



IFRC Position Paper

# Protection and Assistance for Children on the Move

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International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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## Purpose

The purpose of this position paper is to provide an overview of the IFRC position and key advocacy messages related to the protection and assistance for children on the move.

It is intended to help promote a common voice among the IFRC and National Societies around protection and assistance for children on the move when we engage with governmental authorities at a national level and at regional and international fora, including processes such as the Global Compact on Migration.

# Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement support for children on the move

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the IFRC, and ICRC (together the “Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”) have a long history of working to protect children on the move, irrespective of their legal standing, at all stages of their journey.

This includes extensive work led by the ICRC on restoring family links (RFL), tracing, detention monitoring, and outreach to governments. This focus reflects the requirements under the Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law that special protections be put in place for children affected by conflict, including those separated from their families.<sup>1</sup>

As part of their humanitarian mandate, National Societies reach out to vulnerable children, including those ‘living at the margins of conventional health, social and legal systems’<sup>2</sup> the IFRC and National Societies work around the world to protect children on the move. This includes as part of the auxiliary role of National Societies to their governments. Actions by the IFRC and National Societies include providing protection and humanitarian assistance such as: emergency health care; safe spaces like child friendly spaces and homes dedicated to unaccompanied minors; reception and transit centres; psychosocial care; and support to access education, food, shelter, and legal counsel. The IFRC and National Societies also conduct advocacy to governments and local stakeholders to improve the protection of children on the move.

The IFRC and National Societies base their work to protect and assist children on the move on several key policies and resolutions. In particular, the resolution on migration: ensuring access, dignity, respect for diversity and social inclusion<sup>3</sup> made at the 31<sup>st</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement highlights:

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<sup>1</sup> ICRC. IHL Database, Rule 135, Children. [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_cha\\_chapter39\\_rule135](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter39_rule135).

<sup>2</sup> Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. (November, 2009). *Red Cross Red Crescent Policy on Migration by the Council of Delegates*. <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/migration/migration-policy/>.

<sup>3</sup> Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. (2015). *Resolution on Migration: Ensuring Access, Dignity, Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion*. [http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/01/R3\\_Migration\\_EN.pdf](http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/01/R3_Migration_EN.pdf).

*“expressing concern about the often alarming humanitarian situation of migrants in situations of vulnerability, at all stages of their journey and ongoing risks that migrants, in situations of vulnerability, face in regards to their dignity, safety, access to international protection as well as access to health care, shelter, food, clothing and education.”*

And

*“recognizing that acting in accordance with the Statutes of the Movement, in particular Article 3.1, National Societies should enjoy effective access to all migrants, irrespective of their legal status, in order to deliver humanitarian assistance and protection services without being penalized, both in their role as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field at all levels and under their general humanitarian mandate.”*

The IFRC Policy on Migration, developed in 2009, underlines:<sup>4</sup>

*“National Societies provide assistance and protection to migrants, irrespective of their legal status.”*

And

*“An increasing number of migrants are unaccompanied minors or minors separated from their families. Without family links or appropriate care arrangements, they are at high risk of abuse and exploitation. Their rights may be violated, and their prospects for a secure and productive future are often dim. These minors are of special concern to the Movement. National Societies shall cooperate and engage in the protection of unaccompanied and separated minor migrants, including through efforts to restore their family links...”*

**“To reach Luxembourg it took me two months. I traveled through 11 countries. There were so many problems. The hardest part was the mountain passes. We always walked in the dark to avoid being seen. For several days we just had water and biscuits. It was very cold and I was not prepared for that. My friend, who left our village with me, fell after border police started to shoot. I do not know if he died or lived. I just kept telling myself not to give up.”**

**Unaccompanied child from Afghanistan transiting in Luxembourg**

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<sup>4</sup> IFRC. (2009). Policy on Migration. [http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/03/Migration-Policy\\_EN.pdf](http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/03/Migration-Policy_EN.pdf).  
[wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/01/R3\\_Migration\\_EN.pdf](http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/01/R3_Migration_EN.pdf).



## IFRC Position

All children on the move, irrespective of their legal standing, age, gender, or health status should have access to protection and humanitarian assistance. Because of their higher vulnerabilities, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) require particular and urgent protection. No child should be detained based solely on her or his migration status. In order to improve the protection and humanitarian assistance of children on the move it is necessary to meaningfully engage and provide leadership opportunities for girls and boys to identify protection risks and find and implement solutions. Furthermore, more needs to be done to enhance the evidence-base of what specific interventions work to protect children on the move and those that do not, and why.

“My family came to Turkey from Syria because of the fighting and because my parents were worried about the abductions of girls.”

15 year old refugee who is also a Turkish Red Crescent volunteer



## Our concerns about children on the move

The IFRC is deeply concerned about the protection of and humanitarian assistance for children on the move. This is heightened by data that shows the number of children on the move, including unaccompanied and separated children, has grown substantially in the past decade.<sup>5</sup> There are an estimated 50,000 million children on the move worldwide.<sup>6</sup> Whether they are labelled as “migrants”, “refugees”, “displaced persons”, “trafficked”, “returnees”, or “stateless” there are numerous threats that are be faced by girls and boys on the move in their home countries, in transit, and at their destination countries.

The urgency of protecting children on the move is underlined by their growing numbers, the diversity of threats they face, and the global scope of the risk. Our particular concerns are detailed below.

### **Death**

In the first 9 months of 2017, it is estimated that at least 150 children on the move have died during their migration. A significant majority, at least 118, of these deaths have been from drowning. Other causes include dehydration, hypothermia, vehicle accidents, suffocation, and being shot or stabbed. The Central Mediterranean migration route is the most lethal location accounting for the most amount of deaths.<sup>7</sup>

### **Becoming unaccompanied or separated**

At least 300,000 UASC were registered as moving across borders in 80 countries in 2015–2016. This was an almost fivefold increase from 66,000 in 2010–2011. The total number of unaccompanied and separated children worldwide are likely much higher.<sup>8</sup>

The push and pull factors can vary for each child, some common themes identified in the Americas through an IFRC and Terres des Hommes study include: experiencing violence (organised, intra-family, etc.), poverty, social exclusion, lack of opportunities, stigmatisation and the need for family reunification when relatives live in places like the United States.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF. (2017). *A Child is a Child: Protecting Children on the Move from Violence, Abuse and Exploitation*. [https://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_95956.html](https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_95956.html).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> IOM. (September 11, 2017). *Missing Migrants Project*. <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF. (2017). *A Child is a Child: Protecting Children on the Move from Violence, Abuse and Exploitation*. [https://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_95956.html](https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_95956.html).

<sup>9</sup> IFRC and Terres des Hommes. (2017). *Identifying Causes and Defining Strategies to Address Youth Violence and Legal Protection, with Regards to Migration in the Northern Triangle of Central America*.



Whatever their motivations to move, it is clear that UASC are at higher risk of violence and exploitation than children traveling with parents or other groups. For example, in the Eastern Mediterranean route are at double the risk of exploitation than other children.<sup>10</sup>

While severe psychosocial distress can affect any child on the move, the risks are particularly high and intense for UASC.<sup>11</sup>

### **Inadequate registration and best interest assessments**

When children, especially UASC, arrive in transit or destination countries their registration can be incomplete or not occur. This is made more challenging when UASC resist identification due to the influence of smugglers and/or instructions from their families, the community, or even peer pressure.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to registration, during the identification process, Best Interest of the Child Assessments and Best Interest of the Child Determinations are often not carried out in accordance with international standards. The differences in assessments across countries have resulted in discordant decisions on the age of children and disruptions in the provision of protection and assistance to UASC, particularly in cases of transfers. In many countries UASC are not entitled to a formal challenge of results of assessments in front of an independent body, and thus may not have access to national child protection systems.<sup>13</sup>

### **Being placed in detention**

Many countries continue to place unaccompanied and separated children into detention. Although this is clearly prohibited under of the Convention on the Rights of the Child article 37 on the protection from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and from unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

Regardless of the reasons for immigration detention, a number of studies have shown that detaining children has a profound and negative impact on child health and well-being. Even very short periods of detention can undermine child psychological and physical well-being and compromise their cognitive development.<sup>14</sup> UASC deprived of liberty are exposed to increased risks of physical and sexual abuse, acts of violence, and denial of access to education, health care, and family life.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> UNHCR. (2016). Global trends: Focus on displacement in 2015. <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Laban C.J., Gernaat, H.B., Komproe, I.H., Schreuders B.A., & De Jong J.T. Impact of a Long Asylum Procedure on the Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders in Iraqi Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*. 2004 Dec; 192(12):843-51.

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF, and International Rescue Committee. (2016). *Discussion Paper on a Possible Way Forward to Strengthen Policies and Procedures for Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Europe*. [https://www.unicef.org/eca/Way\\_Forward.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eca/Way_Forward.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> International Detention Coalition. (2012). *Impact of Detention on Children*, Chapter 5: The Impacts of Detention on Children, p. 48-57 in IDC (2015), *Captured Childhood*, <http://idcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Captured-Childhood-FINAL-June-2012.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Save the Children. (2011). *Leaving Home: Voice of Children on the Move*.

Interviews with children on the move, for instance in Mexico, show that prolonged detention “discourages children in need of international protection from seeking asylum” and that with the prospect of long-term confinement, “some children fleeing violence distrust the asylum system entirely and avoid it, while others abandon their asylum claims in the hopes of seeking protection elsewhere.”<sup>16</sup>

Research shows that detention can be particularly harmful for UASC mental health because it may compound the trauma they have already suffered in their home country or along the migratory route.<sup>17</sup>

The situation of children, especially UASC, placed into detention solely for being migrants is often dangerous, unhealthy, and poses serious risk to children’s well-being. For example, the status of UASC held within detention facilities within Libya have been described as a “living hell”.<sup>18</sup>

Although any detention is unacceptable, it is especially alarming when children’s detention is indefinite or pending the outcome of the child’s asylum application. In situations where children have been detained, it must be for the shortest possible period, regular monitoring and support must be made accessible, and appropriate care needs to be provided. Such detention must never be in a prison setting.

### **Experiencing violence**

Millions of girls and boys around the world experience gender-based violence including physical, sexual and psychological violence.<sup>19</sup> However in emergencies collecting data on violence, especially sexual violence, can be very difficult because of the secrecy, shame and fear that are associated with it, especially when it concerns children.

While there are no clear global statistics on the levels of GBV against girls and boys on the move, studies, assessments and monitoring by humanitarian agencies and academic organizations show the risk of GBV and exploitation are commonly present. For example, among children transiting through Libya, three quarters of those interviewed said they had experienced violence, harassment or aggression at the hands of adults.<sup>20</sup> Along the Eastern Mediterranean route adolescents are at two times the risk of exploitation than are adults; in the

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<sup>16</sup> UNHCR. (2015). Uprooted. [http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/Documentos/Eventos/2014/Uprooted\\_One-pager.pdf](http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/Documentos/Eventos/2014/Uprooted_One-pager.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> ICRC. (2017). *Children and Detention: In Brief*, <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-4201.pdf>; ICRC. (2016). *Policy Paper on Immigration Detention*. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/migrant-detainees-icrc-policy>; and International Detention Coalition. (2012). *Impact of Detention on Children*. <http://idcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Captured-Childhood-FINAL-June-2012.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF. (2017). *A Deadly Journey for Children*. [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_94941.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94941.html).

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF. (2009). *The State of the World’s Children, Special Edition: Celebrating 20 Years of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. <https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/sowc/fullreport.php>.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF. (2017). *A Deadly Journey for Children*. [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_94941.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94941.html).

Western Mediterranean route 8 out of 10 girls and boys report experiencing exploitation.<sup>21</sup> In Greece, the situation of violence is so troubling that a study by Harvard University described it as “a growing epidemic of sexual exploitation and abuse of migrant children.”<sup>22</sup> The factors contributing to the risk are reported as: an insufficient number of specialized facilities for children; risky living conditions inside camps; potentially hazardous and unsupervised commingling of migrant children with the adult migrant population; weak and insufficiently resourced child protection systems; a lack of coordination and cooperation among responsible actors; and an inefficient and radically inadequate relocation scheme.<sup>23</sup>

Another type of GBV is early and forced marriage of children on the move, a problem that disproportionately affects adolescent girls. Not only can the risk of marriage can be a motivation for girls to flee their homes,<sup>24</sup> the risk of early marriage can increase once on the move. For example, child marriage is a growing problem for Syrian girls in refugee communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.<sup>25</sup>

In general, the risk of GBV against UASC is even more precarious than other children. As an example of forced prostitution of adolescent female UASC, a study by the British Red Cross found:

*“unaccompanied children are among the most likely to fall prey to traffickers or to end up in exploitative situations. Organised criminal networks provide a regular flow of young women from Nigeria’s Edo state to Italy, for example. Not all of these girls are minors, nor are all of them unaware of the sex work that most likely awaits them. A substantial proportion, however, have been enticed from their homes with promises of wealth that they can remit to their families. They are impeded from reporting their situation to authorities or seeking help by threats to themselves or their families, sometimes invoking the use of ‘juju’ or black magic against them.”*<sup>26</sup>

Not only is violence direct by others a troubling concern, so is self-harm and suicide for children on the move who are struggling with severe psychosocial distress and a sense of hopelessness.<sup>27</sup> For instance, in Greece incidents of self-harm among children as young as nine and suicide attempts of children 12 years

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21 UNICEF and IOM. (2017). *Harrowing Journeys: Children and Youth on the Move Across the Mediterranean Sea, At Risk of Trafficking and Exploitation*. [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Harrowing\\_Journeys\\_Children\\_and\\_youth\\_on\\_the\\_move\\_across\\_the\\_Mediterranean.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Harrowing_Journeys_Children_and_youth_on_the_move_across_the_Mediterranean.pdf).

22 FXB Centre for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University. (2017). *Emergency Within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece*.

23 Ibid. <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/04/Emergency-Within-an-Emergency-FXB.pdf>.

24 Population Council. (2013). *Adolescent Girls on the Move: Adolescent Girls and Migration in the Developing World – A Girls Count Report on Adolescent Girls*. [http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2013PGY\\_GirlsOnTheMove.pdf](http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2013PGY_GirlsOnTheMove.pdf).

25 UNICEF. (2014). *A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan*. <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/study-early-marriage-jordan-2014/>.

26 British Red Cross. (2016). *Humanity at a Crossroads: Migrants’ Journey on the Central Mediterranean Route*. <http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Media-centre/Press-releases/2016/September/Dangerous-journeys-Humanity-at-a-Crossroads>.

27 FXB Centre for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University. (2017). *Emergency within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece*.

old have been reported. Moreover, alcohol and drug abuse is reported to have spiked among adolescents living in camps in Greece.<sup>28</sup>

### **Lacking access to health care**

Consultations with sixty-nine agencies by the IFRC and Terres des Hommes in Central America found that the health needs of children on the move can vary according to where the children are on their migration journey. Their needs start within their home community and become more complex as they face different risks while migrating. Girls and boys require access to services such as hygiene, nutrition, vector control, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, treatment of injuries as well as the most common health needs.<sup>29</sup>

While access to health needs is an essential basic service, these services are denied or restricted for children on the move in some states, thereby jeopardizing their physical and psychological health.

### **Struggling with severe mental health and psychosocial distress**

Whether from near lethal encounters, traveling alone and unprotected, being separated from family, experiencing violence or witnessing others become violent, being injured, or missing loved ones and normal routines, the migration experience can place severe mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) distress upon children.

MHPSS risks are elevated for UASC.<sup>30</sup> These include social isolation or lack of engagement with peers and grief; severe distress and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); difficulties in dealing with the past, present and/or future; loneliness and tendency to isolate themselves from others; an inability to express, talk about and/or deal with feelings and stresses (and therefore a risk of re-experiencing distressing experiences); confusion and anger; various relational issues and relationship disturbances to other unaccompanied minors and/or siblings if in the same centre; and loss of control.

“After the South Kordofan violence, we initiated several child protection activities to provide a safe space for children to come to address the trauma they had witnessed. We did this through recreation, education and awareness activities. We also worked on identifying and responding to cases of separated and unaccompanied minors, to help reunite them with their families or to find alternative care solutions where reunification was not possible.”

Sudan Red Crescent volunteer

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<sup>28</sup> Save the Children. (2017). *A Tide of Self-harm and Depression*. [https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Report\\_EU%20Turkey%20deal\\_%20A%20tide%20of%20self-harm%20and%20depression\\_March%202017%5B1%5D.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Report_EU%20Turkey%20deal_%20A%20tide%20of%20self-harm%20and%20depression_March%202017%5B1%5D.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> IFRC and Terres des Hommes. (2017). *Identifying Causes and Defining Strategies to Address Youth Violence and Legal Protection, with Regards to Migration in the Northern Triangle of Central America*.

<sup>30</sup> Laban C.J., Gernaat, H.B., Komproe, I.H., Schreuders B.A., & De Jong J.T. Impact of a Long Asylum Procedure on the Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders in Iraqi Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*. 2004 Dec; 192(12):843-51.



### **Unable to access education**

Education is a basic right for every child. Yet some States place restrictions on access to education for children on the move by not allowing them to attend school or making the procedures and cost of education unreasonable. Among child refugees, even when girls and boys do enrol in school in host countries they are more likely than their non-refugee peers to earn poor or failing grades, drop out, or struggle with a new language or learning curricula.

UASC are especially vulnerable to missing out on an education. In particular, work requirements, poverty, poor health, and language barriers exclude them from schools.<sup>31</sup>

When consulted with, refugee children consistently name education as their top priority; this reflects the “reality that only 50 per cent of the world’s refugee children attend primary school, only 22 per cent attend secondary school and just 1 per cent go on to university.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Inadequate gendered analysis and response**

The experiences of girls and boys on the move can be different. For example, UASC who remain in their regions of origin, such as Africa, tend to include significant numbers of girls and children younger than 14 years; in contrast, the majority of UASC who move onward to Europe and apply for asylum are older boys.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the specific needs of girls and boys on the move can each be unique due to the gender roles that are culturally assigned to them and because of physiological differences. As a result, the IFRC Policy on Migration states “National Societies shall pay special attention to age, gender, and other factors of diversity that increase the vulnerability of migrants.”<sup>34</sup> However, it is unclear how often and to what depth governments, humanitarian agencies and others actually include a gender analysis that shapes the design and implementation of their interventions with girls and boys on the move.

In Germany and Sweden, for instance, within accommodation centres the needs of women and girls have been reported as often going unaddressed although they must live in them while their asylum claims are processed. Often there are no separate living spaces for women and families and no sex-separated latrines or shower facilities. Women and girls are vulnerable to rape, assault, and other violence in these facilities. In addition, accommodation centres have no standard processes to identify and support GBV survivors.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> UNDP. (2009). *Human Development Report: Overcoming Barriers – Human Mobility and Development*. [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/269/hdr\\_2009\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/269/hdr_2009_en_complete.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR. (2016). *Missing Out: Refugee Education in Crisis*. <http://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/57d9d01d0/missing-refugee-education-crisis.html>.

<sup>33</sup> UNHCR. (2016). *High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Needs: Children on the Move*. <http://www.unhcr.org/583d8e597.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> IFRC. (2009). *IFRC Policy on Migration*. <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/migration/migration-policy/>

<sup>35</sup> Women's Refugee Council. (2016). *Falling Through the Cracks: Refugee Women and Girls in Germany and Sweden*. <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/56ef98954.pdf>.

Another example, of a gendered need not always met is that of making accessible to adolescent girls on the move sufficient menstrual hygiene management (MHM) support. Assessments by the Bangladesh Red Crescent and IFRC<sup>36</sup> in response to children arriving from Myanmar found that while female hygiene parcels are being delivered as part of non-food item distributions in camps these were only one-offs and the number of menstrual pads did not meet ongoing needs. Girls reported that when they were menstruating they had to stay in their hut all the time because they only had one set of clothes. Girls reported that they had minimal privacy and felt at risk of GBV when washing their body and clothes outside; they then have to stay indoors for four hours until their clothes dry.

#### **Being left out of decision-making and missing a voice**

A key element of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that “children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within the family, the school or the community.”<sup>37</sup>

Work by the British Red Cross in the Calais refugee camp in France found there was a lack of age and language-appropriate information to help UASC make decisions for accessing essential services and determining where and how to proceed with their asylum processes.<sup>38</sup>

Recognizing the problem of a lack of participation, the IFRC has been a leading member of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action which calls upon governments and humanitarian agencies to:

*“Recognize and strengthen young people’s capacities and capabilities to be effective humanitarian actors in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, and empower and support local youth-led initiatives and organizations in humanitarian response, such as those targeting affected youth, including young refugees and internally displaced persons living in informal urban settlements and slums.”*<sup>39</sup>

When children’s perspectives, insights, and experience are not drawn upon it erodes the effectiveness, relevance and impact of programs designed for them and it fails to meet children’s basic rights to participation.

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<sup>36</sup> IFRC and Bangladesh Red Crescent. (2017). *Child Protection Assessment in Cox’s Bazar*.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF. (No date). *Fact Sheet: The Right to Participation*. <https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> British Red Cross. (2016). *No Place for Children*. <https://www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Refugee%20support/No%20place%20for%20children.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> World Humanitarian Summit. (2016). *Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action*. <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/CompactforYoungPeopleinHumanitarianAction-FINAL-EDITED-VERSION1.pdf>.

### **Forced return**

It is within the prerogative of States to regulate the presence of migrants, including children, on their territory, and if they are deemed to be in an irregular situation, to expel or deport them. However, in all situations governments must comply with their obligations under international law including the principle of *non-refoulement*, the right to be treated humanely, and the right to family unity,<sup>40</sup> and the articles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

In all circumstances, a State is required to assess carefully and in good faith whether there are substantial grounds for believing that an individual child runs the risk of being subjected to a violation of rights as protected under international obligations.<sup>41</sup>

“These child migrants are human beings and need to be treated that way. They are on their own and have big decisions to make about whether to stay or move on, and how to compose a future that allows them dignity and to be safe from violence. At the Red Cross we can try to help.”

Social worker, Hellenic Red Cross

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<sup>40</sup> ICRC. (2016). *ICRC Perspectives Regarding the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Participation in Return-Related Activities*.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

## Global Compact on Migration

The “New York Declaration” (NYD) from which the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees will be developed includes specific elements relating to the protection of children on the move. Specifically, a commitment to respect the best interest of the child, a recognition of the special vulnerabilities of UASC, the importance of avoiding detention of UASC, ensuring access to education for all children, and preventing and responding to GBV.<sup>42</sup> This represents a unique opportunity for States to translate their commitments, as expressed in the NYD, into concrete and tangible deliverables on the ground.



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<sup>42</sup> United Nations General Assembly. (2016). *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/L.1](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/L.1).



# Recommendations

In order to provide further guidance and an adequate framework on how to uphold the best interests of the child in the *Global Compacts on Refugees and Migrants*, the IFRC recommends to Governments the actions listed below.



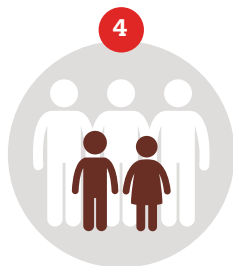
**Ensure access to  
comprehensive protection  
and assistance**



**Prioritize  
protection of UASC**



**End detention of  
children due to their  
migration status**



**Provide leadership  
opportunities for  
children on the move**



**Enhance the  
evidence-base**

**1. Ensure all children on the move irrespective of a child's legal standing, age, gender or health status, have access to comprehensive protection and humanitarian assistance.**

1.1. Provide access to essential basic services including health care, shelter, safe spaces, education, guardianship, psychosocial support, legal counsel, restoring family links (RFL), and information about rights and processes.

1.2. Remove barriers to accessing essential basic services through providing translations, cultural mediators, removing or reducing costs, and making children aware of what services are available and where.

1.3. Establish “firewalls” for government services so that political factors do not become barriers to protection and humanitarian assistance.

1.4. Guarantee that children on the move will not risk criminalization for accessing protection and humanitarian assistance.

1.5. Build the capacity, through training and mentorship, of first responders to increase practical skills to protect children on the move.

1.6. Mandate that all personnel working with children on the move undergo effective screening so they do not pose a threat to children and ensure they know how and where to make child protection referrals.

**2. Prioritize protection of UASC.**

2.1. Put in place emergency reception and registration processes tailored to the needs of UASC.

2.2. Take all necessary measures to identify UASC at the earliest possible stage, including at the border.

2.3. Ensure all UASC complete a thorough and professional Best Interest of the Child Assessment and Best Interests of the Child Determination.

2.4. Where children seek it, support RFL and Tracing processes.

2.5. Do not forcibly return UASC to any destination where they might be at risk of death, persecution or other violations under international law.

### **3. End detention of children solely for reasons of their immigration status.**

3.1. Put in place clear legislation to end detention of children on the move solely for reasons of their immigration status.

3.2. Provide appropriate care solutions such as foster care, adoption, and homes specific for UASC.

3.3. Where children are already being detained due to their immigration status, find immediate appropriate care solutions.

### **4. Engage and provide leadership opportunities for girls and boys on the move to identify protection risks and find and implement solutions.**

4.1. Provide meaningful opportunities for girls and boys on the move to share their perspectives on decisions and interventions that affect them.

4.2. Enable adolescent girls and boys to take a leadership role in designing and implementing protection and humanitarian assistance projects, where it is appropriate and does not pose any risk to the adolescents.


### **5. Enhance the evidence-base of what specific interventions work and those that do not, and why.**

5.1. Improve sex, age and disability disaggregated data collection of the number of children on the move within the State and the services being provided for these children.

5.2. Increase the quantity and quality of rigorous evaluations that show the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of interventions for children on the move, including through a gendered lens.

5.3. Conduct gender analyses to understand the specific needs of girls, boys and other gender identities when assessing the protection and assistance needs of children on the move.

5.4. Use increased quality data and evidence to improve support for and monitoring of protection and humanitarian assistance to children on the move.



“Collectively, across continents, our global efforts to protect children or to provide them with targeted services in countries of transit or destination are inadequate, even non-existent at times. We are falling far short of where we need to be and children are living with the consequences, many of which remain unseen and unheard.”

“In the same way that, in the aftermath of an emergency, we ensure safe water and sanitation, provide emergency health services, and establish shelters for people displaced, we must also do all we can to protect children. It is high time that we make this a priority. Protection must indeed be an integral part of any life saving package in emergency preparedness and response.”

Elhadj As Sy, IFRC Secretary General



## Appendix 1: Terms and definitions

**Child:** Pursuant to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the IFRC<sup>43</sup> defines a child as a “human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”

**Child protection:** Child protection refers to the prevention of, and response to, abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children.<sup>44</sup>

**Children on the move**<sup>45</sup>: Those children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement, while it may open up opportunities, might also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence.”<sup>46</sup>

**Unaccompanied children** (also termed “**unaccompanied minors**”): are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.<sup>47</sup>

**Separated children:** are children separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.<sup>48</sup>

**Humanitarian Assistance:** includes providing food, shelter, clothing, health care, first aid, psycho-social support, etc.<sup>49</sup>

**Protection:** includes, restoring family links, legal and administrative advice, acting against exploitation and deception, providing information on the risks of irregular migration, visiting migrants in detention with a view to helping improve their detention conditions and their treatment when necessary.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> IFRC. (2013). *Child Protection Policy*.

<sup>44</sup> Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2012). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*.

<sup>45</sup> There is no single and commonly used definition of “children on the move.” However, the definition with the broadest consensus through the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children on the Move and applied by the IFRC is used in this document.

<sup>46</sup> IOM. (2013). *Children on the Move*. [http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/children\\_on\\_the\\_move\\_15may.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/children_on_the_move_15may.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> ICRC. (2004). *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*. <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/1101-inter-agency-guiding-principles-unaccompanied-and-separated-children>.

<sup>48</sup> ICRC. (2004). *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*. <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/1101-inter-agency-guiding-principles-unaccompanied-and-separated-children>.

<sup>49</sup> Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. (2007). *Resolution: Together for Humanity*. <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/resolution/30-international-conference-resolution-1-2007.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix 2: Reference documents

### **MOVEMENT SPECIFIC**

1. **IFRC Policy on Migration**  
<http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/migration/migration-policy>
2. **Movement Resolution on Migration**  
[http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/01/R3\\_Migration\\_EN.pdf](http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/01/R3_Migration_EN.pdf)
3. **IFRC Ten Migration Principles**  
<http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/migration/migration-principles>
4. **IFRC Migration Policy Brief**  
<http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/89801/Migration%20policy%20brief-EN.rev1.pdf>
5. **Movement Policy on Internal Displacement**  
<https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/1124-movement-policy-internal-displacement-resolution-no-5-2009-council-delegates>
6. **IFRC Child Protection Action Plan 2015 – 2020**  
[http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/principles/IFRC-Child-Protection-Action-Plan\\_2015-2020.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/principles/IFRC-Child-Protection-Action-Plan_2015-2020.pdf)
7. **IFRC Briefing Note on Child Protection in Emergencies**  
[http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/principles/IFRC-CPiE-Briefing\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/principles/IFRC-CPiE-Briefing_EN.pdf)
8. **IFRC Minimum Standard Commitments for Gender and Diversity in Emergency Programming**  
<http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Photos/Secretariat/201505/Gender%20Diversity%20MSCs%20Emergency%20Programming%20HR3.pdf>
9. **Movement Resolution on SGBV: Joint action on prevention and response**  
[http://rcrcconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/32IC-Background-report-on-Sexual-and-gender-based-violence\\_EN.pdf](http://rcrcconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/32IC-Background-report-on-Sexual-and-gender-based-violence_EN.pdf)
10. **IFRC Strategy on Violence Prevention, Migration and Response 2011 – 2013**  
<http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/53475/IFRC%20SoV%20REPORT%202011%20EN.pdf>

**11. ICRC Professional Standards for Protection Work**

<https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0999-professional-standards-protection-work-carried-out-humanitarian-and-human-rights>

**12. ICRC Protection Policy**

<https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc-871-icrc-protection-policy.pdf>

## **EXTERNAL TO THE MOVEMENT**

**1. Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action**

[https://www.unicef.org/iran/Minimum\\_standards\\_for\\_child\\_protection\\_in\\_humanitarian\\_action.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/iran/Minimum_standards_for_child_protection_in_humanitarian_action.pdf)

**2. Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children**

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/toolkit-unaccompanied-and-separated-children>

**3. Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children**

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/field-handbook-unaccompanied-and-separated-children>

**4. UN Refugee Convention**

<http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

**5. OCHA Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement**

[http://www.eods.eu/library/UN.OCHA\\_Guiding%20Principles%20on%20Internal%20Displacement\\_2001\\_EN.pdf](http://www.eods.eu/library/UN.OCHA_Guiding%20Principles%20on%20Internal%20Displacement_2001_EN.pdf)

**6. New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants**

<http://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration>

**7. Recommended Principles to Guide Actions Concerning Children on the Move and Other Children Affected by Migration**

<https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/06/Principles.pdf>

## Appendix 3: Sample Profiles of National Society Interventions to Protect Children on the Move

### **Global:**

Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies – Case Study Report

<http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/05/IFRC-CFS-Case-Study-Report-2017.pdf>

### **Europe:**

“Over Under Sideways Down” comic book

<http://webapps.redcross.org.uk/RefugeeWeekComic>

### **Afghanistan:**

“The Story of Sharif”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4AedFjPvF5A>

### **Bangladesh:**

Protecting children on the move in Bangladesh

<http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/2017/06/09/protecting-children-move-bangladesh>

### **Croatia:**

Volunteers step in to care for children travelling alone in Croatia

<https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/2017/09/18/volunteers-care-children-travelling-alone-croatia>

### **Greece:**

Young volunteers rally round children forced to flee fire in island camp

<http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/europe-central-asia/greece/young-volunteers-rally-round-children-forced-to-flee-fire-at-island-camp-72538>

### **Luxembourg:**

Having faced harrowing journeys alone, teenage refugees build new life in Luxembourg

<http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/2017/03/07/having-faced-harrowing-journeys-alone-teenage-refugees-build-new-life-in-luxembourg>



**Sudan:**

Alone and fleeing violence in South Sudan: The difficult journey being made by young children

<http://www.ifrc.org/ar/news-and-media/news-stories/africa/uganda/alone-and-fleeing-violence-in-south-sudan-the-difficult-journey-for-young-children--65339>

**Turkey:**

Safe spaces for children in Turkey

<http://www.ifrc.org/fr/nouvelles/nouvelles/europe/turkey/safe-spaces-for-children-in-turkey-70761>

**United Kingdom:**

Child Refugees Document Horror of Fleeing Their Homes Through Powerful Art

[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/child-refugees-art-british-red-cross\\_us\\_5943bf67e4b06bb7d2726b83](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/child-refugees-art-british-red-cross_us_5943bf67e4b06bb7d2726b83)

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Geneva, October 9, 2017

IFRC Position Papers are designed to explain to external actors the IFRC positions on key topics and to outline the changes we would like to see to address the given issue.

# The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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The vision of the IFRC is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view of preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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