alternative to detention, that works towards building a system that does not use harmful, expensive and damaging immigration detention. This is essential in making sure that detention for children is for the shortest period and that children have access to alternatives to detention, in their best interests.

What is the expected impact?

The actualization of the child-sensitive NRM, along with the Best Interest Determination (BID) panels and multisectoral child protection committees have been pivotal in reinforcing cross-border collaboration and referring children on the move to the services they need. When the NRM is fully operationalised, children in migration can effectively access the national child protection services through an integrated case management system and break free from immigration detention.

The NRM has proved to be a good practice as it provides a framework that ensures close collaboration between both state and non-state actors, including law enforcement authorities, social welfare and other stakeholders. This in turn has enhanced the protection of vulnerable children on the move. When case management and best interests procedures are implemented within the NRM, multisectoral teams coordinate for care and protection decisions and the service delivery to children on the move is therefore enhanced.

Through the use of the NRM, the coordination between UNICEF, UNHCR, the MoHAIS and the MCDSS around cases of children on the move has improved, with alternatives to detention being discussed at the national level coordination forums and applied in individual cases in the BID panels. As a result, cases have been adequately referred to alternative arrangements rather than placed in detention.

In the framework of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme (2020-2023), the rollout of the child-sensitive NRM has resulted in successfully addressing 992 individual cases of children on the move (48 per cent of boys and 52 per cent girls) who were placed in detention: they have been referred to safe spaces,

returned to their countries of origin, and reintegrated in families and communities.

What you should know...

The NRM is one of the good practices, implemented through the EU programme, that has been shared in several fora with other countries: it was presented at the Southern African Regional Meeting on Migration Governance (held in South Africa in June 2022), at the virtual UNICEF Community of Practice meeting on ending child immigration detention (December 2022), and in other fora on alternatives to detention across regions, through the International Detention Coalition. The approach was also presented at the UN horizontal exchange meeting between the four EU programme countries (Zambia, South Africa, Mexico, and El Salvador). Several countries from the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (such as Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa) as well as from other regions (such as Sudan, Thailand and Indonesia) expressed particular interest in replicating the model. What has been of particular interest to other countries is how the NRM is applied in cross-border collaboration, when addressing cases of children on the move from neighbouring countries and how the establishment of referral mechanisms contributes to long-term and sustainable benefits for children on the move.

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Useful links

[Chart of the National Referral Mechanism](#)



Outcome 1 - Child protection systems include gender-responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities

El Salvador - the Diploma in Consular Training with special emphasis on children and adolescents on the move



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Why is the intervention important?

El Salvador's migration profile has been historically characterized by substantial emigration and return flows. Emigration is fuelled by structural drivers, such as lack of employment opportunities, food insecurity, violence, and disasters, as well as pull factors, including family reunification and the prospects of employment opportunities abroad. Violence and crime, including gangs, homicide, forced recruitment, extortion, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons, especially of women and girls, as well as sexual and GBV, have historically been structural factors of human mobility within and across national borders. A large number of people travel irregularly, especially to the United States through Guatemala and Mexico, risking their lives and exposing themselves to acute protection risks, including paying large sums for the services of smugglers and criminal organizations.¹⁰ Upon return to their communities of origin, adolescents and their families receive limited support and are confronted with the same factors that forced them to displace initially. Shortfalls in specialized services for children and adolescents, such as health, legal and PSS, including community-based protection services, pose barriers to their protection and community reintegration.

In the current context, Salvadoran migration places the Government of El Salvador, and therefore its Consular Network in the United States of America and Mexico, before a series of challenges, such as: guaranteeing the immediate attention and protection of groups of migrants in vulnerable conditions, especially migrant children; ensuring that migrants, regardless of their status, have all the guarantees to fully exercise their rights; guaranteeing the exercise of full citizenship;

facilitating the link between Salvadorans abroad and the development of the country; and facilitating the integration of Salvadoran returnees through a comprehensive care programme, among others.

What was the intervention?

With the support of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme (2020-2023), UNICEF in El Salvador supported the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in building the capacities of the Salvadoran consular authorities. The Diploma in Consular Training on the protection of migrant children was designed in 2021, in collaboration with the Independent Monitoring Group of El Salvador (GMIES), towards the development of skills that benefit the comprehensive care of migrant children and adolescents. The diploma was launched with the participation of the EU, UNICEF, UNHCR, and the Specialized Institute of Higher Education for Diplomatic Training (IEESFORD, currently Diplomatic Institute 'Dr. José Gustavo Guerrero'). Targeting participants from the Virtual Consular Centre and the Salvadoran Consular Network in the United States of America and Mexico, its learning objectives are: a) to acquire conceptual elements related to the political, legal and institutional frameworks that govern consular action; b) to internalize the importance of providing comprehensive care to migrant children, adolescents and their families; and c) to apply the necessary procedures to provide timely and relevant care and protection to migrants and their families. Along five modules, the course covers different subjects such as the applicable protocols for the protection of migrant children and adolescents and their families; consular services; government services and programs that can facilitate reintegration processes; diaspora, development and investments.

In parallel, technical assistance was provided to government institutions to update their care protocols for migrant children, addressing reception and reintegration stages. As part of the same strengthening process, a theoretical-practical workshop on project management for the protection of migrant children was organised for the officials of the Directorate of Diaspora and Human Mobility, as a means to include protection-related aspects in consular actions. Thanks to the EU funds, UNICEF and UNHCR provided crucial support to the authorities in the identification of returned children and their registration and follow-up processes, while accompanying case management from implementing partners and promoting durable solutions.

What is the expected impact?

Capacity building for authorities leads to strengthened child protection systems and improved services for children and adolescents on the move. Throughout the EU programme, sixty-six participants in the Diploma (58 per cent women and 42 per cent men) acquired knowledge and skills to provide protection to El Salvadoran children and adolescents on the move, living or transiting in Mexico and the United States. The impact of the diploma and the additional collaborative efforts has been profound, both in terms of social advances and the number of children served: by July 2023, 2,505 children and adolescents (35 per cent boys and 65 per cent girls) have benefited from access to protection, health, social work and justice/law enforcement services and 5,547 returned children (52 per cent boys and 48 per cent girls) have been reached through individual case management and accessed basic services such as education, social protection, reintegration, health, child protection and GBV response services.

Building the capacities annually of about 70 government officials and national staff on the protection of displaced children, through training decision-makers and operational teams creates a cascade effect for long-term systems strengthening.

What you should know...

The Diploma in Consular Training was taught by a multidisciplinary team of more than twenty professionals with expertise in multiple areas focused on the most recurrent consular needs for the care and protection of migrants. As per methodology, the course is delivered over 24 weeks in a hybrid format, combining virtual and face-to-face sessions and follows an interactive and participatory approach, where the exchange of knowledge and experiences prevails.

The requirements for the diploma accreditations include passing all the modules that comprise the diploma with an overall grade of 7.0. and the compliance with the IEESFORD regulations.

Within the framework of the training process, besides the mentioned success, some challenges

and limitations have been identified. At the academic level, despite the variety of topics and the quality of the contents were considered good, some content was not found very useful for participants' daily work as migratory contexts are different between the countries and areas where the consulate is located; for example, the migratory context experienced on the southern border of Mexico differs from the one experienced by the consulates located in the USA.

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Useful links

[Launch of Consular Training in Protection of Migrant Children \(Diploma\)](#)

[Systematization of the diploma](#)



Outcome 1 - Child protection systems include gender-responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities

Mexico - UNICEF and UNHCR Advocacy for the Approval of an MoU between Mexico and the United States for the Protection of Children on the Move



Why is the intervention important?

Mexico is a country of origin, transit, and destination for migrant and refugee children. In their transit, children face risks such as detention - or are sheltered in detention-like conditions -, family separation, deportation, physical and psychological harm, marginalization, discrimination, and sexual and economic exploitation. In recent years, the country increasingly become a destination for children and families on the move, particularly from Central America and, in 2022, it was among the top five countries globally for the number of new asylum-seekers. Mexico also remains a country of origin and return for Mexican children, including those displaced internally due to violence.

The migratory context in Mexico is affected by the asylum and migration policy decisions of the US government. The Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) programme (known as 'Remain in Mexico'), formalized in 2019, led to the deportation of thousands of asylum seekers from the USA to Mexico. Although this programme was abolished by the Biden Administration, following a US Court decision, it was resumed between December 2021 and August 2022 across four different ports of entry, enabling border authorities to return over 7,000 asylum seekers to Mexico – rife with criminal groups and limited availability of services– to await their asylum hearing dates.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of deportations from the USA increased through the application of Title 42 and Title 8, which allowed express removals on public health grounds, particularly affecting cities on the northern border of Mexico. Throughout 2022, border restrictions and

summary expulsions of migrants and asylum seekers from the USA under Title 42 persisted, with limited humanitarian exceptions. The complexity of mixed movements and the consequent response of policies like the MPP and Title 42 increased the risk of refoulement of people in need of international protection. Together with the absence of legal stay arrangements and alternative migratory pathways for those not in need of international protection, this resulted in overwhelming pressure placed on the already overstretched capacity of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (COMAR) to process the fast-increasing asylum demands. In May 2023, the Government of the USA lifted Title 42, resuming the application of Title 8 for express deportations.¹¹

What was the intervention?

In the framework of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme (2020-2023), UNICEF and UNHCR carried out sustained high-level advocacy and provided technical assistance to the Government of Mexico for the development of a binational child protection Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the USA and Mexico, for the protection of unaccompanied migrant children. Signed in January 2023, following the North American Leaders Summit held in Mexico City, the MoU proved to be critical to defining Mexico's priority agenda in bilateral relations with the USA, shaping the commitments made by both countries in the Los Angeles Declaration to improve the transborder protection of children on the move.

Based on this MoU, UNHCR and UNICEF continued joint advocacy efforts for the expansion of coordinated binational transfers to Ciudad Juárez-El Paso for family reunifications of unaccompanied children from Mexico to the US, when accessing the US protection system is determined by Mexican CPAs to be in their best interest. This transfer model is based on a pilot mechanism established in 2019 in Tijuana-San Diego which was formalized, improved and expanded through the binational MoU.

High-level advocacy was also carried out, followed by technical assistance, to allocate public expenditure to improve shelter capacities and national care standards, through the launch of national care guidelines for children on the move (see good practice under Outcome 3).

What is the expected impact?

With this historical agreement, both governments committed to facilitating safer pathways for unaccompanied children through secure and orderly transfer between countries, promoting the best interests of children on the move, supporting family reunifications in the US and access to international protection schemes, thus, reducing the recurrence of dangerous, irregular movements of unaccompanied children. This contributes to the accurate identification of children and adolescents in need of international protection, avoiding deportation, progressively deconstructing practices that consider that return is the best option for children on the move, and strongly promoting the right of children on the move to live in a family.

What you should know...

The high-level advocacy not only required coordinated efforts and technical support from UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM in Mexico but also the engagement and participation of several government institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), the National Welfare System (SNDIF), Federal Child Protection Authorities (PPNNA), the National Migration Institute (INM) and the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (COMAR).

A set of high-level skills was critical to the success of the initiative, including the profound knowledge of international and national legal frameworks as well as of governments' structure and key stakeholders; advocacy, negotiation and diplomatic skills; and capacities on (refugee) child protection and case management.

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Useful links

[Press release 'México y EE. UU. firman memorandos de entendimiento sobre movilidad laboral y protección a menores de edad en situación de movilidad' Jan 2023.](#)

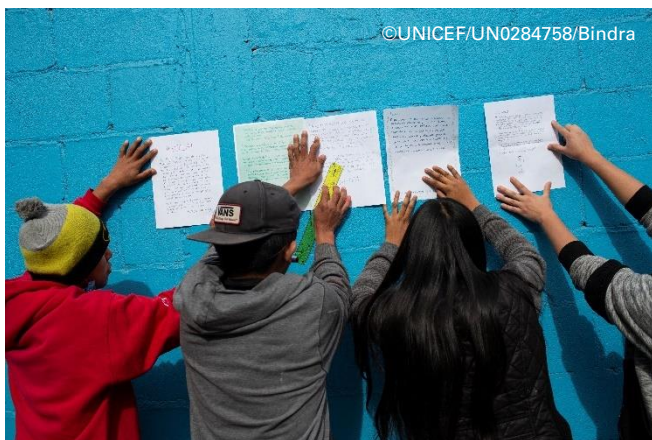
[News article 'Más plazas laborales, seguros de vida y reunificación de familias: los compromisos de México y EE UU para los migrantes mexicanos' Jan 2023.](#)



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Outcome 1 - Child protection systems include gender-responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities

Mexico - Inter-agency advocacy for the implementation of legal reforms for the protection of children on the move



Why is the intervention important?

During the last decade, the levels of forced displacement and irregular migration have increased resulting in Mexico becoming a country of origin, destination for asylum-seekers, and transit for people on the move that aim to arrive to the United States.¹² Similarly, the number of migrant and refugee children and adolescents recorded in Mexico, both accompanied and unaccompanied, increased exponentially.¹³

Ratified international standards and the Constitution of Mexico mandate federal entities to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents, regardless of their migratory status, meaning that children and adolescents entering Mexico automatically access the protection system for children's rights through the Child Protection Authorities (CPAs). However, until the last two years, the laws and regulations that operationalize and guide governmental entities' actions on asylum and human mobility were not harmonized. The lack of harmonization of the national asylum and immigration legal framework with international standards harmed the migratory administrative procedure, the implementation of plans to reinstate rights, and the process for the recognition of refugee status for children and adolescents. As a result, children on the move were primarily assisted by migration authorities, placed in immigration detention and subsequently deported. This represented a significant challenge for the full implementation of the 2014 General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Children's Law) and the shift from an immigration approach to a child rights-based approach.

Evidence available in the region identified as critical the need to strengthen the capacity of governmental

organizations and other public agencies working with children on the move.¹⁴

The intervention aimed to address the legal gaps that allowed the detention of children and adolescents on the move and the protection risks to which they were exposed to in Mexico.

What was the intervention?

After several years of interagency advocacy efforts conducted by UNICEF, UNHCR and other UN Agencies before the legislative and executive branches of the Mexican government, in November 2020, the Migration Law and the Refugee, Complementary Protection and Political Asylum Law were amended. The joint approach and the strong coordination between UNICEF and UNHCR around the same objectives positively influenced decision-makers and led to the approval of the legal amendments. In line with the 2014 Children's Law, the most relevant changes include the prohibition of child immigration detention (including families with children) and the provision of alternative care options; the determination of the best interests of the child as a central element for any decision concerning children on the move; the extension of the protection of children on the move to everyone—not limited to unaccompanied children; and the temporary regularization of the migratory status for children on the move to prevent their immediate deportation and guarantee their basic rights, including access to asylum.

The sharing of experiences throughout the country and the identification of strengths and gaps of the Mexican protection and alternative care systems served as a base to conduct an informed and evidence-based advocacy process, proposing amendments that could be practically implemented by considering the capacities of the entities involved and specific contextual characteristics.

Furthermore, while the Children's Law created mechanisms of child rights governance and coordination within the National Integrated Child Rights Protection System (SIPINNA), the amendments mandate the CPAs and National and State Welfare Agencies with the care and protection of children on the move, representing a major achievement to ensure their full protection.

The insufficient allocation of resources to improve the reception conditions and to ensure timely interventions by CPAs represented an additional challenge. Thanks to the EU programme, UNICEF and UNHCR supported the Mexican Government with the implementation of the reforms through advocacy and technical assistance.

Firstly, advocacy was carried out and interagency efforts were invested to promote the approval of a series of amendments to harmonize the legal framework on migration and asylum with the legal framework on child protection. These efforts included dialogue with legislators, the development of technical documents, and joint press releases to support and advocate for the approval of the legal amendments. At a later stage, technical assistance has been provided to the National Welfare System (DIF by its acronym in Spanish) to facilitate and accompany the implementation of the legal amendments, especially by hiring specialized personnel and providing resources to CPAs of seven key states.¹⁵ As a result, twelve multidisciplinary teams, comprised of psychologists, lawyers, and social workers, have been created, strengthening the capacity of the CPAs to respond to the needs of migrant and refugee children and adolescents. The CPAs have been provided with tools for the identification of children and adolescents in need of international protection, and with information about protection measures, guaranteeing the right to live in a family. Finally, technical support has been provided to create a national registry of children on the move in the country (see good practice under Outcome 4).

What is the expected impact?

Strengthening the child protection system comprehensively (technically, financially and in terms of personnel) enhances its functioning and effectiveness, benefitting all children and adolescents, including those on the move.

The approval and implementation of legal amendments have contributed to the accurate identification of children and adolescents in need of international protection, avoiding deportation and progressively deconstructing practices that consider that deportation/return is the best option for children on the move, promoting the development of alternative care mechanisms for them and promoting their rights.

Through advocacy and interagency efforts, the protection of children on the move has been included on the political agenda, resulting in the prioritization of family unity, due process, and the best interests of the child in all the actions carried out by the Mexican government. The communication and dissemination initiatives in host communities have contributed to reducing stigma and stereotypes about people on the move.

Looking forward, the interagency advocacy will aim to reinforce the use of public federal funds in line with the technical guidelines, ensuring that the functioning of public shelters is aligned with the new legal framework. UNICEF, in collaboration with

the Federal Child Protection Authority, initiated a costing study to identify the structural needs of CPAs and their cost to advocate. This study will be followed by an advocacy strategy implemented by UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, for increased public budgetary allocations at the federal and state level.

What you should know...

Capacities and resources are not the same across the different entities involved in providing protection services to children on the move. In this regard, it is important to implement a flexible approach that can be adapted to the contextual needs and the specificities of migration flows in different geographic locations. The implementation strategy has been adjusted to incorporate the needs at municipal levels, resulting in a wider scope than the one initially targeting federal and state levels and supporting more effectively the implementation of the legal amendments.

Furthermore, legal amendments must be accompanied by an increased budget allocation, in particular, to support those governmental entities assigned with additional responsibilities for the protection of children on the move. While the multidisciplinary teams working in the CPAs are currently being financed by UNICEF and UNHCR, to sustain their functioning in the long term, it is important that federal and state governments progressively incorporate these costs in their budgets or identify development stakeholders that could support the government on this, as part of their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The financial involvement of the governments would also contribute to creating a sense of belonging between the members of the multidisciplinary teams and other personnel from the CPAs and to effectively implement the legal amendments to ensure that children's rights are being protected.

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Useful links

[Twitter 27 Aug 2020](#) - [Twitter 24 Sept 2020](#)
Joint press release September 30, 2020:
[Twitter](#) - [UNHCR Website](#) - [UNICEF Website](#)
Joint press release November 11, 2020:
[Twitter](#) - [UNHCR Website](#) - [UNICEF Website](#)

Outcome 2 - Child protection systems have integrated gender-responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanisms addressing gender-based violence and other structural problems

South Africa - Strengthening local-level systems: integrating child protection services to enhance access of children on the move



Why is the intervention important?

Across Southern Africa, children move within and over borders, to earn money and support their families at home, flee from conflict, domestic violence, oppression or persecution, pursue education, or due to changes in families such as the death of a caregiver.¹⁶ Some children on the move in the region travel with family members or informal caregivers, but many travel alone, either unaccompanied or separated: the number of children migrating to South Africa has significantly increased over the past years.¹⁷ South Africa's response to the recent influx has been guided by provisions of both international and domestic laws on the protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant children, ensuring a human rights and child-centred approach to child protection across borders and within the country.¹⁸ The country's progressive legislative framework provides for the right to self-settlement of migrants, access to basic healthcare, and education.¹⁹ The care and protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant children is determined by the courts and children are often placed in Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCC), or in community-based foster care.²⁰ However, an increasingly restrictive migration governance framework, inconsistencies between policy and practice, and growing anti-foreigner sentiments pose challenges for those working in the sector: laws and policies designed to address key welfare and protection challenges for children on the move lack robust implementation. This means that many of them, particularly those who are separated or

unaccompanied, face several challenges and barriers to accessing asylum, documentation, government welfare, healthcare, education, and other basic services. Additionally, the lack of social protection means that many families and children on the move live in deep poverty, in unsuitable housing without the ability to access education or enter the formal economy because of a lack of documentation. The documentation and legal status of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children (USMC) has an impact on their ability to access the child protection system and the services they need. Furthermore, high levels of xenophobia from residents, xenophobic violence and related hate crimes continue to affect social cohesion, access to services, and the provision of services to migrant children by stakeholders, negatively impacting the well-being of children on the move.²¹

What was the intervention?

Through the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme (2020 -2023), UNICEF in South Africa worked to promote gender-responsive systems for the integral care and protection of children on the move.

Acknowledging that child development is a holistic process, in rights-based programming for children on the move it is critical to involve all the systems within which a child grows. As services for children on the move in South Africa are particularly fragmented and duplicated, contradictory with the application of legislation, and lack cooperation and coordination among stakeholders, the EU programme worked with government departments and NGOs to deliver integrated services for children on the move.

The primary step was to bring all the stakeholders including local and outside agencies together, to critically address the contextual short-term and long-term challenges, understand the socio-political realities and their changes, and take on the various responsibilities to provide integrated services.

Thanks to the EU funds, an Interagency Working Group was established, as a mechanism to encourage collaboration between actors working for children in mobility. The group was used as a catalyst for integrating services and allowed NGOs to begin working with undocumented migrant children. The strategy, encouraged by the EU programme, was not to omit basic needs, which most NGOs have been providing, resulting in competing for small resources, duplicating services and creating dependency. Rather, implementing

partners were encouraged to look critically at the gaps in services, considering the existing capacities and working with each other to activate all NGOs and local community structures across border areas through the Interagency Working Group. To strengthen the supportive system for children on the move and their access to comprehensive services, stakeholders began to strategize and optimise individual strengths and to work together to fill the gaps.

At the same time, implementing partners advocated before the government at the local, provincial and national levels around the barriers faced by children and families on the move and the importance of providing adequate responses based on cooperation rather than competition, with a shared vision and willingness to invest in providing quality services for children on the move.

What is the expected impact?

The realisation of an integrated approach is productive, it fosters buy-in, ownership and leadership among the respective partners. It brings to achieve results for children on the move in a context of under-resourced public services, ever-growing needs, and an often-obstructive bureaucracy.

The implementing partners started providing MHPSS services to children on the move while seeking out ways to meet their basic needs; supporting children's access to education and health services, while making sure they are placed in alternative care options where they are protected and cared for; implementing GBV prevention and response programmes, alongside livelihood work with women and life skills for girls. The provision of integrated services helped implementing partners build strategic relationships with state service providers such as social workers, CYCC staff, and officials from a broad range of agencies. The extent of service integration and coordination allowed civil society to increase the impact of their interventions on the lives of children on the move.

This intervention shows how it is possible to integrate NGO and government services into child protection systems for children on the move at local and provincial or district levels: the collaboration between NGO and government actors increases the reach and improves the quality of services for children on the move in care and attention facilities as well as the efficiency of mechanisms for addressing gender-based violence and other structural problems. The success of this integration relies on the careful building of mutually supportive

personal relationships for both government officials, such as state social workers, and NGO workers.

What you should know...

One key observation is that this work did not need a large injection of funding. Instead, non-state service providers combined their different strengths and connected with government services to bring them on-side through skills-sharing. This approach reduced the burden on government service providers while also ensuring that coordination was improved and intervention gaps were addressed.

As challenges persist and migration is increasingly treated as a national security concern, rather than as a humanitarian duty, there is still work to do. Accessing to and regularising appropriate documentation is a key outcome in response to the increasing securitisation of the migration response in South Africa, for the well-being and future livelihoods of children on the move.

This approach, though context-specific, could also be replicated in other contexts, including urban areas and refugee settlements in both, development and rapid response emergency contexts.

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Useful Links

[UNICEF. 2023. Technical Brief One: Integrating child protection services. UNICEF South Africa](#)



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Outcome 2 - Child protection systems have integrated gender-responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanisms addressing GBV and other structural problems

South Africa - Addressing structural barriers through children's participation, legal reform, research and advocacy



Why is the intervention important?

In South Africa, several structural problems prevent children on the move access to their rights and services and fuels violence against them, especially GBV, with an effect on their psychosocial well-being.²² The lack of documentation, including complex and dysfunctional public processes for registering births and accessing birth certificates, asylum and refugee status papers, seems to be the most significant barrier, preventing access to education, health services, alternative care, and GBV support. Other barriers include fragmented policies related to children on the move across government departments; difficulty in accessing foster care grants for non-South Africans; xenophobic attitudes of some government officials; and a gap between policy and practices, resulting in children on the move being unable to access the protection and support provided for every child in the law.²³

These barriers affect, among other things, children's ability to attend school and engage in extra-curricular activities – all basic rights and normalising activities that help children grow and thrive as well as cope with grief, loss, and responses to traumatic events.

While the lack of documentation is a clear barrier to achieving global commitments including the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 (on reducing inequalities)²⁴ and violates the basic rights of a child, it also leaves children in a protracted state of unease and fear about the future: children on the move are reportedly afraid of becoming stateless and suffer from increased vulnerabilities to exploitation and harassment associated with

statelessness. Alongside these institutional barriers, children and families on the move are often marginalised and experience high levels of violence (structural, xenophobic, and gender-based) that impact their health and well-being. Because of their marginalisation, most families and children on the move struggle to maintain their socio-economic security.²⁵ Many migrant families live in overcrowded housing with no services and the constant threat of eviction because they are unable to pay rent.

The structural barriers that prevent children on the move from accessing their rights are the most difficult barriers for service providers to overcome. The issue of birth registration and documentation continued to present a challenge in accessing services, especially for children born to undocumented parents.

What was the intervention?

In the framework of the EU programme, UNICEF and UNHCR in South Africa played a strategic role in addressing structural barriers by establishing, in 2021, a National Taskforce on Birth Registration, which includes stakeholders from civil society, academia, and legal institutes. Furthermore, all the implementing partners who provided services to children on the move carried out advocacy at both local and national levels, and some of them directly worked on structural barriers as a core component of their work, by identifying, highlighting, and addressing them as infringements on human rights, human dignity, and progress in supporting and protecting children on the move.

Organizations such as the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the Centre for Child Law (CCL), Save the Children and the University of Pretoria, worked with government departments while holding the state accountable and creating an enabling environment for child rights. Through multifaceted work, anchored in child participation and meaningful representation of children's voices, they brought together research, advocacy work, and impact litigation emphasising the critical role that children should and can play in identifying and addressing the structural barriers that prevent them from participating in everyday life in South Africa.

Within the EU programme, SAHRC ensured not only that children on the move were listened to but also that their stories were used to highlight and address the key challenges they face. Findings of interviews with children and monitoring visits were presented in a workshop on 'Alternatives to Detention and Care Policies for Children on the Move', attended by

government officials and other relevant state and non-state actors. Key observations were listed under categories such as accommodation conditions, placement practices, care and treatment practices, and family reunification process. The barriers to legal documentation were highlighted as a cross-cutting issue for every province and stakeholder and as one of the greatest barriers for children on the move nowadays. Recommendations included the following strategies: strengthen the collaboration between the different government departments such as the Departments of Social Development, Education, Health and Home Affairs; organise quarterly or annual advocacy information sessions on human rights; and reform the legislation on alternative care.

Another example of identifying and addressing structural barriers, implemented through the EU programme, is the work carried out by the CCL: with a multidisciplinary and holistic approach anchored in research and advocacy, the CCL upholds the rights of children in South Africa through impact litigation, to obtain precedent-setting judgements and court orders. These included cases involving children on the move and the different structural barriers they face in accessing their rights to basic education and documentation, including birth registration. Developing data and evidence-based advocacy campaigns was critical for holding public institutions to account and for developing litigation strategies and corrective actions contextually grounded.

What is the expected impact?

By supporting institutions and agencies working on birth registration in the country, the task force is contributing to a system that ensures universal birth registration for children by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a target of universal birth registration and a legal identity for every child, by 2030.

As per work on impact litigation, the advocacy and collaborative efforts invested during the programme implementation brought the government and other stakeholders the required political will. As an example, by July 2023, 29,302 learners, including children on the move, could access basic education.

Furthermore, the SAHRC findings and recommendations will be used to engage with the relevant government departments and other stakeholders to discuss practical and collaborative implementation strategies. In this way, the experiences and concerns shared by children on the move themselves are used to highlight and tackle significant structural barriers and, primarily, their access to documentation.

What you should know...

Having a democratic state with a rights-driven constitution and government institutions created specifically to protect human rights, creates enabling conditions. Part of the process was possible in South Africa due to the unique constitutional role that SAHRC plays in holding the state accountable and advocating on behalf of those facing human rights violations.

Despite these practices being context-specific and rooted within the particular historical and contemporary context of South Africa, they can also be replicated in other contexts where organizations and partners similarly work with a vision for social justice and social change with and on behalf of children and families on the move. This would be possible through institutions that connect with government, by taking into account some principles that include a) the importance of child participation in advocacy around structural issues: child participation is a powerful tool to make sure advocacy is based on children's own stories that show the impact of structural barriers on their everyday lives and wellbeing; b) the use of research to inform advocacy and litigation; c) partnerships between academic institutions, legal experts, and civil society; and d) the importance of creating dialogue and cooperation within government departments.

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Useful Links

[UNICEF, 2023. Technical Brief Four: Addressing structural barriers. UNICEF South Africa](#)



Outcome 2 - Child protection systems have integrated gender-responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanisms addressing GBV and other structural problems

South Africa - A transformative child-centred practice

Why is the intervention important?

In the last decades, widely accepted guidelines (including UNICEF's MHPSS Guidelines of 2018²⁶) built on a socio-ecological systems approach, in which individual children are considered to develop within specific contextual systems and therefore require context-sensitive services. Despite that, many organizations work with children on the move without taking into account the heterogeneity of their experiences: in children on the move programming, the variety of migrant children's experiences is often hidden in labels and homogenous responses. A symbol of this is the language used when describing particular children (e.g. unaccompanied and separated children are often referred to in publications and speech by the acronym 'UASC') and processes (e.g. 'FTR' for family tracing and reunification). Furthermore, many children, particularly those in marginalised and difficult contexts, have few opportunities to speak up, share their views and concerns and collaborate on decisions impacting their future lives. For children on the move, especially girls and unaccompanied and separated children, the need for tailored intervention is even more important: because of social norms that 'blame and shame' women and girls for GBV and the institutional discrimination of foreigners that fuels racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, children on the move are particularly vulnerable because they are undocumented, live within an abusive setting, and are afraid to speak out. As they mostly live in marginalised spaces of cities and township areas, their awareness and knowledge of services is also low, and they often do not know who they can speak with confidentially.

Several organizations delivering social services to children on the move, work with standard operating procedures. While ensuring quality control and standardised practices, these cannot be tailored to the specific needs of each individual, the different contexts and the range of experiences children on the move face. What is essential in delivering quality services is the elaboration of a specific case management plan and the provision of services based on the different identities and multiple vulnerabilities of children on the move. Intersecting characteristics include the child's age, gender, physical ability, HIV status, family situation, language, country of origin, journey experience, current place of living, and any experience of abuse and violence.

What was the intervention?

In the framework of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme (2020-2023), the implementing partners in South Africa examined the complexities and the multiple forms of contexts, lived experiences and inequalities of children and families on the move they worked with, in line with UNICEF's MHPSS Guidelines of 2018 and the UNHCR Framework for the Protection of Children.²⁷ Adopting an intersectional approach offered practitioners an alternative way of examining contexts of inequality and marginalisation and overcoming the challenges in responding with needs-tailored interventions. By involving children on the move in this analysis, partners engaged to better adapt their responses to the nuances of the complex and multiple factors that shape the lived experiences of boys and girls of different ages and abilities.

A transformative and culturally sensitive child-centred practice brings to balance the heterogeneity of migrants' experiences (individual identities, needs etc.), with more standardised and formal mechanisms to ensure quality support. This is done through prioritising the experiences of the child in case management, legal and psychosocial services; practising children's active listening, from when a child arrives at a service centre, finding out details about a child's story – as much as they are willing to share, and in their preferred language. Strengths-based intervention tools are used to assess environmental, cultural, individual and kin assets and risks, and to support resilience, recovery, and healing related to children on the move's lived experiences. During the programme, two South African organizations have developed specific rights-based services: Refugee Social Services (RSS) and ChildLine South Africa.

RSS's main drop-in service centre is based in inner-city Durban, in the province of Kwa Zulu-Natal. The service welcomes children and families on the move who live in overcrowded facilities in inner-city Durban, as well as those living in less densely packed peripheral townships. The settings are very diverse, with poor water, sanitation and electricity conditions violence in the urban context high unemployment rates, violent masculinity and GBV and very limited, far and expensive services in the peripheral areas. And so are varying needs. To respond to these RSS has worked to provide all clients with an orientation in their language on refugee rights and responsibility as well as information relevant to their particular needs on accessing services; implement case management

with tailored referrals; deliver time-limited material assistance when necessary; support with individual psychosocial counselling; organise gender and age-sensitive support groups and carry out advocacy at city and area level around GBV prevention and responses and human rights awareness. RSS also runs an extensive community outreach and information programme that does not differentiate refugees from residents. This encompasses awareness of health, education and documentation rights and services, and income generation projects. RSS provides a 'holistic package of services', with a careful balance between recognising and responding to specific needs and offering a specific set of services.

Childline South Africa has functioned since 1986, starting in a few provinces and growing to a national helpline. According to 2020 data, Childline South Africa responded to 52,620 calls of children who received counselling and 9,332 calls where cases needed to be referred to services. Globally, child helplines are considered a low-threshold, easy to access and safe space for children and young people, they could, therefore, be a key point of support for children and young people in migration. However, at this point, child helplines are not commonly used by this group.²⁸ Under the EU Programme, Childline South Africa tailored its services to the needs of children on the move, by creating comprehensive and relevant communication and outreach strategies for this particular and diverse target group, alongside reaching local children. The strategies implemented focused on: a) including counsellors who could speak the languages of children on the move in the country; and b) raising awareness in communities with large populations of families and children on the move on the toll-free number and encouraging children to use it. This included explicit communication about the openness of the helpline to children on the move.

What is the expected impact?

Drawing on long-term experience, the two organizations carefully and sensitively respond to the heterogeneity of needs of children on the move and their differing lived realities, while also working within standardised mechanisms that ensure quality support. The quality of the service delivery has increased, ensuring that specific gender needs and vulnerabilities were integrated into the design and the implementation of activities, resulting in enhanced gender mainstreaming and responsiveness of the services provided.

Throughout the programme, children and families on the move were supported through intensified MHPSS provision, counselling, Psychosocial

Support (PSS) activities, and referral to specialized mental health services as well as with cash-based and livelihood interventions, to cope with the devastating effects of COVID-19, civil unrests and floods.

The programme contributed to raising community awareness and school engagement on MHPSS and GBV prevention and response through campaigns, workshops, and counselling, promoting linkages and referrals with the existing structures, and increasing access to services for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and their families. This has led to improved understanding and empathy towards children in migration, fostering inclusivity and a more robust support system, where families, communities, and stakeholders collaborate to provide holistic care. Between 2020 and 2023, 32,409 children and adolescents (50 per cent of girls) received gender-responsive psychosocial support and were referred to mental health services, through Childline South Africa and other partners. The provision of these tailored services has significantly improved the mental well-being of children on the move, offering them a safe space for healing.

What you should know...

Service provision to children on the move can be responsive to children's specific context and needs even within the constraints of growing demand and reduced resources. It requires a careful look at the different components of service management and collaboration with available services. The development of gender, language, and culturally responsive PSS services and prevention mechanisms lies in the careful research of the specific characteristics of children. However, adopting a child-centred and tailored practice takes time: responding to the specific needs of boys and girls on the move is also dependent on building trust through listening with respect and treating children as experts on their own lives and futures. Finally, including family and community in services for children on the move can provide a holistic response which takes into account the systems in which a child lives and grows up.

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Useful links

[UNICEF. 2023. Technical Brief Three: A transformative child-centred practice. UNICEF South Africa](#)

Outcome 2 - Child protection systems have integrated gender-responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanisms addressing GBV and other structural problems

Zambia – A multi-language helpline to provide counselling services for children on the move



Why is the intervention important?

Zambia continues to experience complex and mixed migration flows relating to both internal and external movements. Situated in the centre of Southern Africa, Zambia is land linked to eight neighbouring countries, namely Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tanzania. Its geopolitical location positions the country as a country of origin, transit and destination and as a preferred route for migrants in mixed flows moving through the southern migration route from the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region to South Africa. Children on the move are among migrants who are stranded, seeking asylum, in refugee situations, stateless or at risk of being stateless, victims of trafficking or child labour, unaccompanied or separated as well as internally displaced children fleeing violence or conflict, and children displaced due to weather-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, and storms.

A complex movement of groups of vulnerable migrants from the Horn of Africa, mainly from Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea, continues to be recorded in the eastern part of the country along the border points of Malawi and Mozambique and it has been increasing since 2020: after COVID-19, along with a resurgence of once-traditional migration routes, the Commissioner of Refugees Office is recording an increase in the number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving from the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region, seeking asylum in Zambia,²⁹ or with intentions to move further to South Africa. Despite a known under-reporting due to a weak Information Management System (IMS), between 2020 and

2023, over 2,000 Ethiopian migrants (mostly males; 40 per cent children) were registered in the country. Hundreds of them were detained and some (including 7 children) were found dead in transit through hazardous means.³⁰

What was the intervention?

Child helplines are a common child protection intervention. Each year, millions of children all over the world, reach out to a child helpline service. In 2021, Child Helpline International reported 2,925,242 counselling contacts.³¹ Child helplines offer children opportunities to look for help themselves when they are in need. They use child-appropriate communication media such as telephone, SMS, chat, email or in remote areas, walk-in-centres or letter boxes. In Africa (and in some countries outside Africa) child helplines are now linked to the toll-free number, 116 and promoted as an integral hotline for referral services. When calling this number, children can speak to a counsellor in trust and confidence and, if needed, be referred to child protection services. Along with the helpline, Childline also offers Online Counselling through a 'chat' function available at certain times of the day.

Affiliated to Child Helpline International, Lifeline/Childline Zambia is an organization that conducts primarily telephone counselling, guidance and referral services on various social and health problems that affect the Zambian Community through toll-free numbers 116 Child Helpline and 933 Gender Based Violence Line. It provides 24/7/365 telephone counselling and outreach services for children and adults who face challenges visa-vis Child Abuse, Child Marriage, Child On-line Protection, Child Labour, Gender-Based Violence, and HIV/AIDS counselling.

Within the EU Best Practices for Children in Migration programme (2020-2023), LifeLine/ChildLine in Zambia worked to create comprehensive and relevant communication and outreach strategies that specifically targeted children on the move, alongside reaching local children. This has included the introduction of translators and/or interpreter counsellors who could speak the languages of children on the move from the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions (e.g. French, Swahili, Somali and Amharic). The service has been used by several entities, such as law enforcement when interviewing migrant children; childcare facilities that accommodate child migrants; and the judiciary when children appear as witnesses in judicial proceedings, improving communication and support for child migrants.

Throughout the programme, UNICEF’s partnership with LifeLine/ChildLine Zambia supported six interpreters/counsellors who provided interpretation services for the High Court, correctional facilities in Katete, Kamwala Remand Prison and Kabwe correctional facility. These services were also provided to Social Welfare and the Immigration Department. The interpreters were trained in psychosocial support services, provided counselling and PSS support to the children in need and participated as translators in family tracing and judicial proceedings.

What is the expected impact?

LifeLine/ChildLine Zambia was instrumental in providing free psycho-social support, translation, and referral services to children on the move in Zambia.

By leveraging the expertise of LifeLine/ChildLine Zambia, the programme successfully bridged communication and language barriers, ensuring that interpretation and translation services were readily accessible for those in need. When the services have been linked to social welfare and justice systems, it enhanced the timely and quality provision of child-friendly counselling and protection services to children on the move, including preventing their immigration detention.

On-site counsellors in refugee settlements (under the aegis of LifeLine/ChildLine Zambia), provided vital counselling services, both face-to-face and through the use of the toll-free helplines, ensuring and strengthening the provision of gender-responsive protection services to refugee children.

During the programme implementation, LifeLine/ChildLine reached and supported 1,157 children on the move (603 boys and 554 girls) through translators and interpreter counsellors. These children benefited from the services provided through 116 toll-free lines in the languages they could speak and understand. Government authorities requested translation services from LifeLine/ChildLine for 132 migrant children (118 boys and 14 girls), to address their cases, devising their care/protection decisions and enabling them to access psychosocial support.

Many services introduced by the EU-funded programme became anchored in the national child protection system, as national authorities recognised their value and used them to respond to the needs of children on the move in the country. This lays the ground for the sustainability of the gains made through the programme and creates the conditions to amplify the expected impact.

What you should know...

Language-sensitive protection services are key to listening and creating an appropriate care plan for children on the move. Children and families need to communicate in their language; yet, this issue is given limited funding and, so often, no interpreters or staff speak the languages of migrant children. One key strategy can be to engage with local migrant communities, to find interpreters to be trained in counselling and referrals.

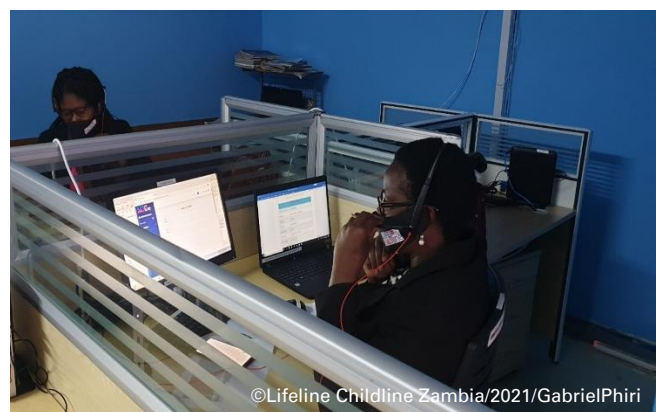
In addition, it is also important to raise awareness of the existence of the helpline, through communication material written in the languages spoken by children on the move and distributed in areas with high migrant populations.

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Useful links

[20 years, 20 voices: LifeLine/ChildLine Zambia](#)



Outcome 2 - Child protection systems have integrated gender-responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanisms addressing GBV and other structural problems

El Salvador - Short storybook and board games



Why is the intervention important?

In El Salvador, violence and crime, including gangs, homicide, forced recruitment, extortion, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons, especially of women and girls, as well as sexual abuse and GBV, have historically been structural factors of human mobility within and across national borders. A large number of people travel irregularly, especially to the United States through Guatemala and Mexico, risking their lives and exposing themselves to acute protection risks, including paying large sums for the services of smugglers and criminal organizations.³² Upon return to their communities of origin, adolescents and their families receive limited support and are confronted with the same factors that forced them to displace initially. Shortfalls in specialized services for children and adolescents, such as health, legal and psychosocial support, including community-based protection services, pose barriers to their protection and community reintegration.

In the country, the efforts to strengthen protection services for the population in mobility have been gradually and steadily increasing through the strengthening of the legal framework, institutional protocols, and the sustained support of international cooperation. However, socially there is still a great deal of misinformation, apathy and intolerance as well as many dangers for children and adolescents in mobility, being exposed to all kinds of physical and emotional abuse, and the

trauma caused by it, separation anxiety, loneliness, and fear. Trauma is a process that can paralyze and requires professional help to be addressed. With children and adolescents on the move, it is paramount to find ways to accompany them, help them overcome trauma recognize their experiences, and reintegrate those who return into the country, encouraging their active participation in the re-signification of their individual experiences.

What was the intervention?

Thanks to the EU programme, and as a result of a participatory process, in 2022 UNHCR in El Salvador developed the storybook *'Te Cuento Mi Cuento'*, and three board games to help raise awareness on forced displacement, forced recruitment of children, gender-based violence and healing from trauma. During the process, the stories were reviewed to ensure sensitivity to age, gender and diversity. A guiding document was also produced to accompany the kit, including pedagogical orientations on how to use it. Before the final production, UNHCR and SOS Children's Village facilitated consultations with children, caregivers, and technical staff in national institutions. The products were eventually released to the public in November 2022, including a series of short videos on five of the stories.³³

The storybook and didactic materials are tools for the operators of the National Child Protection System. Their main objective is to raise awareness on forced displacement, disseminate and promote the rights of migrant, returnee and internally displaced children and adolescents, and prevent forced recruitment.

Through the EU programme, UNHCR delivered 307 books and board game kits to national protection institutions such as CONAPINA, the Attorney General's Office, the Ombudsperson's Office, and youth-government-led community centres *'CUBOs'*. State and non-state stakeholders with field presence and UNHCR-led child-friendly spaces *'A tu lado'* mainstreamed the use of these tools with children, addressing key topics of displacement, children's rights and GBV, by adopting a child-friendly play-and-learn approach.

In 2023, the storybook and board games have been used in training spaces and public events, including rights promotion fairs carried out by Municipal Children's Units and CLDs; workshops in communities and schools; child-friendly spaces and UNHCR Mobile Units.

What is the expected impact?

The inter-agency implementation of these actions played a pivotal role in strengthening the child protection system services for children and adolescents on the move, collaborating with and strengthening the capacities of government institutions at the central and community levels, as well as that of international and national NGOs, and UN agencies. Notably, UNHCR and UNICEF coordinated efforts that contributed to the adoption of a child-sensitive, gender-sensitive approach, up taken by the comprehensive protection system, migration and local authorities, and civil society organisations, leading to the creation and enhancement of specialized, child-centred services.

The donation of ludic kits to CONAPINA strengthened the work of the technical teams with the population served through CANAF which, in turn, increased the capacities of identification of forcibly displaced populations and prioritized assistance. The teams incorporated interactive ludic activities with children, enhancing the overall quality of the services provided, particularly those related to psychosocial care, resilience strengthening and preparation of life projects for children and adolescents.

Through storytelling and the use of games in various rounds, participants learned about the opportunities offered by these materials in addressing the phenomenon of forced displacement. The use of stories and games, allows relevant actors to get closer to the community and to promote greater local capacities to identify risks and respond to the needs of children on the move.

By integrating PSS with GBV prevention efforts, Salvadoran children who have faced difficult mobility contexts, including forced displacement, poverty and violence, were equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect themselves and advocate for gender equality. This approach is aligned with the commitment to foster a generation of informed and empowered adolescents and youths who can actively contribute to building a society free of violence and discrimination, ultimately promoting the well-being and rights of all children in the region.

As a result, children learn about their right to protection and the right to live free from violence;

they gain improved capacities to recognize and respond to different forms of violence and understand the importance of speaking out and seeking help when one experiences violence.

What you should know...

The playful methodology is an effective pedagogical action that helps empower and strengthen the various institutions working with children and adolescents, and responding to the risks they face.

Strengthening the capacities of service providers and promoting efficient and effective coordination with governmental institutions to optimize the work and learning between different organizations and the government staff, is critical to ensure sustainability. Special attention must be paid to the inclusion of self-care activities for the training teams, psychologists and social workers involved.

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Useful Links

[Story book publication](#)

[Press release: Launch of Story book and board games \(UNHCR and SOS Children Village\)](#)

[Video on the story 'Gualcho'](#)



Outcome 3 – Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives

South Africa - Principle-led services and alternative care



©Scalabrini Centre, Julia Cumes

Why is the intervention important?

At a global level, growing advocacy is leading to pursue the best interests of unaccompanied and separated children, by moving away from institutional care and towards alternatives such as kinship or foster care. According to the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2010,³⁴ governments must provide individualised family and community-based care to all children who have temporarily or permanently lost parental care, including children on the move. The Better Care Network,³⁵ established in 2003 by the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), the Africa Bureau for Sustainable Development of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Save the Children UK, works to “increase, strengthen, and support family and community-based care options for children and to ensure that residential care is used in a strictly limited manner and always as a temporary placement”.³⁶ South African legislation also recognises the need to provide a range of alternative care settings: sections 180 to 182 of the 2007 Children's Amendment Act 41, provide that a child can be placed into foster care with a suitable person by a children's court order.³⁷ In addition, the South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 makes a distinction between non-kinship foster care, kinship foster care and cluster foster care.³⁸

Furthermore, the lack of statistics on unaccompanied and separated migrant children in alternative care in South Africa, at both national and local levels, prevents the holistic planning for their care and protection on a long-term basis and to advocate for resources for sustainable interventions. To fill this gap, between 2019 and

2022, UNICEF supported the DSD, to conduct a national audit of migrant children in alternative care. According to the audit report, 744 children and young people (51 per cent girls) are placed in alternative care facilities; 90 per cent are below 18 years old; 48 per cent are unaccompanied and most of them reside in CYCCs, instead of family-based care.

Many South African NGOs who run Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) recognise that institutional care is not a good practice. However, migrant children's kins often cannot be traced and South Africa's foster care system faces multiple challenges, such as a massive backlog of foster care orders and deviations and a lack of funding to employ social workers. The Department of Social Development has yet to provide a comprehensive legal solution to eliminate these challenges.³⁹ Children are placed in CYCCs and other facilities for diverse reasons including caregivers being unable to financially provide for their basic needs; abandonment, neglect and/or abuse; orphanage; unaccompanied status of children in migration. While family tracing and reunification, when in the best interests of the child, is the preferred option in law and policy for separated and unaccompanied children, in some cases, this possibility is limited and residential care is sometimes the only choice. This reality is also influenced by the fact that many separated and unaccompanied children and other children on the move do not have any form of documentation, including birth certificates: the Audit found that 65 per cent of unaccompanied and separated migrant children are not documented. This not only makes them highly vulnerable to statelessness and trafficking but also to arrest, detention, and deportation once they are old enough to leave state care.⁴⁰ Therefore, the need to ensure that children are placed in a setting where they can receive adequate social and legal support to begin the processes of accessing documentation, often makes residential care the most practical option.

In 2022, the socio-economic plight in the country exacerbated the need for protection interventions from the actors working with children on the move and the population affected by migration: the increased number of unaccompanied and separated children, coupled with the limited social workforce in some areas, created some challenges in the implementation of alternative care initiatives. Changes were recorded in how alternative care was accessed in migrant communities: reports from implementing partners indicated that USMC have preferred to

increasingly make use of informal living arrangements, creating a low demand for alternative care options. Concurrently, visits to alternative care centres across the nation by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), to monitor the protection of the rights of children in care facilities for immigration detention, shed light on the difficulties institutions face in securing the necessary support to adequately care for migrant children.

What was the intervention?

In response to these challenges, in the framework of the EU programme, CYCCs were capacitated on management, finance and care provisions to improve access to services for children on the move. Working with the DSD, the EU programme implementing partners have strengthened the available alternative care models, placing children in informal foster care, CYCCs or in the care of extended family (kinship care) through a referral system. They further introduced formal foster care, through court orders as well as piloted supervised independent living for adolescents in some provinces.

The outcomes of the EU programme are built around the principles of equity, responsiveness, and centrality of community among others.⁴¹ All of the NGO partners in South Africa applied these principles and rooted their work in local principles that emerged from their specific context and practice.

The Scalabrini Centre and other partners advocated to surface existing barriers such as the lack of documentation and challenges in family tracing. In their approach to providing care for children on the move, they recognized that documentation is integral to their protection and safeguarding, central to children's identity and sense of belonging. The principle of 'belonging' drives an approach in which children are listened to within their contexts, understood based on the experiences they share, and supported to be at the centre of responses that impact them. Differing cultural and contextual knowledge of children on the move is an important factor to take into account in addressing their needs in practice. The process of welcoming by Scalabrini staff is a methodology, employed to give children a sense of belonging.

As part of a principle-led approach, throughout the programme, partners applied also the equity principle to the context of children in care facilities and in community-based models and implemented protective interventions for children on the move designed by the communities, rather than being agency-led.

What is the expected impact?

Thanks to the programme, formal foster care, family reunifications and community-based care models were promoted: over the programme lifespan, 3,038 children on the move (57 per cent boys and 43 per cent girls) have been provided with durable solutions, such as permanent alternative care placements, options for resettlements, family reunification, and support for local integration. Thanks to the Action, gender-responsive and community-based care services were supported by partners nationally, with a principle-led approach, creating caring relationships with children on the move as a response to precarity, making sure that they felt safe and expressed themselves freely. As a result, service providers fostered their sense of belonging and drove social change, bringing together children's legal rights and psychosocial well-being.

What you should know...

The principle-led practice lies in the identification of a set of key principles to drive a range of approaches and interventions with children. A principle-led practice helps promote impactful interventions that address the multiple protection and support needs of children on the move while being responsive to the instability and uncertainty that many of them face. This is particularly effective in a context where regional and state laws, policies, and guidelines are not particularly supportive or enabling. Working with a 'principle framework' supports service providers in making decisions and justifying what, how, and why certain approaches are used for the service provision of a set of core principles. This is central to challenging contextual constraints and uniting key stakeholders in pursuing the vision of each partner organization.

The principles of belonging and community-led action are both applicable to different contexts and could inform the development of equitable, responsive services in other countries.

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Useful links

[UNICEF. 2023. Technical Brief Two: Principle-led and gender responsive services. UNICEF](#)

Outcome 3 – Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives

Zambia - Cross-border collaboration and engagement



Why is the intervention important?

Zambia continues to experience complex and mixed migration flows relating to both internal and external movements. Situated in the centre of Southern Africa, Zambia borders eight countries, namely Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tanzania. As a country of origin, transit and destination, its geopolitical location positions Zambia as a preferred route for migrants in mixed flows moving through the southern migration route from the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region to South Africa.⁴²

Increasingly, migration is observed in the border areas of Zambia with Namibia, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. The Zambia Trafficking in Person Report (2022)⁴³ indicated an emerging and growing trafficking situation that occurs within the country's borders and involves traffickers exploiting women and children from rural areas into cities for domestic servitude, forced begging and forced labour, especially in sectors, such as agriculture, textile production, mining, construction, and small businesses including bakeries and beauty parlours. While working in these informal sectors, the women and children are at high risk of and/or experience transactional sex and/or child sex trafficking.

Congolese, Malawian, Zimbabwean, Tanzanian Masai boys and male youth and Mozambican children, women, and young people cross into Zambia to engage in cross-border trading, and to access education and primary health care facilities. Migrants, including children, if found in the country irregularly or in possession of expired travel documents, risk detention.

Along with a resurgence in the formerly traditional migration routes (in the north and north-eastern, where Zambia borders the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania) attributed to improvements in the public health situation and the easing of COVID-19 restrictive travelling conditions, the Commissioner of Refugees Office is also recording an increase in the number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving from the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region, seeking asylum in Zambia,⁴⁴ or with intentions to move further to South Africa.

What was the intervention?

The National Referral Mechanisms (NRM) is the guiding document for cross-border cooperation on individual cases of child migrants from neighbouring countries. The EU Programme in Zambia contributed to facilitating cross-border collaboration mechanisms with adjacent countries, and to strengthening bilateral relations, such as between Zambia and Namibia, supporting cross-border case management, family reunifications and community reintegration of children on the move. Through the establishment of the National Secretariat on Human Trafficking, the introduction of Human Trafficking Desks at police stations and the development and rollout of the NRM for vulnerable migrants, the programme supported border districts to establish Best Interests Determination (BID) and multisectoral Child Protection Committees that comprise law enforcement and social welfare authorities from at least two countries. The existence of the Committees fosters coordination and collaboration efforts during the case management process, including screening and identification of children on the move, referrals and service provision, and repatriation and reception of returnees. It also speeds up reintegration procedures through timely cross-border referrals of children who can be assisted to return to their country with temporary travel documents and supported with family tracing and community reintegration.

What is the expected impact?

With an average of 12 cases discussed per month, the Child Protection Committees reviewed the cases of children on the move, facilitating cross-border family reunification, resettlement, local integration, or permanent placement in alternative care. The committees have been critical in addressing individual cases of child migrants placed in detention or safe spaces and then returned to their countries of origin, to reintegrate

them into their families and communities, in the 10 priority implementation districts. The committees discussed also the cases of children who have survived GBV and/or were victims of/at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Over the programme lifespan, improved cross-border coordination has resulted in successfully addressing 992 individual cases of child migrants (48 per cent boys and 52 per cent girls) placed in detention and referred to safe spaces, returned to their countries of origin and reintegrated into families and communities. Strengthened cross-border collaboration with Namibia, but also with Malawi and Mozambique, has been critical to fast-track case management procedures, speed removal of migrant children from detention facilities, and expedite returns and cross-border family reunifications: thanks to the EU programme, 274 children on the move (57 per cent boys and 43 per cent girls) have been reunited with their families.

Furthermore, the prompt response of Zambian BID committees to expedite cases for Namibian children triggered a reciprocal response from Namibian counterparts when removing cases of Zambian children from detention and promoted the effective exchange of information on cases of vulnerable children involved in mixed migration for both countries: over the programme period, 475 children on the move (368 girls and 107 boys) were retrieved from sexual exploitation or other exploitative work along the Zambia-Namibia border areas and, where needed, referred to gender-based violence specialised services. Moreover, 258 Zambian returnee children (58 per cent boys and 42 per cent girls) have been reached, mainly at the border with Namibia, with individual case management and access to basic services such as education, social protection, reintegration, health, child protection and GBV response services.

What you should know...

Zambia has active cross-border engagement with Namibia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique.

The Zambia-Namibia cross-border remains the most functional with bilateral mechanisms in place to resolve cases of children on the move. While cross-border collaboration as a modality has worked to protect children in migration, these collaborations need strengthening, especially where the coordination is weak. For example, the Zambia-Democratic Republic of Congo cross-border collaboration remains challenging; the situation of children on the move along this border remains unresolved, with strained access to services. This collaboration needs government-to-government high-level engagement to specifically deal with the cross-border relations, while the Zambia side will need to strengthen the border districts' capacities to respond to the heightened needs of children crisscrossing in these areas.

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Useful links

[The Government of the Republic of Zambia, with support from UNICEF and UNHCR, prevents and protects children from trafficking.](#)



Outcome 3 – Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives

Zambia - Best Interest Procedure and Case Management for vulnerable children on the move



Why is the intervention important?

Zambia continues to experience complex migration flows relating to both internal and external movements, as a country of origin, transit and destination. Situated in the centre of Southern Africa, the country is a preferred route for migrants in mixed flows moving through the southern migration route, towards South Africa.⁴⁵ After COVID-19, along with a resurgence of once-traditional migration routes, the Commissioner of Refugees Office recorded an increased number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving from the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region, seeking asylum in Zambia,⁴⁶ or with intentions to move further to South Africa.

Increasingly, migration is observed in the border areas of Zambia with Namibia, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. Children, women, and young people cross into Zambia also from neighbouring countries to engage in informal agriculture, construction, and small trading businesses or to access education and primary health care facilities. People on the move are often at risk of being exploited, abused and trafficked, particularly when engaging in irregular cross-border trading activities and seasonal work. Zambia's legal framework does not prevent children from being detained for immigration-related purposes: they risk detention if found in the country irregularly or in possession of expired travel documents.

Despite a known under-reporting due to a weak Information Management System (IMS), complex movement of groups of vulnerable migrants from the Horn of Africa, mainly from Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea, continues to be recorded along the borders with Malawi and Mozambique and it has

been increasing since 2020. Hundreds of them were reportedly detained and some (including children) were found dead in transit through hazardous means.⁴⁷

What was the intervention?

The EU programme supported the development of the National Statutory Case Management System and the establishment and/or strengthening of Best Interest Determination (BID) panels and multisectoral child protection committees. Efforts were invested to strengthen the social service system at the district level and to ensure that it fully incorporated the protection of children on the move. This was achieved through the finalisation and validation of the National Statutory Case Management Handbook, the Revised Guidance Note on the protection of children in Alternative Care and Re-Integration and the special Guidance Note on Child Migration. This specialised guidance note assists the District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) in the application of the case-management decision for children on the move: it provides procedures to lead the BID panels and implement the Best Interest Procedures (BIP, including Best Interests Assessment-BIA- and Best Interests Determination-BID-). Also known as the case management system, the BIP is a coordinated, timely, comprehensive standardised procedure for the identification of vulnerable children and adolescents, facilitating their access to appropriate gender-responsive protection and care services.

Selected priority districts participated in both drafting and piloting these procedures. In addition, the capacities of multisectoral district committees and BID panels were enhanced through technical supervision provided by the National Departments of Social Welfare and Law Enforcement. Refresher and in-service training on case management and piloting of the national statutory Case Management Handbook and the Guidance Note on Child Migration were also held. District officers from social welfare, police, immigration, health, judiciary, prisons, childcare facilities and education were trained on alternative care and reintegration guidelines, minimum standards for childcare facilities, case management, National Referral Mechanisms, and case management or BIP (BIA/BID). Furthermore, from 2021, specific modules on in-service case management and alternative care for children on the move have been incorporated into the curricula for the social work programme of two universities (the University of Zambia and Mulungushi University)

and rolled out to support in-service training of the DSWOs and current university students.

What is the expected impact?

Reinforcing or establishing district-level and multi-stakeholder structures, such as the BID panels, during the first year of programme implementation was instrumental in ensuring that children on the move benefited from the BIP process (BIA/BID) and were referred to the national case management system, thus accessing services and alternative care or family reunification, rather than being placed in detention. The capacity building resulted in improved coordination amongst district officials, social welfare, police and immigration and the qualitative case management of cases of child migrants.

The intervention has therefore facilitated the work of the 10 district-level BID panels and resulted in 1,405 children on the move (46 per cent boys and 54 per cent girls) identified, and referred to safe spaces and alternative care options, promoting their effective access to child-friendly and gender-sensitive protection services. Moreover, 258 Zambian returnee children (58 per cent boys and 42 per cent girls) have been reached, mainly at the border with Namibia, with individual case management and access to basic services such as education, social protection, reintegration, health, child protection and GBV response services.

These efforts have contributed to expediting and facilitating the release, voluntary return, or reintegration of child migrants to their countries of origin, based on their best interests and supported the decrease of children in detention: one example is the case of the 889 Ethiopian migrants (743 male adults and 146 boys) found in detention in the Eastern province of the country, who were repatriated in June 2022. Additional targeted efforts were invested in ad hoc BID panel sittings to monitor unaccompanied and separated children who wished to return home to the DRC: decisions were made for a total of 4,215 unaccompanied and separated children (1,852 boys and 2,363 girls) considered for repatriation. These children have been supported with care placement decisions (in foster families) or referred to receiving officials in the DRC.

Thanks to the support provided on case management through guidelines, IMS, and continuous capacity building, district practitioners emerged as key partners in addressing individual cases, enabling tracking, follow-ups and reviews.

What you should know...

In Zambia, case management and BID panels are considered good practices, as they enhance the service delivery to children on the move by bringing together multisectoral teams for care and protection decisions. When implemented together and within the National Referral Mechanisms (NRM), these procedures enable systematic, uniform and qualitative case management for children, including those on the move. A coordinated case management system promotes effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, equality and equity in the provision of gender-responsive and child-sensitive services to children on the move.

Establishing and strengthening BID panels facilitated multi-stakeholder assessments, reduced back-and-forth referrals amongst stakeholders, and helped convey case conferencing for joint protection and care decisions on placing children on the move in alternative care options, in their best interests. The existence of BID committees at the district level also offers the opportunity to jointly lobby for the allocation of additional resources.

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Useful links

[Best Interest Determination works for better outcomes for children on the move in Zambia: UNICEF supports BID panels in 10 districts](#)



Outcome 3 – Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives

El Salvador - Design of the Comprehensive Care Program for Returned Migrant Children and Adolescents and their Families in El Salvador



Why is the intervention important?

El Salvador's migration profile has been historically characterized by substantial emigration and return flows. Emigration is fuelled by structural drivers, such as lack of employment opportunities, food insecurity, violence, and disasters, as well as pull factors, including family reunification and the prospects of employment opportunities abroad. Violence and crime, including gangs, homicide, forced recruitment, extortion, drug trafficking and trafficking in persons, especially of women and girls, as well as sexual and GBV, have historically been structural factors of human mobility within and across national borders. Children and adolescents on the move face several situations during their migration journey that have a negative impact on their well-being, both physical and socioemotional.⁴⁸ Upon return to their communities of origin, adolescents and their families receive limited support and are confronted with the same factors that forced them to displace initially. Shortfalls in specialized services for children and adolescents, such as health, legal and PSS, including community-based protection services, pose barriers to their protection and community reintegration. Moreover, evidence suggests that, when children and adolescents return to their community of origin, they often face stressors related to acculturation, family reunification, and interactions with the educational and legal systems that can affect their mental health and psychosocial well-being. Key stressors include differences in curricula and school facilities in the countries of transit and destination, the stigma of being a 'failed migrant',⁴⁹ as well as feelings of uncertainty, frustration and fear due to

the return to the context and conditions from which they had fled.⁵⁰

In 2015, as a response to the migration of unaccompanied children from El Salvador to the United States, the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA by its acronym in Spanish) launched a plan for the care of returnee children and adolescents⁵¹ to be implemented in specialized Care Centres (*Centros de Atención a la Niñez, Adolescencia y sus Familias*; CANAF by its acronym in Spanish). Through these efforts, El Salvador officially recognized the risks associated with forced displacement and irregular migration of children and adolescents and contributed to the restitution of their rights by creating a series of specialized services to respond to their humanitarian needs.⁵²

Between 2021 and August 2023, 30,520 Salvadorans were returned to El Salvador. Among them, there is a decreasing prevalence of children and adolescents, from 32 per cent in 2021 to 13 per cent in 2023.⁵³

What was the intervention?

Through the EU programme, UNICEF in El Salvador supported the implementation of the 2021-2023 *Brazos Abiertos* Plan (Plan for the Comprehensive Care and Protection of Children and Adolescent Migrants Returnees and their Families), approved in August 2021. This plan made ISNA responsible for the implementation of a sustainable reintegration programme for returnee children, adolescents, and their families. To achieve the objectives of the *Brazos Abiertos* Plan, it became necessary to evaluate and review the 2015 CANAF plan. In this framework, in 2022, UNICEF supported ISNA (which has become CONAPINA from 2023), with a diagnostic assessment of the reintegration programmes provided by CANAF. The analysis focused on two areas of intervention: individual-family and community. Although the results recognized the efforts and progress achieved in the provision of care to returnee children and adolescents, it also identified some limitations in available resources (personnel, vehicles and gas), impacting CANAF's follow-up capacities once children and their families have returned to their communities.

Building on the lessons learned and best practices identified through the diagnosis, UNICEF engaged with different office departments within ISNA and then CONAPINA, to update the mapping of stakeholders, services and programmes for returnees as well as to reinforce the functioning of CANAF considering its strengths and areas of

opportunity, designing new programmes to improve the services provided. The process included the analysis of the legal framework for sustainable reintegration; a consultation process with children and adolescents, families, cooperation agencies, and governmental entities; the creation of interinstitutional working groups; the assessment and estimation of necessary resources to operationalize the comprehensive care programme; and the identification of interinstitutional implementation and coordination protocols.

In July 2023, the proposal for a comprehensive care program for returned children, adolescents and families was submitted to CONAPINA for authorization, based on the newly approved Growing Together Law (which came into effect as of January 2023) and the Growing Together Policy. Its core objective is the restitution and protection of the rights of returned migrant children and adolescents, seeking their sustainable reintegration into their community environments. More specifically, the Comprehensive Plan aims to a) provide services and care to returned migrant children and adolescents through referrals that respond to specific violations of their rights; b) promote conditions in the family and community environment of returned migrant children and adolescents that migrant children and adolescents that allow for the protection and restitution of their rights; and c) ensure that the CANAF programme has the organizational capacity to provide services and monitor the required referrals of migrant returnee children and adolescents.

The revised version of the programme incorporates results-based, rights-based, gender-based, and inclusive approaches. Moreover, the programme emphasizes sustainable reintegration and aims to address the limitations on the follow-up capacities of the CANAF.

What is the expected impact?

The comprehensive care program contributes to the efforts of El Salvador's government to protect returnee children and adolescents. The comprehensive care programme creates a space of support that ensures a safe return and opportunities for sustainable reintegration. It also promotes collaborative work among different governmental entities, civil society organizations and international organizations, clarifying responsibilities, and avoiding overlaps in service provision. A CONAPINA representative will be on the local protection committees and the institutions will coordinate on the ground, so that

there is an impact in the community. This is a way to connect territorial management to other programmes, thus ensuring the comprehensive protection and rights of returnee children and adolescents and their families.

The programme will provide relevant and timely services (such as social protection, health, psychosocial support, and education) to returnee children, adolescents, and their families, and promote communitarian actions to help them reintegrate into society, to identify children that need protection and to prevent and reduce irregular migration.

What you should know...

This initiative is being implemented in a context where strong policies are in place to support the sustainable reintegration of returnee children, adolescents, and their families. In this regard, the design of a comprehensive care programme provides an opportunity to promote the best interests of the child through all of the programme's components, including strategies to analyse children's and adolescents' environments and the reasons to leave their communities, to ensure that reintegration strategies provide adequate responses and relevant protection.

Moreover, the participation of all relevant sectors and stakeholders involved in providing comprehensive care to children and adolescents will facilitate the coordination between governmental entities and the development of mechanisms to respond to operationalization needs.

Finally, it is important to conduct advocacy efforts with El Salvador's government to ensure that the progress made in terms of public policies can be supported by the resources needed to successfully and sustainably implement the comprehensive care programme.

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Useful links

[UNICEF press release, June 2023](#)

Outcome 3 – Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives

El Salvador - Training of trainers with local committees for the rights of children



Why is the intervention important?

El Salvador has a historical backdrop of violence, leading to both internal and external displacement. There are several reasons why people leave El Salvador, including economic hardship, family reunification, natural disasters, instability, violence, and crime. Children and adolescents on the move face several situations during their migration journey that have a negative impact on their well-being—both physical and socioemotional.⁵⁴ Upon return to their communities of origin, adolescents and their families receive limited support and are confronted with the same factors that forced them to displace initially. Shortfalls in specialized services for children and adolescents, such as health, legal and PSS, including community-based protection services, pose barriers to their protection and community reintegration. Moreover, evidence suggests that, when children and adolescents return to their community of origin, they often face stressors related to acculturation, family reunification, and interactions with the educational and legal systems that can affect their mental health and psychosocial well-being. Key stressors include differences in curricula and school facilities in the countries of transit and destination, the stigma,⁵⁵ feelings of uncertainty, frustration and fear due to the return to the context and conditions from which they had fled.⁵⁶

In 2015, as a response to the migration of unaccompanied children from El Salvador to the United States, the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA by its acronym in Spanish) launched a plan for the care of returnee children and adolescents⁵⁷ to be implemented in specialized Care Centres (*Centros de Atención a la Niñez, Adolescencia y sus*

Familias; CANAF by its acronym in Spanish). Through these efforts, El Salvador officially recognized the risks associated with forced displacement and irregular migration of children and adolescents and contributed to the restitution of their rights by creating a series of specialized services to respond to their humanitarian needs.⁵⁸

Between 2021 and August 2023, 30,520 Salvadorans were returned to El Salvador. Among them, there is a decreasing prevalence of children and adolescents, from 32 per cent in 2021 to 13 per cent in 2023.⁵⁹

What was the intervention?

Thanks to the EU programme Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration (2020-2023), a community-based strategy has been implemented in El Salvador to improve stakeholders' skills in the prevention and response to forced displacement, forced recruitment, child protection, GBV prevention, community leadership, positive discipline, and alternative care options.

Through a collaborative process, UNHCR, in collaboration with SOS Children's Villages and in coordination with the national authority, CANAF, developed a four-module Training of Trainers (ToT).

A total of 79 participants, including 21 technical staff of CANAF and 60 members of the Local Committees for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (which gather community delegates in a national coordination mechanism for child protection) graduated as trainers in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

In 2021, the coordinator of the Department of Protective Measures, along with ISNA's Cooperation Unit, outlined the training plan and facilitated the participation of 21 members of the technical teams of CANAF, CONNA and ISNA's Training School. This activity reached six communities: Valencia, Sagrada Familia, La Esperanza, Manlio Argueta, 10 de Mayo and Comunidad el Pacífico.

In 2022, UNICEF, in partnership with local organizations, municipalities and CONAPINA, identified key community leaders: building upon the previous experience, 25 technical staff of the Local Committees for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in four prioritized municipalities (i.e. Mejicanos, Panchimalco, San Miguel and Lolotique) graduated as trainers. Through the ToT methodology, the Local Committee

representatives shared their learnings with an additional 35 members of the Local Rights Committees from Santa Ana, San Vicente and Zaragoza. The Local Committees of the four prioritized municipalities demonstrated interest in following up on the community work for the prevention and protection of children and adolescents at risk of displacement or forced recruitment; they committed to further enhance interventions with families by developing municipal plans to strengthen the protection of children in 2023 and beyond, depending on funds availability.

Throughout the programme, trained members of CANAF (in 2021) and of Local Rights Committees (in 2022 and 2023) organized replica sessions with families in the targeted municipalities, reaching a total of 205 children and adolescents (99 boys and 106 girls) and 186 family representatives (40 males and 148 females). Topics discussed during these sessions included, among others, the prevention of forced internal displacement, alternative care, and teaching-learning processes for children and families. Children and adolescents learned how to identify and respond to situations of forced displacement and recruitment, and developed leadership soft skills to promote positive change in their communities.

What is the expected impact?

The community-based strategy strengthened the capacities to identify, refer, manage and monitor cases of internally displaced, refugee or returnee children in need of protection, using gender, protection and best interest approaches.

Promoting participation and ownership of local authorities fosters institutional engagement with communities while creating opportunities for the integration of public policies and boosting the sustainability of interventions. Furthermore, the strengthening of community engagement structures, such as the Local Committees for the Rights of Children and Adolescents contributes to the long-term sustainability of the programme's impact: empowering community leaders with knowledge and tools to address child protection and GBV issues within their communities, the programme has fostered a sense of ownership and commitment and resulted in greater oversight for child protection efforts that will continue benefit children, adolescents and families at risks of displacement and forced recruitment.

Replica sessions with families provided an opportunity to address topics such as positive discipline and alternative care and helped children,

adolescents, and their caregivers to develop healthy coping mechanisms and positive behaviours. These sessions provided a safe and supportive environment for children and adolescents to connect with peers and trusted adults, enhancing in turn their social and emotional development.

Supporting and strengthening community-based initiatives and creating local ownership among community stakeholders at the municipality and community levels will promote inclusivity and mainstreaming of care for children on the move as well as the promotion of their rights and access to services.

What you should know...

This initiative included representatives from UNHCR, the Office of the First Lady of the Republic, the National Council for Early Childhood, Childhood and Adolescence (CONAPINA), the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR), the Ministry of Education, the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsperson (PDDH), mayors, Local Rights Committees and civil society.

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Useful links

[Aldeas Infantiles SOS en asocio con ACNUR socializan proyecto para fortalecer respuesta a niñez en situación de desplazamiento interno, refugiado, protección e interés superior. - Aldeas Infantiles SOS El Salvador \(aldeassos.org.sv\)](#)



Outcome 3 – Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives

El Salvador - Specialized diploma in 'Protection of Children and Adolescents in Situation of Forced Internal Displacement'



Why is the intervention important?

In Latin America and the Caribbean Region, the root causes of gang violence and displacement remain mostly unaddressed. Displaced people face challenges in accessing education, healthcare, livelihoods opportunities and recreational activities. Women, girls, children, and adolescents are at a heightened risk of experiencing violence and abuse. For many children and adolescents, this historical violence is compounded by poverty and limited access to quality education, social services, and livelihood options.

Forced displacement has far-reaching and complex impacts on the enjoyment of human rights. Recurrent internal displacement can ultimately lead people to leave the country in search of safety and protection. The effects of violence, forced displacement, and structural exclusion are particularly acute for women and girls, who face multiple forms of discrimination and gender-based violence. National public institutions provide psycho-social support, legal services, and assistance for specific vulnerable groups, such as children, adolescents, and women. However, to effectively respond to the specific needs of internal displaced persons (IDPs), stronger engagement from all stakeholders, including public institutions, is required. Coordination among stakeholders has proven to be useful in enhancing comprehensive responses for children and improving the livelihoods of displaced young people.

Between 2006 and 2016, 1.1 per cent of families in El Salvador were forcibly displaced, resulting in an estimated 71,500 internally displaced people. The majority of these IDPs are young, from socio-

economically vulnerable families, according to a profiling exercise published by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in 2018.⁶⁰

What was the intervention?

In 2021, UNHCR and its partner SOS Children's Villages performed an assessment of services for children, adolescents, and their families on the move. The analysis focused on alternative care modalities for unaccompanied and separated children and was performed through interviews with national child protection authorities and case studies of adolescent boys and girls, families, and caregivers in a situation of internal forced displacement. The study identified the protection gaps and rights violations affecting unaccompanied and separated children. This document helped national authorities to prioritize actions for children on the move, considering their particular needs, including PSS and livelihood support for their families, reintegration into the education system, and tailored services for children affected by forced recruitment or GBV.

Based on the main findings and opportunities identified, UNHCR undertook a comprehensive process to boost institutional capacities and enhance their local sustainability. As part of it, in 2021, UNHCR and SOS Children's Villages, in association with the *Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas* (UCA), implemented a four-month 80-hour specialized diploma on 'Protection of Children and Adolescents in Situation of Forced Internal Displacement'. With a blended theory- and practice-based methodology, the course aimed at raising awareness of staff working in public institutions and organizations, allowing further impacts on public policies. Moreover, it included a specialized module to strengthen technical capacities in the identification, management and follow-up of cases of children affected by internal displacement. Building upon the training experience in 2021, in the first part of 2022 the curriculum underwent a review process from the participating institutions, such as the Office of the First Lady, the National Council for Children and Adolescents and the partner organization SOS Children's Villages. Virtual and in-person sessions were organized between July and November 2022 and contributed to sharing practices and experiences, while discussing the application of the protection rules based on cases and practical situations. The course targeted regional protection bodies known as 'Protection Boards' and the 'Local Rights Committees' in municipalities. Over the programme's lifespan, 180 public officers and

human rights defenders (72 men and 108 women), who directly work in the provision of services to children at risk or affected by forced displacement, participated in the specialized diploma. Among them, 68 participants (24 males and 44 females) finalized the diploma during the programme implementation, including 50 members of the Children and Adolescent Protection Boards, and 18 CSO representatives. The course concluded with a graduation ceremony attended by representatives of the European Union, UNICEF, UNHCR, SOS Children's Villages and Central American University 'José Simeón Cañas'.

What is the expected impact?

The diploma will allow for a better impact on the prevention and protection of Salvadoran children: by strengthening the capacities of key actors it will improve the identification and management of children on the move cases, according to the assessment and determination of the best interests of the child, and the referrals to the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (SNPINA), who will provide the best options for alternative community- and family-based care with a gender-sensitive and child-friendly approach. As a result of the training, specialised public service providers in charge of the application of protection measures will also have a better understanding of the context, the national legal framework and international standards.

Every year, the technical staff of the National Child Protection System will acquire knowledge of individual case management and will gain improved capacities for case referral and coordination between institutions part of the system. This will contribute to strengthening the child protection system so that children in mobility receive the attention and care they need.

What you should know...

During the diploma course, different topics are addressed, including a) the creation of proposals, or adaptation of procedures according to best interests, to ensure a referral system for

unaccompanied and separated children; b) the standards of international law for forcibly displaced and refugee children; and c) the design of strategies for the care of children, accompanied and unaccompanied adolescents and families who are victims of forced displacement, with an emphasis on a gender-sensitive protection approach.

The specialized diploma continued in 2023 with the Diplomatic Institute Doctor José Gustavo Guerrero. In October 2023, 72 professionals from the national child protection staff enhanced their technical knowledge and practical abilities through the three-month and 80-hour course.

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Useful links

[SOS Children's Villages press release, Aug 2021](#)

[UNHCR External Update, Aug 2022](#)

[SOS Children's Villages Facebook, Aug 22](#)

[UNHCR Twitter, Dec 22](#)



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Outcome 3 – Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives

Mexico - The Care Model for Children on the Move launched by UNICEF and the National Welfare System.



Why is the intervention important?

Mexico is a country of origin, transit, and destination for migrant and refugee children. In their transit, children face risks such as detention- or shelter in detention-like conditions -, family separation, deportation, physical and psychological harm, marginalization, discrimination, and sexual and economic exploitation. In recent years, Mexico has increasingly become a destination country for migrant and refugee children and their families, particularly for those originating from Central America. Mexico also remains a country of origin and return for Mexican children, including internally displaced due to violence.

Mexico has one of the largest immigration detention systems in the world, employing several dozen detention centres, euphemistically called '*estaciones migratorias*', and detaining hundreds of thousands of people every year. While the COVID-19 pandemic spurred the country to temporarily release many immigration detainees, intense pressure from the United States and continuing migration from turmoil-wracked Central America have helped drive up detention numbers, which surpassed 300,000 in 2022.⁶¹

Following the 2021 legal amendments to the Migration and the Refugee and Asylum Laws, children on the move can no longer be detained for immigration-related reasons, but rather placed in care institutions under State custody and the responsibility over their care was transferred to the National and Local Welfare Agencies, through their care institutions networks. Notwithstanding, children on the move, particularly, those unaccompanied, were held in detention-like conditions in these care institutions, being a closed-door care model used in Mexico for all children in need of alternative care.

What was the intervention?

A central strategy of the EU programme has been advocating for the transformation of the closed-door model of residential care institutions, along with expanding the family-based alternative care and independent living options for all children in Mexico, including those on the move. Without any care standards or national guidelines in place, it was particularly challenging to transform the care model for children on the move without reforming the national care model in general: UNICEF led the national care reform and embedded its efforts to transform the care schemes for children on the move within the broader national care agenda. It advocated for the development of residential care standards that would set conditions for the use of federal funding to end detention-like conditions for children on the move in practice. UNICEF's interventions supported national policy reforms, to provide young children on the move with foster care programs and older adolescents with supervised independent living models.

As a result, in July 2022, the SNDIF launched the National Care Model for Children and Adolescents on the Move, which establishes minimum standards and general lines of action for the effective and individualized monitoring of children/adolescents who receive accommodation and care in Social Assistance Centres or other authorized care centres, prioritizing children's right to live in a family, comprehensive protection schemes and community integration strategies.

Moreover, as part of broader efforts to support the implementation of a national care reform roadmap, including care standards and arrangements for children on the move, in February 2022, the SNDIF, supported by UNICEF and RELAF launched the '*Guidelines for foster care programs for separated and unaccompanied children and adolescents on the move*'.

Improving the quality of alternative care services and expanding the institutional shelter for children on the move remained a priority throughout the programme. With complementary US BPRM funding, UNICEF supported and expanded foster care programmes for children and adolescents deprived of family care in Baja California, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Michoacán, and Guerrero, providing technical support through cooperation agreements with specialized NGOs and state governments.

In 2023, UNICEF supported the SNDIF in rolling out the National Care Model for Children and

Adolescents on the Move and implementing it through the care centres network, adopting detailed methodological guidelines to improve the quality of care services in shelters.

What is the expected impact?

Reforming the protection system as a whole allows the rights of children on the move to be protected comprehensively and emphasizes the importance of their integration into society.

The National Care Model for Children and Adolescents on the Move guarantees adequate conditions to accommodate children and adolescents in shelters and Social Assistance Centres at federal, state and municipal levels, where temporary care is provided to children on the move. It also ensures that children are placed in these shelters only for a short-term period, used as a transition phase to a family- or community-care option.

The development of documents and guidelines will ensure quality standards in terms of child protection and alternative care, and operational manuals that aim to standardize care practices for children on the move implemented by relevant governmental entities.⁶²

The rollout of the National Care Model reached 63 shelters, which, only between January and July 2023, provided care to 20,849 children on the move (11,426 boys and 9,423 girls).

Furthermore, over the lifespan of the programme, 172 new families have been certified to foster children and 219 children were fostered by them, including 12 children on the move.

Providing services for boys and girls on the move can lead to innovative practices that could be adapted and applied more widely, such as foster care programmes and supervised independent living, benefitting the most vulnerable children and adolescents, including those on the move.

What you should know...

Small open-door residential care facilities integrated into the community, with technical teams specialized in working with adolescents from different social backgrounds, can be effective alternative care strategies to provide shelter in the first weeks of stay in the country of transit or destination. In addition, foster families and

independent living models have positive results in providing quality care and support for adolescent migrants.

Improved coordination of shelters and foster care programmes run by child protection authorities are key elements for the establishment of rights restitution plans that are adapted to the diversity of social characteristics, vulnerabilities and the best interests of migrant children.

The proposal to generate an alternative care model led by the federal government made it possible to prioritize this issue in the national migration agenda. This acceptance was amplified by the financial investment made by the government so that the changes would occur at the operational level in the shortest possible time and would be sustained over time. Throughout the 33 months of the Action, the national government has made a significant investment (US\$70M) to improve the existing infrastructure for residential care. This makes it possible to anticipate a greater appropriation of the technical guidelines by alternative care institutions throughout the country.

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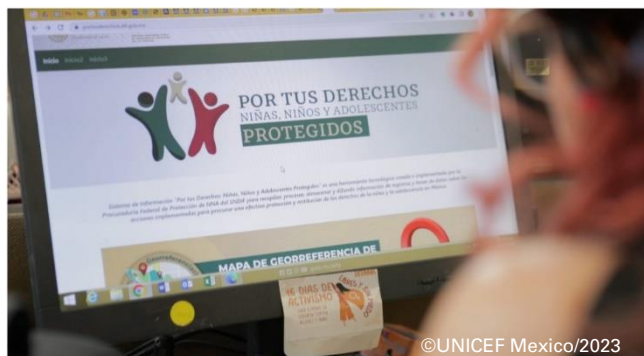
Useful links

[International Organization for Migration \(IOM\), 2023. Migration Governance Indicators Profile 2022 – Mexico.](#)



Outcome 4 – Exchanges of gender-sensitive good practices and lessons learnt across two regions/four countries serve as evidence for the protection of children on the move in different contexts, based on empirical evidence and data

Mexico: Including Children on the Move into National Information Management Systems for improved evidence-based programming: the children on the move module into the 'Por tus Derechos' data system



Why is the intervention important?

Mexico is a country of origin, transit, and destination for migrant and refugee children. In their journey, children face risks such as detention - or shelter in detention-like conditions -, family separation, deportation, physical and psychological harm, marginalization, discrimination, and sexual and economic exploitation. In recent years, Mexico has increasingly become a destination country for migrant and refugee children and their families, particularly for those originating from Central America. Mexico also remains a country of origin and return for Mexican children, including internally displaced due to violence.

In Mexico, the Migration Policy Unit (UPM, for its acronym in Spanish), under the Ministry of the Interior, is the agency responsible for publishing migration statistics. Every month, UPM makes available migratory flow data disaggregated by sex, age ranges, status of accompaniment (in the case of children and adolescents), and countries of origin. During the period of the EU-funded programme (October 2020 – July 2023), the National Migration Institute (INM) identified 1,094,902 people on the move in Mexico. Of these, 200,516 (18.3 per cent) were children and adolescents (87,394 girls and 113,122 boys), and 33,337 of them (16.6 per cent) were unaccompanied. Most of these children were from Honduras (51,152), followed by Guatemala (38,499), Venezuela (27,486), Ecuador (15,144), Colombia (10,275) and Brazil (9,506)⁶³.

Additionally, the UPM publishes a monthly newsletter that includes information on children's and adolescents' migratory flows. This information only reports the cases of people identified by the migration authorities; in other words, they do not reflect the entire population on the move in Mexico. On a different channel, COMAR publishes the number of asylum seekers every month. However, this report does not always present age-disaggregated figures. In 2022, Mexico was among the top five countries with the highest number of new asylum-seekers globally: according to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR), 341,466 persons applied for asylum during the programme period, mainly from Honduras, Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Of these, 21.9 per cent (74,679) were children, including 2,269 unaccompanied.

According to the reform to the Migration and the Children's Laws (November 2020), the National Welfare Agency (SNDIF) must "design and administer databases of accompanied and unaccompanied children and adolescents in migration situations. These databases must include, among other aspects, the causes of their migration, transit conditions, family ties, risk factors at origin and transit, information on their legal representatives, information on their accommodation and legal situation".

What was the intervention?

Thanks to the EU programme and co-funds from US BPRM, UNICEF played a critical role in providing technical assistance to the Federal CPA and strengthening the national Child Protection Information Management System (IMS): in 2022 UNICEF supported SNDIF to develop and launch the Children on the Move Registry, hosted within the larger IMS 'Por tus Derechos' (For your Rights). This is a technological tool created and implemented by the Federal Child Protection Unit (PFPNNA) of the National Welfare System (SNDIF), to collect, process, store and disseminate information from records and databases on the actions implemented by the Child Protection Authorities (CPAs) to ensure effective protection and restitution of the rights of children and adolescents in Mexico.

The information in the Register is organised in sections, according to the nature of the information and the authorities in charge of providing it. The system is composed of three different modules, namely, the Right to Live in a

Family Registers (including adoption and foster care), the National Register of Social Assistance Centres and the Children on the Move Register.

The Right to Live in a Family Register includes both the adoption procedures of children and adolescents susceptible to adoption as well as the adoption applicants and the professionals involved in the processes and procedures concerned. Likewise, the Foster Care Register. The National Register of Social Assistance Centres includes information related to the Centres that provide residential foster care to children and adolescents without parental care, which have been authorised by the Federal and State CPAs, after complying with the applicable regulations.

Through the Children on the Move Registry, the CPAs collect relevant data such as causes of migration, transit conditions, risk factors, protection measures, and shelter data and provide disaggregated information by age, sex, disability, accompanied status and ethnicity, among others. This Registry is managed collaboratively by the SNDIF, PFPNNA, the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) and the National Migration Institute (INM).

In coordination with the Federal CPA, UNICEF developed as well the Children on the Move Registry User's Manual. The manual allows users of the Registry to consult doubts about its operation and to clarify concepts about the fields of information to be entered. Additionally, in collaboration with IOM, UNICEF trained 142 government officials of INM, DIF, COMAR and CPAs to use the system and produced 7 video tutorials, helping solve frequently asked questions on the use of the IMS 'Por tus Derechos'.

What is the expected impact?

Every child on the move lives different experiences. Some are exposed to rights violations and restricted access to services. Governments must be attuned to these differences to design effective interventions. By collecting good-quality and disaggregated data, the Government of Mexico will be able to answer the fundamental questions of whether children on the move were effectively protected, their rights respected, and outcomes achieved. The system can provide key information from which improvements –or retrogression- can be demonstrated, and in consequence, build a protection system that leaves no one behind.

During the first 10 months of implementation (Oct 2022 – July 2023), 8,979 children on the move were registered (52 per cent accompanied boys; 6 per

cent unaccompanied boys; 37 per cent accompanied girls; and 4 per cent unaccompanied girls).

What you should know...

Furthermore, UNICEF is providing technical support to the Federal CPA to test the child protection case management digital tool Primero, alongside a harmonized national case management protocol. This tool will assist caseworkers in documenting case management processes, from identification and registration to assessment, case planning, referrals, transfers, and closure. Caseworkers will be able to document events and violations to respond with timely referrals and information on risk factors and child rights violation patterns. The roll-out of Primero is planned to conclude in December 2023 and to start formal operation in January 2024. After its roll-out, UNHCR will provide technical assistance as needed, to ensure the inclusion of the specific needs of refugee children.

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Useful links

[Information System Website](#)

[Children on the Move Module User's Manual](#)

[Introductory Video](#)



END NOTES

¹ [International Data Alliance for Children on the Move, 'Children on the Move: Key terms, definitions and concepts', United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2023.](#)

² In South Africa there is limited availability of national statistics on children on the move, due to a lack of effective documentation and systematic registration, coupled with minimal border control and high levels of corruption and smuggling practices at border posts. UNICEF and The South African Red Cross partner to assist migrant children. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/press-releases/unicef-and-south-african-red-cross-partner-assist-migrant-children>.

³ South Africa is a signatory state party to international and African regional children's rights law, humanitarian conventions and policies that seek to protect the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, specifically separated and unaccompanied children.

⁴ Mkwanzani, F., & Wilson-Strydom, M., 'Multidimensional disadvantages and educational aspirations of marginalised migrant youth: Insights from the Global South'. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 2018. Pp 14(1), 71-94.

⁵ These include, the Department of Social Development (DSD), the South African Police Services (SAPS), the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), the Department of Health (DoH), the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DOJ) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The latter department also has provincial government departments of education which oversee the implementation of policies at the school level within the districts.

⁶ Members include; Centre for Child Law, Consortium for refugees and migrants in South Africa, International Organization for Migration, Jesuit Refugee Services, Lawyers for Human Rights, Save the Children South Africa Terre des Homme, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

⁷ Zambia is regarded as a safe migration route due to non-militia and/or notorious gang groups known for extortion and exploitative activities in other countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a democratic country that has never experienced any conflict since its independence.

⁸ Traditional migration refers to routes used by migrants to enter Zambia before 2020; these are through the borders of Zambia-Tanzania and Zambia-Democratic Republic of Congo.

⁹ Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, Case management data.

¹⁰ [IOM and WFP, 'Understanding the adverse drivers and implications of migration from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras \(Panama and San Jose\)', 2022](#), pp. 5 and 22.

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¹³ [UNICEF. 'Number of migrant children moving across Latin America and the Caribbean hits new record amid violence, instability and climate change', September 2023. REDIM. Niños, niñas y adolescentes migrantes en Mexico.](#)

¹⁴ [Marcus, Rachel, et al., 'Children on the Move in Latin America and the Caribbean: Review of the Evidence', United Nations Children's Fund, Panama City, Panama, 2023.](#)

¹⁵ [UNICEF Mexico \(2019\) Procuradurías de protección de Niñas, Niños y adolescentes.](#)

¹⁶ Save the Children. Study on unaccompanied migrant children in Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. 2017; United Nations Children's Fund. Child Protection Advocacy Brief. Children on the Move. UNICEF, New York, 2018.

¹⁷ In South Africa there is limited availability of national statistics on children on the move, due to a lack of effective documentation and systematic registration, coupled with minimal border control and high levels of corruption and smuggling practices at border posts. UNICEF and The South African Red Cross partner to assist migrant children. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/press-releases/unicef-and-south-african-red-cross-partner-assist-migrant-children>.

¹⁸ South Africa is a signatory state party to international and African regional children's rights law, humanitarian conventions and policies that seek to protect the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, specifically separated and unaccompanied children.

¹⁹ [IOM. Migrants' Rights to Health in Southern Africa, 2022.](#)

²⁰ Sloth-Nielsen J, Ackermann M., 'Unaccompanied and Separated Foreign Children in the Care System in the Western Cape – A Socio-Legal Study'. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*. 2016; 19:1–27.

²¹ Hanna, Helen, 'Being a migrant learner in a South African primary school: recognition and racialisation', *Children's Geographies*. 2023, 21:3, 518-532.

²² Sonke Gender Justice. 'Gender, Migration and Health in SADC: a focus on women and girls'. Johannesburg: Sonke Gender Justice. 2019.

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²⁵ United Nations Children's Fund. [Health and Children on the Move](#). New York. 2022.

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²⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [Framework for the Protection of Children](#). UNHCR. 2012.

²⁸ Child Helpline International. [Child Helplines and Inclusive Practices by Child Helpline International](#). 2022.

²⁹ Traditional migration-here refers to routes previously used by migrants to enter Zambia before 2020, and these are through borders of Zambia- Tanzania and Zambia-Democratic Republic of Congo.

³⁰ Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, Case management data.

³¹ [Child Helpline International website.](#)

³² [IOM and WFP, Understanding the adverse drivers and implications of migration from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras \(Panama and San Jose\), 2022](#), pp. 5 and 22.

³³ [Te cuento me cuento.](#)

³⁴ United Nations. [United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#). 2010.

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- ³⁷ Republic of South Africa. [Children's Amendment Bill. Portfolio Committee on Social Development](#). 2022.
- ³⁸ Cluster foster care originates from the traditional practice of community members providing spontaneous care for children in need of protection, often in a 'children's house'.
- ³⁹ [Parliamentary Monitoring Group. Foster care court order progress with Minister | PMG](#). 2022.
- ⁴⁰ UNICEF. [UNICEF and The South African Red Cross partner to assist migrant children](#). 2020.
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- ⁴² Zambia is regarded as a safe migration route due to non-militia and /or notorious gang groups known for extortion and exploitative activities in other countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a democratic country that has never experienced any conflict since its independence.
- ⁴³ [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Zambia](#).
- ⁴⁴ Traditional migration refers to routes used by migrants to enter Zambia before 2020; these are through the borders of Zambia-Tanzania and Zambia-Democratic Republic of Congo.
- ⁴⁵ Zambia is regarded as a safe migration route due to non-militia and /or notorious gang groups known for extortion and exploitative activities in other countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a democratic country that has never experienced any conflict since its independence.
- ⁴⁶ Traditional migration refers to routes used by migrants to enter Zambia before 2020; these are through the borders of Zambia-Tanzania and Zambia-Democratic Republic of Congo.
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- ⁴⁸ [RELAF, Save the Children, UNICEF, 'Niñas, niños y adolescentes migrantes retornados un análisis de los contextos y las respuestas de los servicios y políticas de protección en El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y Mexico', Buenos Aires, 2015](#).
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- ⁶² For example: 'Guidelines for foster care programs for separated and unaccompanied children and adolescents on the move', launched in 2021 by RELAF and UNICEF; and the 'National Care Model for Children and Adolescents on the move', launched by UNICEF and the DIF in July 2022 to continue working on the implementation of an alternative care system that protects the rights of children.
- ⁶³ [UPMRIP. Boletín de Estadísticas Migratorias. 2023](#).