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## FACTS ABOUT CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **What is IDAC?**

The International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC) is a cross-sectoral global coalition that aims to improve data and statistics and support evidence-based policymaking for migrant and displaced children. Jointly led by Eurostat, IOM, OECD, UNHCR and UNICEF (Secretariat Chair), IDAC brings together governments (including experts from national statistical offices and migration- and displacement-related ministries), international and regional organizations, NGOs, think tanks, academics, civil society and youth. At the end of 2023, IDAC's membership had surpassed 50, including 25 Member States.



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## WHO ARE CHILDREN ON THE MOVE?

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, either internationally across borders or within the same country. When referring to children on the move, IDAC includes migrant children and children of migrants; children in need of international protection, such as children of refugees and asylum-seekers or unaccompanied minors; internally displaced children; children indirectly affected by migration and displacement, such as children who stay behind while parents or caregivers migrate; stateless children<sup>1</sup> and child victims of cross-border trafficking.

## ABOUT THIS BROCHURE

This document presents data on some of the better-defined groups of children on the move; not all of these groups are mutually exclusive and, in many cases, their exact numbers are unknown. For example, the international migrant population in a country is usually defined as the foreign-born population and includes many different groups – each with different rights and needs – such as migrants in regular or irregular situations, refugees, asylum-seekers and so on. Their characterization as ‘migrants’ is based on the fact that they are born abroad (and most – but not all – are foreigners in their country of residence) but is independent from the reason for leaving their country of birth or from their legal status.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, unaccompanied minors can travel under many different circumstances and on many different routes but are often reported only at certain borders or when applying for asylum.

For more information on the different groups that comprise children on the move, see IDAC’s reference document, [Children on the Move: Key terms, definitions and concepts](#).

1. IDAC’s definition of children on the move only includes children who are stateless in the context of migration and displacement.

2. In reality, this is even more complicated since not all foreigners (those with foreign citizenship) are necessarily born abroad, some foreign-born persons are citizens of the country of residence and native-born children of refugees can have refugee status as well or are citizens, depending on the specific national situation. Furthermore, when measuring migration flows, the crucial criteria is change of country of residence rather than citizenship or country of birth. For a more detailed discussion, see IDAC’s [Children on the Move. Key terms, definitions and concepts](#).



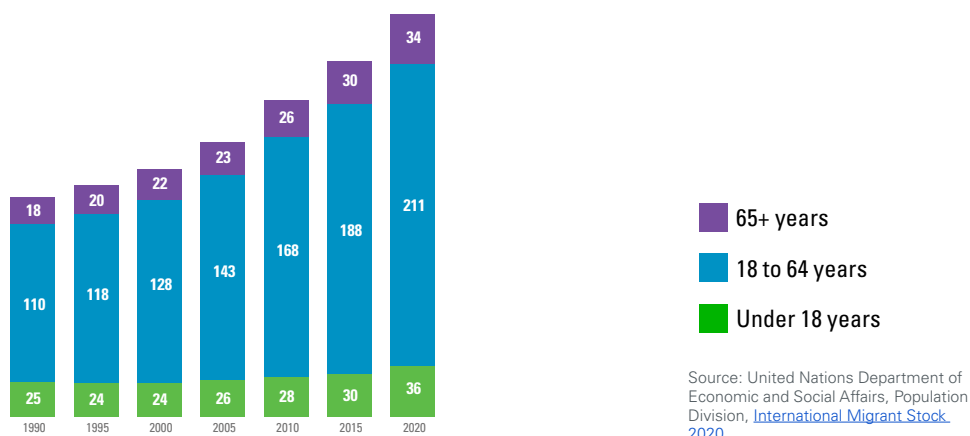
# INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT CHILDREN

**FACT 1:** In 2020, there were an estimated 35.5 million international migrant children globally, the largest number ever recorded. This corresponds to around 1 in 66 children worldwide living outside their country of birth, whatever their reason for having crossed borders.

The global total of 281 million international migrants reported by the United Nations<sup>3</sup> captures any individual living outside her or his country of birth at a specific point in time (in this case, mid-2020).<sup>4</sup> It includes persons from a range of backgrounds and circumstances, with different needs, challenges and aspirations: migrants in regular and irregular situations, refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as those who have recently immigrated or who arrived decades earlier.

Of these 281 million international migrants, around 13 per cent – or 35.5 million – are children under the age of 18.

**FIGURE 1:** NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS BY AGE, 1990–2020 (IN MILLIONS)



3. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [International Migrant Stock 2020](#).

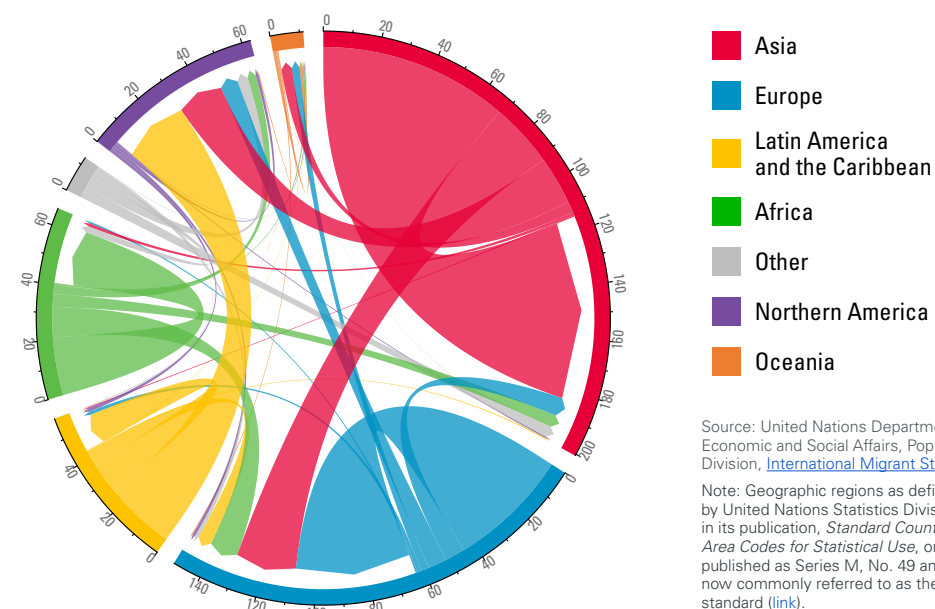
4. 'Migrant stock' refers to the number of international migrants at a special time, as opposed to 'migrant flow', which refers to the number of persons immigrating (or emigrating) every year into (or out of) a country. Although 'country of birth' is the preferred criteria to determine migratory status in the context of migrant stock, 'citizenship' is used instead if information on country of birth is missing.

**FACT 2:** Most international child migrants move within their global region.

Of the 115 million international migrants of all ages from countries in Asia, 60 per cent had moved to another Asian country. This regional movement was similar in Europe (70 per cent), Africa (52 per cent) and Oceania (56 per cent), but not in the Americas, where only 26 per cent of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean stayed within the same region, and in Northern America (only the United States and Canada), with 25 per cent.

Although data on children for these corridors may have been collected, country-level analysis is not done with age as a factor – but the movement for children may not look very different from the general pattern shown here.

**FIGURE 2:** DIRECTION AND SIZE OF REGIONAL CORRIDORS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, 2020 (IN MILLIONS)

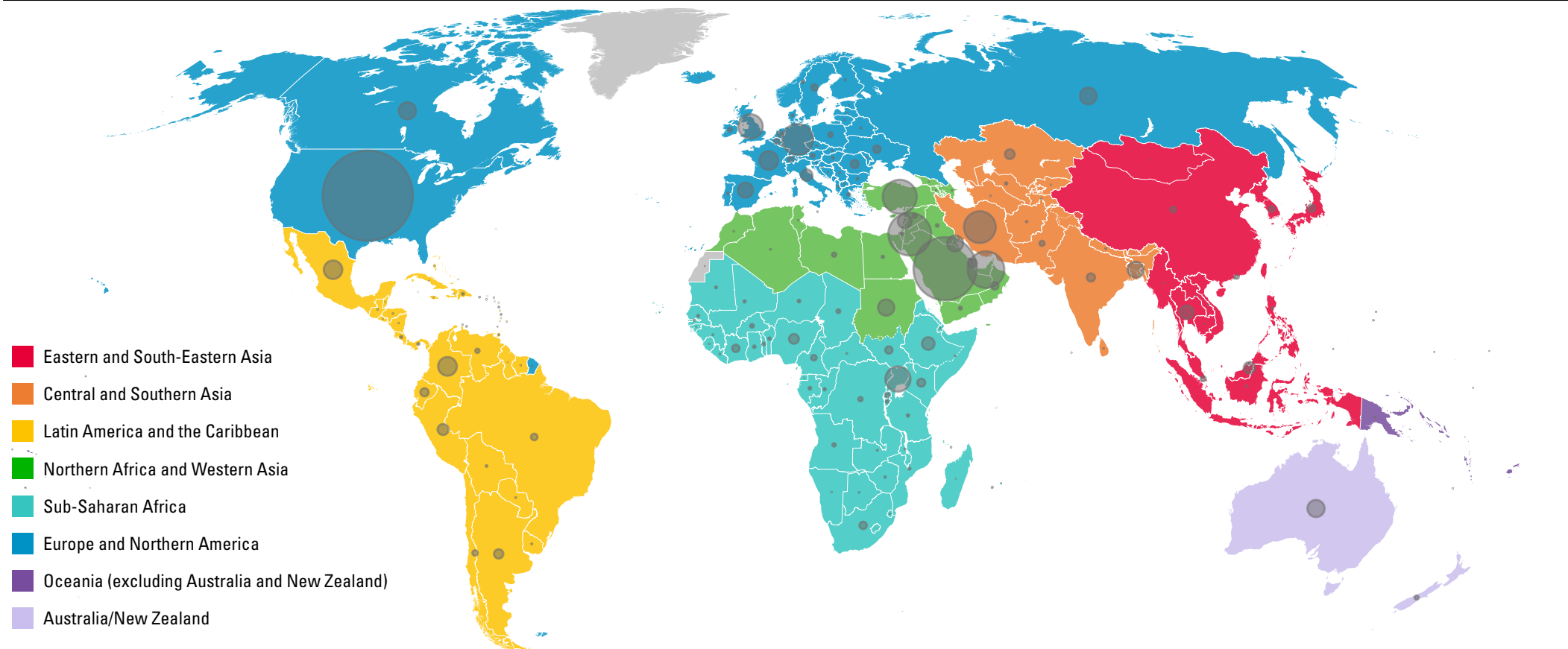


### FACT 3: One third of the world's international migrant children live in just seven countries.

The United States is home to the largest group of international migrant children, numbering 3.3 million, followed by Saudi Arabia (2.3 million), Jordan (1.6 million), the United Arab Emirates (1.3 million), Türkiye (1.3 million), Iran (1.2 million) and Germany (1.1 million), which together host one third of the world's international migrant children. But this list hides large differences in the underlying groups of children on the move.

While in most countries the proportion of refugees among the international migrant population is relatively low (for example, in Europe as a whole, the share is less than 5 per cent), in some countries – in particular those that neighbour countries in conflict or crisis – the vast majority of the international migrant population is comprised of refugees (e.g., Jordan, Lebanon or Chad).

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE BY COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE, 2020 (IN MILLIONS)



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [International Migrant Stock 2020](#).

Note: Colors represent Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) regions ([link](#)).

This map does not reflect a position by IDAC, its members or contributors to this publication on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area has not yet been determined. Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.



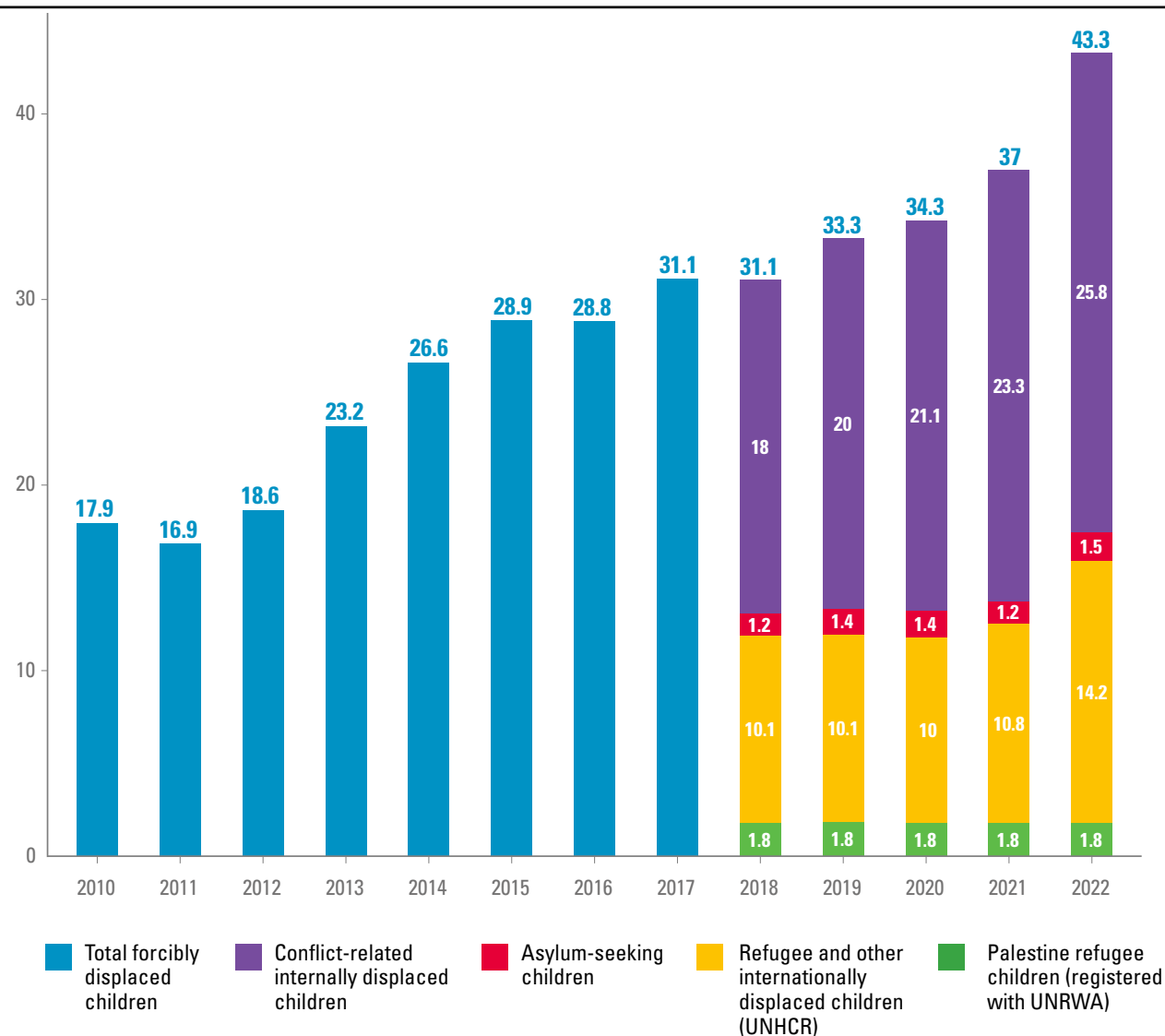
# DISPLACEMENT

## FACT 4: The number of children forcibly displaced, internally and internationally, has more than doubled over the last 10 years.

At the end of 2022, UNHCR<sup>5</sup> reported that 108.4 million people worldwide were living in forced displacement within their own country or across borders, driven from home by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. Children accounted for more than two in five of the world's forcibly displaced people. An estimated 25.8 million were internally displaced children, another 14.2 million were children displaced across borders and under UNHCR mandate<sup>6</sup> and 1.5 million were children in the process of applying for asylum. In addition, 1.8 million Palestine refugee children were registered with UNRWA.<sup>7</sup>

The number of children displaced as a consequence of conflict and violence and other human rights violations internally or across borders increased markedly from 17.9 million in 2010 to 43.3 million in 2022. This trend does not show any signs of slowing down.

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED CHILDREN, 2010–2022 (IN MILLIONS)



5. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

6. Unless otherwise stated, all references to children/people displaced across borders in this document refer to refugees, people in refugee-like situations and other people in need of international protection.

7. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

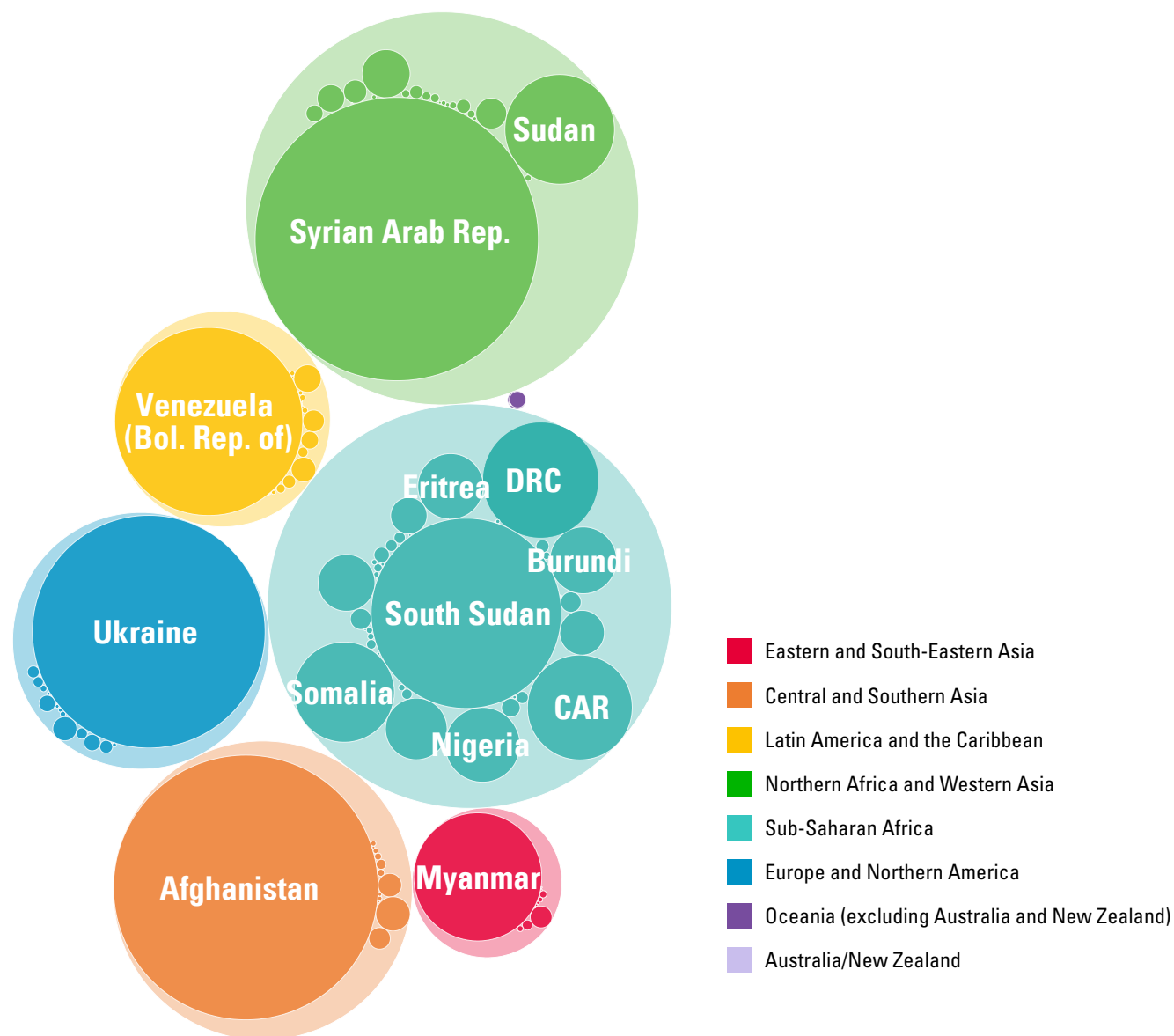
Source: Estimation based on United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2022](#), 2023; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Global Internal Displacement Database](#), 2023; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, [Registered Population Dashboard](#), 2023.

**FACT 5: Half of the world's refugee children come from only three countries: the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Ukraine.**

At the end of 2022, the top three countries of origin with the most refugee children were the Syrian Arab Republic, with 3.0 million (21 per cent of the global total); Afghanistan, with 2.6 million (18 per cent); and Ukraine, with an estimated 2.0 million (14 per cent). Together, they accounted for 54 per cent of all refugee children in the world (including other children in need of international protection). Other countries from where large numbers of refugee children originate are South Sudan (1.3 million), Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (1.2 million), Myanmar (610,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (490,000), Sudan (440,000), the Central African Republic (410,000) and Somalia (380,000). Almost 90 per cent of all refugee children stem from one of these 10 countries.

Most regions are dominated by a single country as the origin of refugee children. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic is responsible for 82 per cent of refugee children in Northern Africa and Western Asia, Afghanistan for 97 per cent in Central and Southern Asia, and Ukraine for 98 per cent in Europe and Northern America. In sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, numerous conflicts have forced 3.6 million children to cross borders seeking safety. The same number of refugee children originate from countries in Northern Africa and Western Asia.

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF REFUGEE CHILDREN BY COUNTRY AND SDG REGION OF ORIGIN, 2022



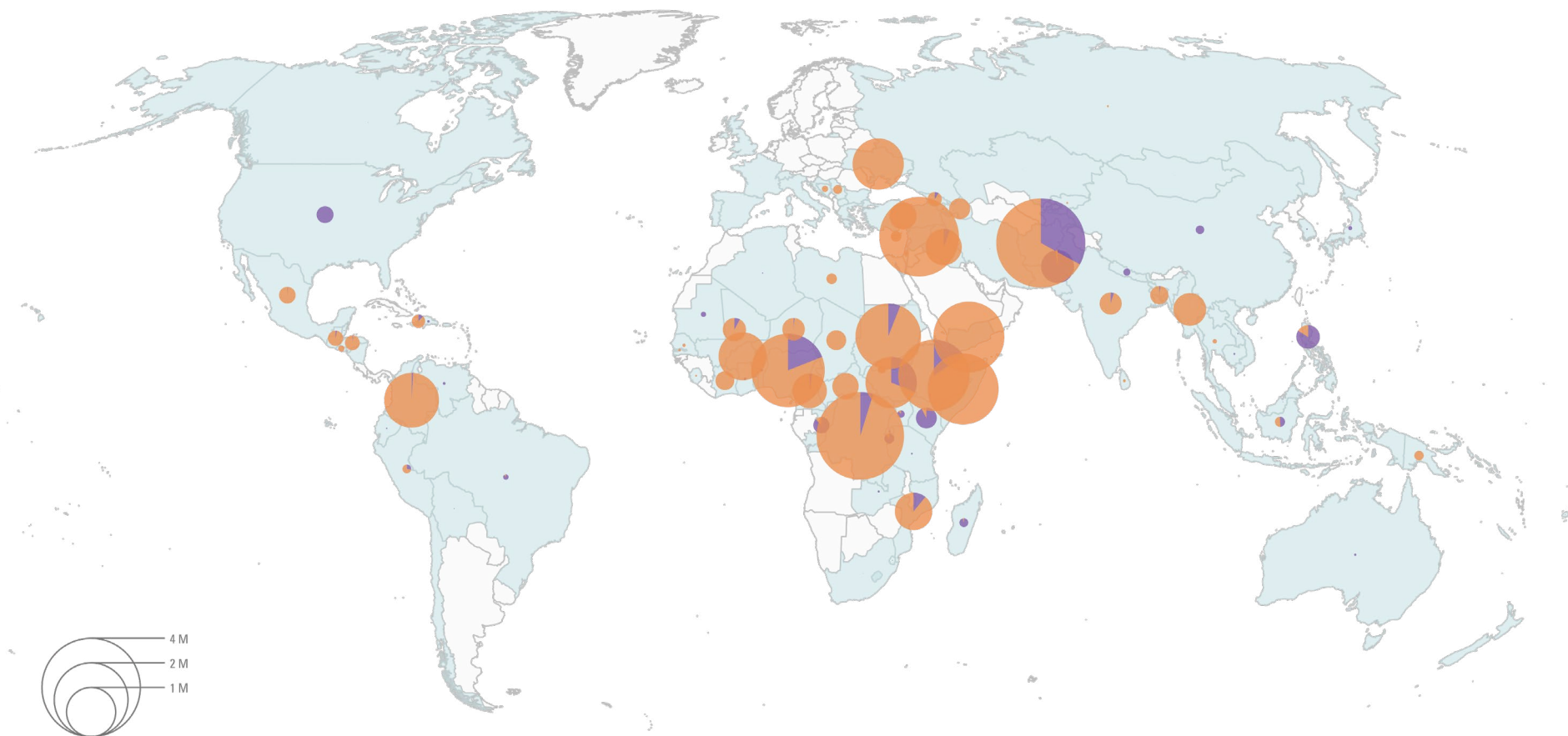
Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [International Migrant Stock 2020](#).

Note: Sorted by SDG region. Refugee children and other people in need of international protection (OIP) under UNCHR mandate. An additional 1.8 million Palestinian refugee children registered with UNRWA are not included here. Due to limited availability of age-disaggregated data, the estimated number for refugee children from Ukraine has a relatively large uncertainty range (1.8–2.2 million), similarly for OIP children from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (1.2–1.4 million).

## FACT 6: Conflict and violence are the main reasons children are displaced within their own countries.

Displacements due to conflict and violence typically last far longer than those caused by disasters due to the often protracted nature of conflict. This results in more children living in internal displacement at any given time than being newly displaced during a year. At the end of 2022, there were an estimated 29.7 million children who were internally displaced – the vast majority of them (25.8 million) because of conflict and violence – which is twice the number of children displaced across borders as refugees. Most of these conflict-related internally displaced children lived in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan.

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN (DISPLACEMENT STOCK) BY CAUSE OF DISPLACEMENT, 2022



Conflict related Disaster related

Source: Estimation based on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Global Internal Displacement Database](#), 2023.

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**FACT 7: In 2022 alone, there were an estimated 20.8 million new internal displacements of children globally. Disasters drove more than half of these displacements.**

Conflict and violence resulted in 8.5 million new displacements of children within their own country and more than 12.2 million displacements were due to disasters. These numbers are based on reported movements of people forced to flee their homes due to conflict and violence or disasters. Some children may have been displaced more than once over the course of year.

The majority of conflict-related new internal displacements occurred in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, while the bulk of those due to disasters (mostly weather-related events such as storms and floods) took place in Southern Asia and South-Eastern Asia. The number of displaced children is likely to dramatically increase over the next 25 years, with climate change estimated to place 1.2 billion people at risk of internal and cross-border displacement by 2050.<sup>8</sup>

**FACT 8: The refugee population is much younger than the foreign-born population, with children accounting for nearly half of all refugees.**

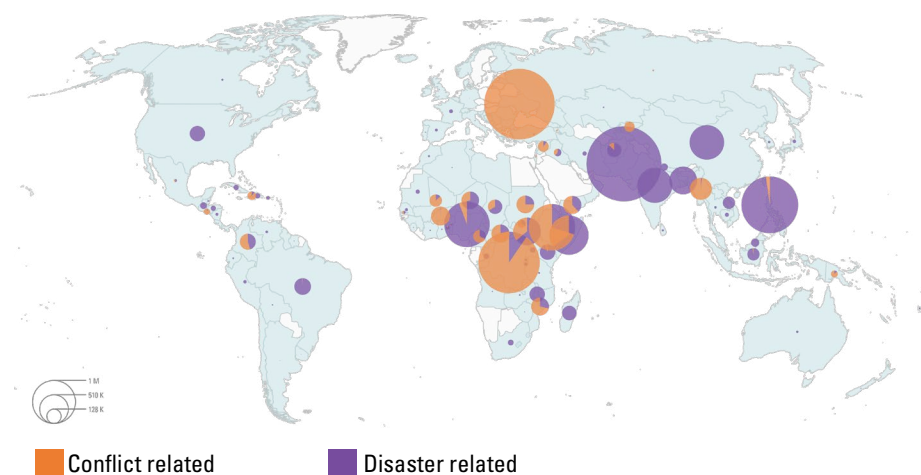
Children are disproportionately represented among refugee populations, comprising 46 per cent of refugees, versus a 13 per cent share of the migrant stock and 30 per cent of the global population.<sup>9</sup> The low share of children among the general migrant population is primarily due to the fact that non-forced migration is often driven by those seeking better opportunities for work and education and is therefore predominantly linked to young adults and those of working age. In addition, as immigrant populations age with time, their average age increases.

Forced displacement, on the other hand, impacts the population differently. The often relative young age structure of conflict countries (many are in sub-Saharan Africa, others contributing large refugee numbers are in the Middle East and South Asia, see Fact 5) and the fact that children and women are usually slightly overrepresented in displaced populations are the main reasons for the larger share of children among global refugees compared to the global population.

8. Institute for Economics and Peace, *Ecological Threat Register 2020: Understanding ecological threats, resilience and peace*, IEP, 2020.

9. 'Migrant stock' refers to the foreign-born population and includes refugees.

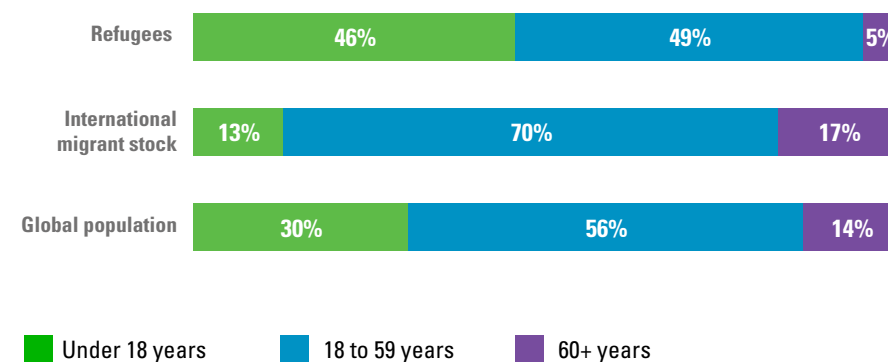
**FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN BY CAUSE OF DISPLACEMENT, 2022**



Source: Estimation based on Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Global Internal Displacement Database](#), 2023.

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**FIGURE 8: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF REFUGEES, INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND GLOBAL POPULATION, 2020 (PERCENTAGE)**



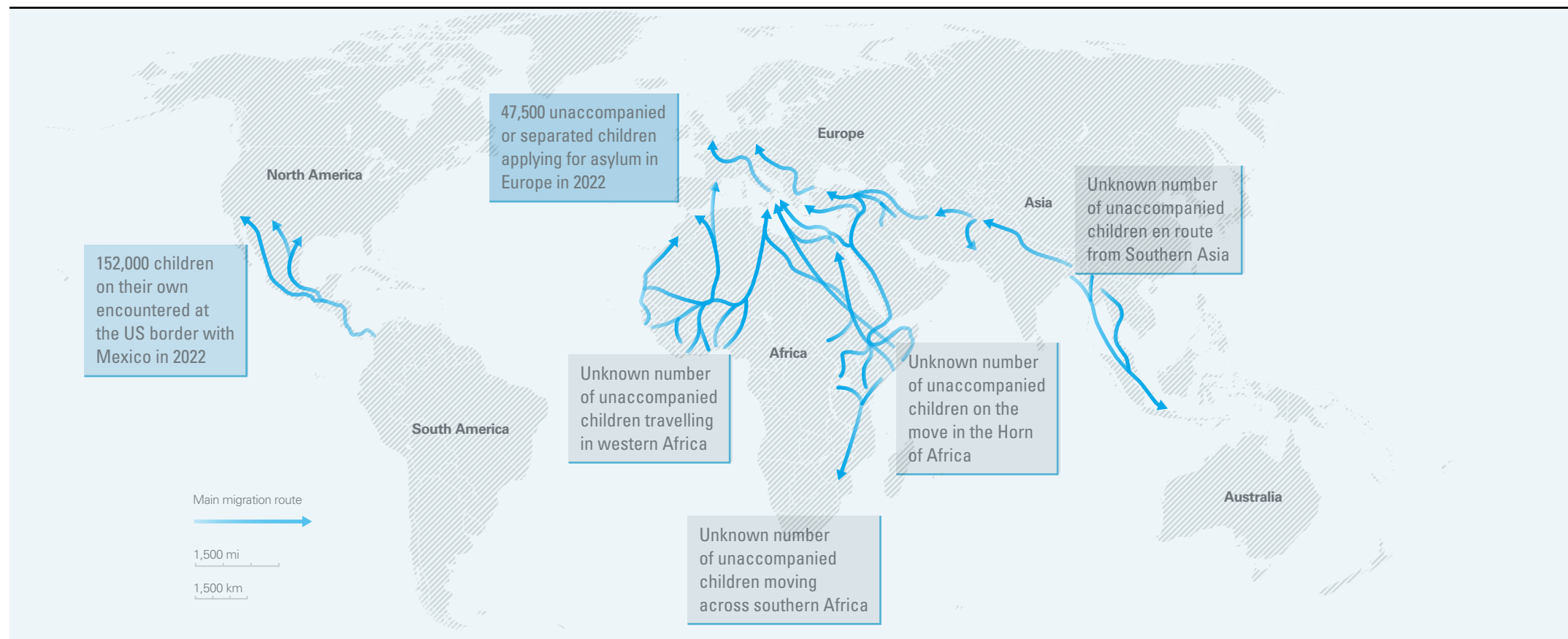
Source: Estimation based on United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020](#), 2021; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, [Registered Population Dashboard](#), 2021; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [International Migrant Stock 2020](#); United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, [World Population Prospects: The 2022 revision](#), 2022.

## FACT 9: Crisis and conflict drive more children to travel alone.

The number of children travelling unaccompanied (that is, without a parent or legal guardian) along the world's major migration routes is largely unknown – but data from major arrival points suggest an alarming number are in this dangerous situation. In Europe,<sup>10</sup> 47,500 unaccompanied or separated children were among asylum-seekers in 2022, and at the US border with Mexico, a large and increasing number of children are arriving unaccompanied – 152,000 children in 2022.<sup>11</sup>

The flow of children travelling alone fluctuates with specific crises and conflicts, as seen with the 2015 migration crisis in Europe, when around 103,000 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in European countries – almost half of them (46 per cent) from Afghanistan. During the pandemic, the number of asylum applications decreased globally by 1 million in 2020, but the share of unaccompanied or separated children applying for asylum increased from 1 per cent (25,000) to 2 per cent (21,000) of total asylum applications in 2020. Over the following two years, their numbers more than doubled, reaching 51,700 in 2022.<sup>12</sup>

**FIGURE 9: MAJOR GLOBAL MIXED MIGRATION ROUTES AND WHAT IS KNOWN AND UNKNOWN ABOUT UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN ON THE MOVE**



Source: Eurostat Database, 2023; Government UK, 2023; U.S. Customs and Border Protection, fiscal year 2022; Conant, Eve, 'The World's Congested Human Migration Routes in 5 Maps', *National Geographic*, 19 September 2015, and UNICEF, *A Child Is a Child*, 2017.

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10. Based on data from the 32 countries of the European Union, the four countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Kingdom.

11. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, data from fiscal year 2022 (October 2021 to September 2022).

12. UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020*, 2021; UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2022*, 2023. Figures on unaccompanied or separated children among asylum-seekers are significant underestimates due to the limited number of countries reporting data.





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## IDAC PLEDGES TO...



**Strengthen data systems and capacities**



**Promote and establish collaboration and innovation**



**Improve data visibility, availability, accessibility and usability**

**FOR BETTER LIVES FOR  
CHILDREN **ON THE MOVE****

SECRETARIAT:

