

DANGERS OF TRAFFICKING

Children fleeing crisis may be forced to rely on riskier, more expensive smuggling networks to reach their destinations – placing many girls and boys on the move at risk of abuse, exploitation, debt and trafficking. Rather than limiting migratory movement and decreasing children’s susceptibility to trafficking, COVID-related travel restrictions may be pushing trafficking networks further underground. This, combined with disruptions in services, can make identification of trafficking victims more difficult, rendering these child victims even more invisible and vulnerable.⁴⁴

Migrant girls navigating travel today may be especially susceptible to trafficking, given that globally, women and girls comprise two out of three detected victims.⁴⁵

Severe increases in poverty, unemployment and systemic inequalities – some of the root causes of human trafficking – mean many more girls are at risk.⁴⁶ Data on trafficking trends are limited to date, but some front-line organizations working on this issue have reported increased demand for services.⁴⁷ Other evidence has shown that two thirds of countries surveyed reported an increased risk of trafficking due to COVID-19.⁴⁸

While girls are most often trafficked for sexual exploitation, boys are more likely to be trafficked for forced labour, the most commonly detected form in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁹

More research is needed to capture the burden carried by boys; for instance, in Europe, though available data show sexual exploitation as the most common form of trafficking, victims of forced labour may be less easily detected.⁵⁰

Data from the first half of 2020 showed that children continued to brave the dangerous route across the Mediterranean Sea, many of them relying on traffickers and smugglers. Of an estimated 6,200 children registered as arrivals over that period, 85 per cent were boys. A third of these children travelled unaccompanied or had been separated from their parents, placing them at heightened risk of violence, harm and exploitation. More than 9 in 10 of these unaccompanied and separated children are boys.⁵¹

BETTER DATA TO . . .

- detect the girls and boys who have been victims of trafficking and how the pandemic has impacted trafficking networks
- indicate how migratory routes and patterns are changing, and where and how children are encountering gendered risks



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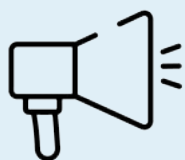
INJUSTICES DEMANDING ACTION

Migrant and displaced populations are intensely vulnerable and must be included in COVID-19 prevention, response and recovery plans. These approaches must be underpinned by quality data that can be disaggregated by age and sex, to ensure the most vulnerable are prioritized and receive the resources they need. **Children on the move, and girls in particular, must not be left even further behind.**

Though the COVID-19 crisis has underscored and exacerbated many pre-existing inequalities that impact migrant and displaced children every

day, it also presents an opportune moment to address these injustices through a gender lens. For instance, positioning women and girls on the move at the centre of both national responses to the crisis and longer-term solutions paves the way to investments that address girls’ gendered risks: e.g. lack of financial resources, food and health insecurity, school dropout, child marriage, GBV, and trafficking.

Better data to drive gender-responsive plans of action that support all children on the move are urgently needed to forge a more secure path ahead.



URGENT GENDER-RESPONSIVE ACTIONS FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE DURING COVID-19

- Invest in data and improved methodologies to generate reliable data that include gender perspectives
- Identify new, pandemic-driven data needs, ensuring gender is a consideration
- Support data-driven analysis that prioritizes gender equality
- Include migrant and displaced children in COVID-19 preparedness, response, and mitigation efforts, joining forces with relevant local, national and global partners and stakeholders
 - » Ensure women's and girls' equal representation in response planning and decision-making
 - » Engage with organizations that represent adolescent girls, women's rights, and youth
- » Consider gender and intersectional inequalities to ensure all migrant and displaced children are reached
- Guarantee universal access to COVID-19 testing and national vaccine roll-out plans, health care and public health information, safe living conditions, mental health and psychosocial support and other essential services, for all who need them, regardless of status
- Implement education strategies for continued learning for all children – including migrant and displaced children, focusing on girls in particular – and make schools safe, healthy and inclusive environments
- Expand social protections to minimize the economic impact of COVID-19 on families and children
 - » Drive transformative change for equality by addressing the care economy, paid and unpaid
 - » Target women and girls in all efforts to address the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19
- Advocate proactively against xenophobia, stigma and discrimination
- Respect human rights at borders and uphold the prohibitions of collective expulsion and refoulement for all migrants, ensuring safe, dignified returns and reintegration

A CRITICAL NEED FOR DATA

Quality, reliable data are the surest way to fully grasp the extent of COVID-19's damaging effects on children on the move. These data must be collected by improved methodologies that capture gender-diverse populations and intersectional inequalities. Robust data that can be disaggregated by age and sex tell us who and where the most vulnerable children are, and ensure we have the knowledge, tools and resources in place to protect their rights from the moment they leave home.

Data are the backbone of policies and programmes that ensure every migrant and displaced child has the opportunity to thrive. Data allow us to tackle the troubling risks, insecurities and harms faced by children on the move with direction and conviction. Data help us discern particular areas of concern for girls on the move, and where boys need our support. They also tell us where our work has been effective and where we must do better.

The heavy toll of COVID-19 is still unfolding. The time is now to invest in improving data availability and quality to keep pace with these changes and support the unique needs and aspirations of every girl and boy that migrates.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Production of the issue brief was coordinated by the IDAC Secretariat (UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR, OECD) with inputs from IDAC members. Special thanks to Rose Allen, Jan Beise, Naomi Lindt, Lauren Pandolfelli and Danzhen You for preparing the draft. Thanks to all IDAC members, and in particular to Estrella Lajom and to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, for their inputs and comments.

Design by Ane Louise Gaudert.

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The **International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC)** is a cross-sectoral, global coalition that advocates for better statistics and data on migrant and forcibly displaced children. IDAC's work promotes the strategic generation, use and analysis of quality data to support evidence-based policymaking that protects and empowers all children on the move.

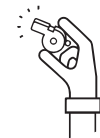
This is the first in a series of IDAC issue briefs, which leverage available data to raise awareness of pertinent issues impacting the lives of migrant and displaced children.

For more information, please contact IDAC@unicef.org.

IDAC PLEDGES TO...



STRENGTHEN data systems and capacities



PROMOTE and establish collaboration and innovation



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