



“Migrant and Displaced Children: Deep in the shadow of COVID-19” **- A webinar on the impact of the pandemic on childhood migration –**

Key Messages

Children on the Move – an incomplete picture of who they are, where they are, where did they come from, and what future awaits them.

- In 2020, 36 million children were living outside their country of birth (*IDAC*). Those children seek home in different destinations.
- Many children have embarked on their migration journeys fleeing conflicts and crises in their home country. For instance, more than 1.6 million Syrian children were living in Turkey as of end 2020 (*OECD*). Moreover, 298,000 Venezuelan children and adolescents left for Colombia in 2019 (*Colombia*).
- Around 400,000 children, aged 0-14 years old, settle in OECD countries every year. The three main OECD countries of destination are the United States of America, Germany and the United Kingdom (*OECD*).
- Apart from living abroad, many children are forced to leave their home due to conflicts or natural disasters but remain within their countries’ borders. At the end of 2019, an estimated 21 million internally displaced persons were under the age of 18 (*IDMC*).

More precarious situation of migrant and displaced children during the pandemic

- Access to basic services:

Before the pandemic, migrant and refugee women and adolescent girls encountered disproportionately higher barriers to health care information, facing constraints such as language barriers, fear of navigating the health care system, and restrictive gender roles and norms. Those gender deprivations are likely to worsen at the times of COVID-19 (*UNICEF*).

- Education:

Children on the move are experiencing the fallout from school closures during the pandemic. ICT-enabled remote learning is out of reach for many migrant and displaced children and girls may face higher barriers to using these technologies when they are available due to the restrictive gender norms and safety concerns about girls going online. Migrant and displaced children are also at heightened risk of dropping out of school all together, with some estimates suggesting that as many as half of all refugee girls in secondary school will never return to the classroom (*UNICEF*).

- Gender based violence:

Evidence has demonstrated an increase in gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence among displaced women and girls around the world. At the same time, lockdowns and movement restrictions have made it more difficult for displaced women and girls to report violence and access support services (*UNICEF*).

- Family reunification:

Permanent migration dropped sharply in OECD countries in 2020. A large part of these migration flows concerns family reunifications. The delay in family reunifications affects the family's integration into the destination country and could disproportionately affect migrant children. Children who arrive at pre-school age can have substantially more favorable integration outcomes as adults than children who arrive at school age, in terms of educational attainment, employment, wages and especially host country language proficiency (*OECD*).

- Abuse and exploitation:

There will be more pressure on migrant and displaced children to work as global poverty escalates. Vulnerable migrant and displaced children are likely to engage in more child labor, while those already working may be further exploited or unable to return home due to travel restrictions. Moreover, children are likely at greater risk of trafficking now as COVID-19 intensifies the root causes of child trafficking, including poverty and unemployment (*UNICEF*).

Children on the move fall behind native children

Evidence from Colombia shows that children on the move are generally worse off than their native counterparts:

- In 2019, almost half of Venezuelan children in Colombia, aged 0-5 years old, were undocumented. Moreover, 45.4% of Venezuelans aged 6-11 years old, and 38.1% of those aged 12-17 years old did not have an identification document. On the other hand, 98.2% of Colombian children aged 0-5 had a civil birth registration, and less than 1% of Colombians aged 6-17 years old did not have an identification document.
- With respect to education, 39.9% of Venezuelan minors in Colombia did not attend school, compared to only 6.6% of Colombian minors.
- Concerning access to health care services, 75.9% of Venezuelan migrant minors were not registered to the health system, compared to 3.4% of Colombian minors.
- Teenager pregnancy among the migrant population was double that among Colombian minors (8.9% vs. 3.5%).
- Migrant minors were at a disadvantage compared to Colombians in terms of access to extra-curricular activities: 5.1% of Venezuelan migrant minors had access to music compared to 10.6% of Colombian minors, 8.1% of Venezuelan minors had access to sport compared to 18.6% of Colombian minors, 16.7% of Venezuelan migrant minors had access to reading compared to 30% of Colombian minors, and finally, 46.1% of Venezuelan migrants had access to outdoor games compared to 66.2% of Colombian minors.

Data from OECD countries show similar trends:

- Children with migrant parents tend to be overrepresented among those with a low economic status compared to those with native-born parents. 45% of migrant children live in a poor household compared to 25% for non-migrant children.
- Migrant children are less likely to have computers at home compared to their non-migrant counterparts. The difference is not large in most OECD countries, but there are significant gaps in countries such as Greece and France where the difference is almost 10 percentage points. In Europe, 8% of people born outside the EU cannot afford a computer, compared 3.1% for native ones.

Policy and program implications - The case for better data and statistics

International organizations and governments rely on numerous data sources and adopt different methodologies to improve child migration data and statistics:

- A joint project between AU, IOM, UNDP and UNICEF works on mapping countries' capacities to collect data on children on the move, and the assistance that is being given in each country (*AU*).
- At the National Institute of Statistics in Colombia, the main source of data used to assess the number of migrant children in Colombia and the children's living conditions is the 2019 Quality of Life survey (*Colombia*).
- To fill the data gaps on internally displaced children, IDMC started using global IDP data and then applied population demographic distribution on the data (*IDMC*).
- The International Data Alliance for Children on the move (IDAC) was launched in March 2020 to improve statistics and data on migrant and forcibly displaced children with the goal to support evidence-based policymaking that protects and empowers them. UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR, and OECD form a joint Secretariat. The Alliance is comprised of 38 members that have volunteered to contribute their technical expertise, good practices and lessons learned at improving data visibility, availability, accessibility and utilization (*UNICEF*).