

Regional Child Protection Operational Note



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Regional Child Protection Operational Note

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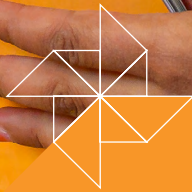
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Participants attending the Child Protection Forum in Nouakchott, Mauritania visit an alternative care facility supported by IOM and UNICEF as a form of exchange of good practices. © IOM 2024



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GLOSSARY



CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Asylum-seeker: A general term for any person who is seeking international protection. In some countries, it is used as a legal term referring to a person who has applied for refugee status or a complementary international protection status and has not yet received a final decision on their claim. It can also refer to a person who has not yet submitted an application but may intend to do so, or may be in need of international protection.[...]¹

Child trafficking: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means [...].²

Child: A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.³

Children left behind: Children raised in their home countries or in their countries of habitual residence, who have been left behind by adult migrants responsible for them.⁴

Children on the move: 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.⁵

Children who are currently on the move: 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 may open up opportunities, but might also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence. This definition includes also internal migration, human trafficking and forced displacement.⁶

Children who might potentially move: [children] living in environments with high migration prevalence and/or that could lead to migration because of child protection issues and/ or economic, social, cultural, political reasons, etc.⁷

.....

¹ UNHCR, n.d.

² United Nations General Assembly, 2000, art. 3.

³ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 1.

⁴ UNICEF, n.d., pg. 1.

⁵ International Data Alliance for Children on the Move, Eurostat, IOM, OECD, UNHCR and UNICEF 2023, pg. 7

⁶ IOM and UNICEF, 2022, pg. 2.

⁷ Ibid.

Children temporarily or permanently out of a migration process: [children] integrated in destination/transit countries, refugees in host countries, reintegrated in a third country or returned to the country of origin.⁸

Human Trafficking/ Trafficking in Persons: Shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation [...].⁹

Internally displaced person (IDP): A person who has been forced or obliged to flee from their home or place of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who has not crossed an internationally recognized State border.¹⁰

Irregular migration: Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.¹¹

Minor: The term is often used in national legislations, but its meaning varies greatly among States and can sometimes have a negative connotation. The term of “child/children” is thus to be favoured when referring to persons under the age of 18, as most notably done in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.[...] ¹²

Mixed migration/ Mixed movement: The cross-border movement of people, generally in an irregular manner, involving individuals and groups who travel alongside each other, using similar routes and means of transport or facilitators, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have different needs and profiles and may include asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children, stateless persons, and migrants (including migrants in irregular situations or migrants in vulnerable situations).[...] ¹³

Non-refoulement: A core principle of international human rights and refugee law that prohibits States from returning individuals in any manner whatsoever (whether directly or indirectly) to territories where they may be at risk of persecution, torture, or other forms of serious or irreparable harm.[...] ¹⁴

Refugee: [...] Persons outside their countries of origin who are in need of international protection because of feared persecution, or a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom in their country of origin as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder.[...] Sometimes—notably in statistical contexts—the word refugee is used to designate individuals or groups who have been formally recognized by States or UNHCR as entitled to refugee status following an asylum or other status-determination procedure.[...] ¹⁵

.....
⁸ Ibid.

⁹ United Nations General Assembly, 2000, art. 3.

¹⁰ UNHCR, n.d. (accessed 2024).

¹¹ IOM, 2019, pg. 116.

¹² IOM, 2019, pg. 140.

¹³ UNHCR, n.d. (accessed 2024).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Regular migrant/migrant in a regular situation: A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.¹⁶

Separated children: Children, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.¹⁷

Smuggling of migrants: [...] shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident. [...] ¹⁸

Unaccompanied migrant children: In the context of migration, children separated from both parents or other caregivers are generally referred to as unaccompanied migrant children (UMC).¹⁹ In the literature, the expression "unaccompanied and separated children" in the context of migration are also referred to by the acronym UASC.

Youth: [...]The age range for youth of 15 to 24 years has been endorsed by the United Nations for statistical purposes, and is widely understood to encompass "adolescents" (aged 15–19 years) and "young adults" (aged 20–24 years). [...] ²⁰

Potential or presumed victim of trafficking: [...] Persons may also be termed as "potential" or "presumed" victims of trafficking. Potential victims are people who have not yet been trafficked, but due to their vulnerability or other circumstances, are at risk of being trafficked. A presumed victim is a person whose circumstances indicate that they may have been trafficked, but no final determination has yet been made, perhaps pending further inquiries. In the interim they should be treated as a victim and immediately provided with protection and assistance. [...] ²¹

Victim of trafficking: The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children does not define the term "victim of trafficking". However, article 4 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings defines a victim of trafficking as any natural person who is subject to trafficking in human beings [...]. ²²

¹⁶ IOM, 2019, pg. 134.

¹⁷ IOM, 2019, pg. 195.

¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 2002, art. 3.

¹⁹ IOM, 2019, pg. 223.

²⁰ DESA, 2011.

²¹ UNODC, n.d.a. (accessed 2024).

²² Ibid.



CHILD PROTECTION

Best Interests Assessment: The BIA is a child protection assessment, that involves interviews with the child, the parent and/or legal/customary caregiver, and usually a home visit where possible. The BIA can be conducted in different forms according to the complexity of child's situation.[...] ²³

Best interests of the child: In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.[...] ²⁴

Best Interests Determination: A formal process, which has strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests when taking particularly important decisions affecting the child. It should facilitate adequate child participation without discrimination, involve decision makers with relevant areas of expertise and balance all relevant factors in order to assess and determine the best option.[...] ²⁵

Best Interests Procedure: [...]includes the key steps of child protection case management as well as the UNHCR Best Interests Determination (BID) process and is implemented for individual children at risk who are in need of targeted, structured, systematic, sustained and coordinated support. It ensures that decisions and actions aimed at addressing protection risks and needs for children are in their best interests.[...] ²⁶

Child protection case management: Child protection case management (also referred to hereafter as case management) is an approach to addressing the needs of an individual child who is at risk of harm or has been harmed. It is an essential part of child protection programming, which involves preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children. [...] ²⁷

Child protection system: Certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. A child protection system is generally agreed to be comprised of the following components: human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring and data collection as well as protection and response services and care management. It also includes different actors – children, families, communities, those working at subnational or national level and those working internationally. Most important are the relationships and interactions between and among these components and these actors within the system. It is the outcomes of these interactions that comprise the system. ²⁸

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²³ IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2022a, pg. 5.

²⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 3.

²⁵ UNHCR, n.d. (accessed 2024).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 11.

²⁸ UNHCR, n.d. (accessed 2024).

Child protection in humanitarian action: The prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children in humanitarian action.²⁹

Kafala: [...] the commitment by an individual or family (kafil) to voluntarily take responsibility for the daily care, education, safety, and protection of a child (makful) deprived of family care, in the same way a parent would do for their biological child. Kafalah has origins in Islamic law (sharia, hereafter), as an alternative care option for orphans and abandoned children.[...]³⁰



VULNERABILITIES AND RESPONSES

Abuse: A deliberate act with actual or potential negative effects upon a child's safety, well-being, dignity, and development. It is an act that takes place in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.³¹

Gender: The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth.³²

Gender Based Violence (GBV): [...] any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.³³

Intersectionality: a concept and theoretical framework that facilitate recognition of the complex ways in which social identities overlap and, in negative scenarios, can create compounding experiences of discrimination and concurrent forms of oppression based on two or more grounds [...].³⁴

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS): [...] any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental health conditions.³⁵

Mental health: Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.³⁶

²⁹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, pg. 302.

³⁰ UNICEF, 2023a, pg. 4.

³¹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, pg. 299.

³² IOM, 2021, pg. 3.

³³ Global Protection Cluster and IASC, n.d., pg. 4.

³⁴ United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, n.d., pg. 11.

³⁵ UNICEF, 2019a, pg. 5.

³⁶ World Health Organization, n.d. (accessed 2024).

Neglect: The intentional or unintentional failure of a caregiver – individual, community, or institution (including the State) with clear responsibility by custom or law for the well-being of the child to (a) protect a child from actual or potential harm to the child's safety, well-being, dignity and development or (b) fulfil that child's rights to survival, development, and well-being, when they have the capacity, ability, and resources to do so.³⁷

Persons with disability: [...] those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.³⁸

Risk: [...] For child protection, risk refers to the likelihood that violations of and threats to children's rights will manifest and cause harm to children.³⁹

Violence against children: All acts that involve the intentional use of power or verbal or physical force, threatened or actual, against a child or against a group of children that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child or children's safety, well-being, dignity, and development.⁴⁰

Vulnerability: [...] For child protection, vulnerability refers to individual, family, community and societal characteristics that reduce children's ability to withstand adverse impact from violations of and threats to their rights.⁴¹



CHILD'S FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Best interests of the child: In all actions concerning children, [...] the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.⁴²

Non-discrimination: States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the [present] Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.⁴³

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³⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, pg. 310–311.

³⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 2006, art. 1.

³⁹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, pg. 313.

⁴⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, pg. 315.

⁴¹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, pg. 316.

⁴² United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 3.

⁴³ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 2.

The right to be heard and to participate: States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.⁴⁴

The right to family unit: States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child [...].⁴⁵ [...] Applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner.[...]⁴⁶

The right to identity: The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights [...] in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.⁴⁷ States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.⁴⁸

The right to life, survival and development: States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 12.

⁴⁵ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 9.

⁴⁶ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 10.

⁴⁷ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 7.

⁴⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 8.

⁴⁹ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 6.



INTRODUCTION

The Regional Child Protection Operational Note has been developed within the framework of the sixth phase of the IOM Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP) for North Africa, a regional initiative funded by the European Union through the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs and the Italian Ministry of Interior.

The Regional Child Protection Operational Note is a multifaceted practical tool to help stakeholders in North Africa and key countries across the migratory route, such as the Niger and Mauritania, to improve the protection of children on the move with a focus on cross-border coordination.

To this end, updated regional and country profiles on the protection of children on the move introduce a series of thematic focuses on cross-border coordination and continuum of care, the right to identity and birth registration, the best interests of the child and legal guardianship, sustainable solutions, alternative care, and child smuggling and trafficking.

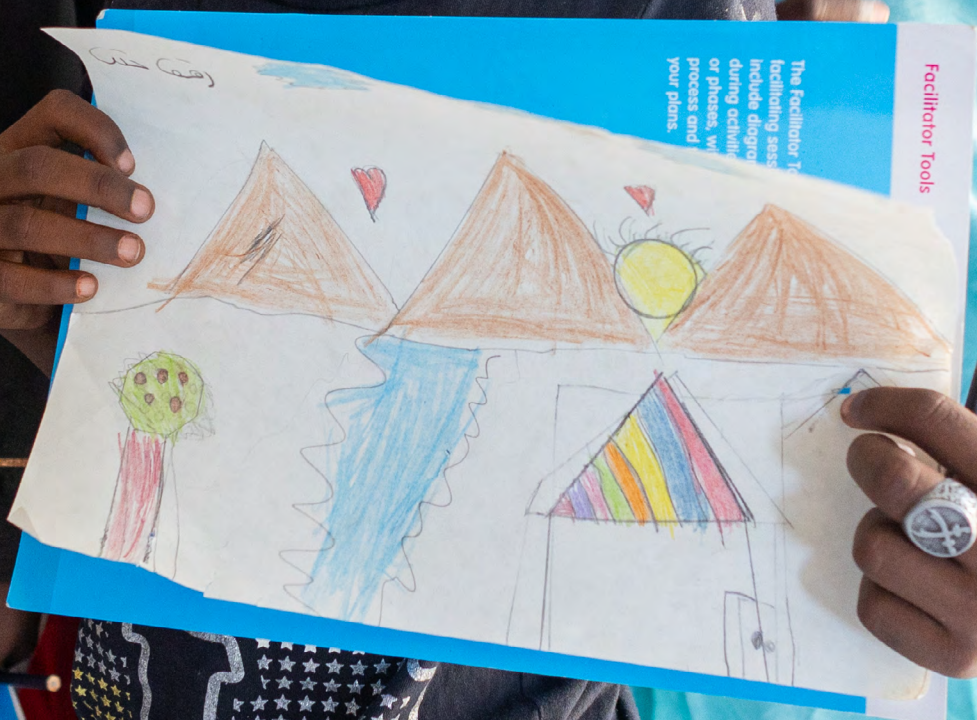
This comprehensive background analysis provides the framework for a suggested Essential Guidelines for Sops on Child Protection Case Management and Cross-Border Coordination for Children on the Move in North Africa for the protection of migrant children, which unpack the set of international guidance and tools for the protection of migrant children and their families. With a particular focus on cross-border coordination, continuum of care and family tracing and reunification, the tool will support national key actors in the targeted countries to develop tailored SOPs or as a basis for cross-border SOPs, both in line with recommendations from stakeholder consultations.⁵⁰

Both sections are coupled with replicable good practices developed in North Africa, along key routes, and other regions of the world to ensure a sustainable and more seamless approach to child protection.

The Regional Child Protection Operational Note is complemented by a glossary to ensure harmonization of terminology as agreed between IOM, UNICEF and a set of recommendations tailored to cross-border settings. These tools will improve the concrete protection of children on the move in initiatives and actions across North Africa and across the Atlantic and Mediterranean migration routes.

We deeply thank the IOM and UNICEF Regional and Country Offices In North, West and Central Africa who contributed to the Operational Note.

⁵⁰ IOM RDPP workshop Protecting Victims of Trafficking and Children in North Africa and along key routes took place in Cairo, Egypt, on 5 and 6 March 2024, and the IOM RDPP Regional Forum: Protecting Children on the Move in North Africa and Along Key Routes held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, on 22 and 23 October 2024.



Facilitator Tools

The Facilitator Tools
include diagrams
during activities
or phases, with
your plans.



THEMATIC FOCUS

► Best interests principle for children on the move

Throughout their migration journey, children on the move in North Africa may face harsh living conditions, violence, abuse, detention, lack of access to basic services, discrimination and stigmatization.

Unaccompanied and separated children travelling without their families and legal guardians are at an even greater risk of exploitation, trafficking, abuse and gender-based violence. Additionally, the lack of safe pathways and border control policies can further exacerbate the perils of the journey of children.⁵¹

According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, children in international migration must be primarily treated as children regardless of their or their parents' or legal guardians' migration status.⁵² As a result, principles relating to the rights and best interests of the child should prevail over any measures relating to their migration status. At the same time, child protection should be mainstreamed in migration policies, and needs of children on the move should be integrated into.⁵³

As stated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States, as duty-bearers, have the responsibility to ensure the right of all children to live, survive and develop, including physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially. The right of children on the move not to be discriminated should be granted against the various intersecting forms of discrimination that may result from their situation.⁵⁴

The principle of non-refoulement, which prevents migrant children from being returned to a country of origin or transit where they would be at risk of irreparable harm, including human rights violations, persecution, torture and other forms of harm, is also crucial to ensuring their protection.⁵⁵

The responsibility of States to ensure the protection of children on the move and to apply the principle of the best interest of the child is also reflected in ending child detention. Important is to always ensure that the rights and best interests of the child are protected and respected, regardless of the child's migration status, by promoting alternative solutions to detention in non-custodial settings. To do this, it is key to prioritize community-based forms of reception that ensure access to education and health care, protecting the right to family life and family unity, and work to end the detention of children in the context of international migration.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, 2017.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ United Nations General Assembly, 2019, pg. 20.

Respecting a child's right to healthy development is not only an individual dimension, but also involves the direct and indirect risks to family well-being associated with migration and restrictive migration policies. Mitigating these risks would involve ensuring migrant children's families have access to social rights, regardless of their migration status.⁵⁷ As underlined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of its children. Therefore, the preservation of the family unit is considered an essential element of a child protection system based on the best interests of the child. This can be achieved by preventing family separation except when necessary for the best interests of the child and, even in this case, ensuring relationships with parents and family members as appropriate.⁵⁸ In the context of international migration and contexts such as forced displacement, children may be separated from their parents or caregivers. This situation, if prolonged, may jeopardize the child's development and negatively affect the child's well-being. That is why, as reminded also by the Global Compact for Migration, States should protect the right to family unity and family reunification, which should be central themes of migration policies.⁵⁹

Children's rights are fundamental and must be respected in all circumstances. Their best interests should always be a primary consideration in any decision affecting them, and every child deserves to be treated equally without discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, social or ethnic origin, property, disability, birth or other status. Furthermore, every child has an inherent right to life and his or her survival and development should be supported to the fullest extent possible; it is also essential that children have the opportunity to express their views freely and that their views should be taken into account in accordance with their age and maturity.⁶⁰

The best interest of the child is a fundamental right and principle in child protection. The best interest principle states the best interest for the child or children's well-being should be a primary consideration when making any decisions regarding the child.⁶¹ As per Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the responsibility for the protection of a child falls firstly on the families and legal guardians. When caregivers are unavailable, the duty of protection should fall to the national authorities of the country in which the child is located. To fulfill this duty, States must put in place a system for the case-by-case assessment and determination of the best interest of children, including for children involved in international migration.⁶² Procedures to regulate the best interest determination mechanisms should be headed by national authorities within the child protection legislative framework.⁶³

⁵⁷ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, 2017.

⁵⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Children, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), 2013.

⁵⁹ IOM, 2017a, pg. 1.

⁶⁰ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12.

⁶¹ Committee on the Rights of the Children, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), 2013.

⁶² Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, 2017.

⁶³ Ibid.

Children should be able to actively participate in all steps and activities aimed to ensure the child's rights, including their right to preserving their identity.⁶⁴ To better ensure the well-being and protection of children, the right of the child to express their views on any decision affecting them should be applied. The age, maturity or vulnerability of the child shall not be considered as a reason to exclude or limit the child's right to be heard. States and child protection actors should ensure that tailored measures are in place to enable children to participate fully in the decision-making process, according to their individual needs.⁶⁵

Practically speaking, Best Interest Determination is a child-centred process consisting of two distinct procedures: Best Interest Assessment (BIA) and Best Interest Determination (BID). The BIA evaluates all essential elements required to assess children's best interests and to develop related recommendations.⁶⁶ The BID is a formal procedure that evaluates these elements and provides a sustainable solution for the child's welfare and security.⁶⁷

Specific vulnerabilities and risks such as trafficking and exploitation for migrant, asylum-seeking, or refugee children, must be considered comprehensively during the identification of their needs in general and during the best interest determination.⁶⁸

Unaccompanied and separated children or children unable to be represented by their caregivers should be referred immediately to child protection authorities and services, including children identified through immigration and border management procedures. A guardian should be appointed for them as soon as identification takes place.⁶⁹ For these cases, specific frameworks should be developed to ensure the child's representation during procedures and decisions regarding their best interest. In particular, an Individual case management approach within the child protection case management and information management system should be ensured.

The legally appointed guardian would intercede until children are reunited with their primary guardian or caregiver; until legal adulthood or until the child permanently left the country where they were identified.⁷⁰ The legal guardian should participate in the BIA and BID and should be informed and consulted on specific protection measures.⁷¹ Durable solutions such as return and reintegration or placement and alternative care are also under the evaluation of the legal guardian. The legal guardian should be informed of all available care options and should have the right to access records and documentation on the children in their care to supervise all protective measures.⁷²

⁶⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, arts. 8 and 12

⁶⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Children, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), 2013.

⁶⁶ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 271.

⁶⁷ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 273.

⁶⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Children, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), 2013.

⁶⁹ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, 2017.

⁷⁰ Committee on the rights of the child, General comment no. 6 (2005) treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, 2005.

⁷¹ European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights, 2014, pg. 72.

⁷² United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 17.

In some North African and neighbouring countries, BIA and BID mechanisms and procedures exist that also include children on the move. In several targeted countries, UN agencies play a key role in BID panels for migrant children, that primarily decide on appropriate sustainable solutions for unaccompanied migrant children, such as asylum, integration or voluntary return. A progressive commitment to national child protection is being promoted, with the aim that these procedures are coordinated and managed by national institutions as much as possible, in accordance with international engagements. For instance, in Tunisia the BID panel is composed of a joint committee which includes national child protection authorities and presides on all best interest assessment and determination cases, including alternative care solutions.

While BIA and BID are relatively common and established practices in North Africa, clear and coordinated mechanism for the appointment of qualified legal guardians for unaccompanied and separated migrant children remains a major challenge. In many cases, for instance in Morocco or Mauritania, judges in juvenile courts are generally appointed as legal guardians and representatives of the best interest of unaccompanied and separated children. In Egypt, specific Standard Operating Procedures have been developed for the protection of child refugees, victims of trafficking, and smuggling, which provide for the automatic appointment of a legal guardian to vulnerable unaccompanied migrant children.⁷³ In cases where appointment of guardians has not been possible through national procedures, actors refer cases and coordinate with the embassies of the children's countries of origin or their ministries of foreign affairs, which may provide oversight of the case in the absence of a guardian.⁷⁴

Good practice – Italian Law N. 47/17 on protection measures for unaccompanied migrant children and the voluntary legal guardianship⁷⁵



In 2017, the Government of Italy approved Law N. 47/17 on "Protection Measures for Unaccompanied Minors," which introduced a new system for appointing legal guardians for unaccompanied migrant children. According to the law, after identifying an unaccompanied migrant child, national authorities should report the case to the relevant judicial authority, which has 48 hours to appoint a guardian.

Before 2017, only civil servants could be appointed legal guardians. This circumstance made it difficult to ensure a case-by-case approach and follow up, resulting in huge delays and weakening the effectiveness of child protection measures.

The Law N. 47/17 introduced an alternative system and called the "voluntary legal guardianship". Private individuals can voluntarily enroll in the programme and be appointed as legal guardians of up to three unaccompanied migrant children. Juvenile courts are responsible for selecting and appointing the voluntary guardians. Before being assigned, they are trained by the competent Regional Ombudsperson for Children. Close monitoring and follow up of the programme is ensured by the National Ombudsperson for Children.

⁷³ IOM, 2024a.

⁷⁴ IOM, 2024b.

⁷⁵ Parlamento Italiano, n.d. (accessed 2024).

Good practice – Legal guardianship appointment in Egypt



According to law n. 82/2016 on Combating Illegal Migration and Smuggling of Migrants, the Government of Egypt ensures protection services to unaccompanied and separated migrant children during family tracing and legal guardian assignment process. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) is automatically appointed as legal guardian and manages the following processes:

1. Registration of complaints and notifications received concerning unaccompanied children of smuggled migrants and securing information in special file for each individual case;
2. Family tracing and legal guardian assignment process;
3. Investigation of families and appointment of legal representatives during prosecution services;
4. Placement of unaccompanied children in national care facilities when family tracing fails;
5. Notifying the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior when the NCCM determines that the child be returned safely and immediately to their country of origin.

► The right to identity and identification of children on the move

As stated by the UNCRC every child has the right to a name, a nationality as well the preservation of their identity.⁷⁶ Identification qualifies children as rights-holders, as members of families or communities and protects their right to be known and cared for. Children on the move should be guaranteed a link to their countries and communities of origin. Furthermore, children on the move should not be deprived of maintaining their cultural customs, religion and language.⁷⁷

Birth registration for all children is a prerequisite of identity and it is needed to trace key information such as birthplace and parentage. Without registration and identity documents children cannot access basic services and protection measures.⁷⁸ Access to civil registration systems can improve the functioning of social protection systems and facilitate children's access to social protection.⁷⁹ Birth registration also helps to protect children from exploitation and abuse in various forms⁸⁰ and can facilitate the conviction of perpetrators in case of child abuse.⁸¹

Certification of birth is equally important to registration of birth as an essential administrative step for releasing identity documents and accessing social services and benefits.⁸² In this regard, the Committee On The Rights Of The Child emphasized that all States should remove all obstacles to birth registration and to the issuance of birth certificates for all children regardless of their or their parents' migration status.⁸³

Depending on the specific national legal framework, knowing a child's place of birth in some contexts may be crucial to determining the nationality that the child acquires and its legal status.

⁷⁶ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, arts. 7 and 8.

⁷⁷ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 20.

⁷⁸ Save the Children, 2018, pg. 34.

⁷⁹ UNICEF, 2023b, pg. 8.

⁸⁰ UNICEF, 2023b, pg. 6.

⁸¹ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, 2017.

⁸² UNICEF, 2023b, pg. 7.

⁸³ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, 2017.

This is why lacking access to birth registration in countries of transit and destination puts children on the move at high risk of statelessness and subsequent exclusion from necessary care and services.⁸⁴ A condition that should be avoided by States by providing appropriate measures, including by recognizing nationality to children born on their territory.⁸⁵

The right to identity is also linked to some essential steps, like the identification of family links for accompanied children and identification and verification of identity of children on the move, especially unaccompanied or separated children. Migrant children often travel alone or in groups with migrant adults who are not their parents or caregivers. Early detection of vulnerabilities and timely identification are key during family tracing and reunification, protection responses such as sheltering or direct assistance, and to solutions such as alternative care and return. At the same time identification of migrant children can be challenged by factors linked to border control measures.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the fear of being prosecuted for their irregular migration status pushes children to concealing their identities or claiming false identities, further complicating family tracing and access to sustainable solutions.⁸⁷

In North African and neighbouring countries such as the Niger and Mauritania birth registration and the verification of parent-child relationship remains a major challenge for protection of migrant children.⁸⁸

In many contexts access to birth registration services is difficult, especially for children born outside formal health systems or to parents in irregular migration situations. In the absence of accessible official procedures, families often turn to informal approaches or seek assistance from NGOs or UN agencies to complete essential formalities. Uncertainty about paternity is an important obstacle, particularly in cases where the father is absent or in single-parent households, especially in societies where filiation is recognized by father. Children born to migrant parents who are in a situation of irregularity face additional difficulties in being officially registered.⁸⁹

Finally, children born of unknown or deceased parents face significant obstacles to having their existence officially recognized. Birth registration procedures are often complex, lengthy and costly, discouraging many families from ensuring their children are registered. Age restrictions for marriage and parental consent requirements also pose constraints, and cultural and social norms frequently influence birth registration and respect for children's rights.⁹⁰

Practical solutions to improve birth registration are making procedures more flexible, by accepting alternative forms of identification and simplifying administrative procedures. A community-based approach can also encourage registration by involving local leaders. International cooperation could harmonize procedures to facilitate the registration of migrant children. Finally, advocacy for legal reforms is crucial to guarantee the rights of migrant children and ensure their legal protection.⁹¹

⁸⁴ UNHCR, 2015, pg. 8.

⁸⁵ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, 2017.

⁸⁶ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 256.

⁸⁷ IOM, 2024a.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ IOM, 2024b.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Good practice – IOM Niger Birth registration for migrant newborn children

In the context of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, IOM Niger supports foreigner migrant women and parents by ensuring they have access to hospitals and health-care facilities to give birth. After the baby's delivery IOM Niger coordinates with national institutions to obtain a birth certificate and to register the baby in the Niger. Once issued, the birth certificate is given to the mother or parents before they return to their country of origin. If the issuance of the birth certificate is delayed for any reason, IOM Niger sends the birth certificate to IOM missions in the migrant parents' countries of origin and they coordinate to ensure that the certificate is delivered to the mother's or parent's residence.

► Child trafficking

Child trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, and it is a crime that can be perpetrated nationally or internationally following a border crossing.⁹²

Children and youth who migrate often flee from political, climate, and economic crises and lack of access to services and development opportunities. Furthermore, they may be fleeing violence and abuse from their families and communities. In this context, a lack of regular pathways for migration may push children to turn to informal *passeurs* or even criminal organizations to cross borders for better opportunities or reunification with family living abroad.

Risks might increase when children are migrating alone or accompanied by adults who are not family members or their legal guardians/caregivers, especially if the latest are responsible for exposing the child to protection risks, or directly involved in children's irregular migration and exploitation. However, community and family dynamics as well as cultural practices can also contribute to child trafficking. As a result, early identification of trafficked children is essential to ensure their protection.⁹³

Access to the internet to seek out irregular migration services, exponentially increases the risk of children being trafficked.⁹⁴ Victims of trafficking are often subjected to practices like violence, the confiscation of documentation and passports and income limitation. Migrant girls generally assist or experience gender-based violence including sexual harassment and assault, usually at the hands of smugglers and traffickers.⁹⁵ Victims of trafficking can suffer long-term and irreparable harm in a variety of ways, including physical injury and disability, mental health problems, sexual and reproductive health problems, financial loss, social stigma, legal problems and sometimes death. Specifically on children this context of severe abuse has a strong impact on their psychophysical health, which can cause developmental delay and regression.⁹⁶

Children may face serious consequences for legal transgressions. In this regard, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Supplementary Protocols and recommendations advocate for not prosecuting trafficked persons for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked or if they were forced to commit crimes in that situation.⁹⁷

⁹² United Nations General Assembly, 2000, art. 3.

⁹³ IOM, 2024a.

⁹⁴ IOM, n.d.a. (accessed 2024).

⁹⁵ Save the Children, 2023, pgs. 33–34.

⁹⁶ IOM, n.d.a. (accessed 2024).

⁹⁷ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime - Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, Report on the meeting of the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons held in Vienna on 14 and 15 April, 2009, pg. 8.

According to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons Especially Women and Children, child trafficking is a specific offence which does not require proof of coercion to be established. Unlike adults, it is not necessary to demonstrate the use of a mean like fraud or deception in the case of children. The status of victim of trafficking gives access to specific rights as a victim. It is therefore crucial that child victims are properly identified and supported throughout the legal proceedings. Proper identification and adequate legal support enable them to receive enhanced protection against traffickers.⁹⁸ At the same time, recognition of their status as victims of trafficking should not affect access to protection systems for migrant children. Indeed, a child victim of trafficking is first and foremost a child at risk, and their needs in terms of protection must be taken care of.

Furthermore, International child protection frameworks call upon States that are party to the UNCRC to adopt specific actions to address child trafficking, child marriage and sexual exploitation available in the national framework and granting regular stay and assistance; such assistance should not be dependent on a migrant child's cooperation in criminal proceedings against traffickers.⁹⁹

Several countries in North Africa and neighbouring countries have adopted national laws and a regulatory framework that include national referral mechanisms for victims of trafficking following the 4Ps framework established by the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. According to the framework, anti-trafficking efforts aim to prevent trafficking, protect and assist victims of trafficking, prosecute perpetrators, and strengthen partnerships to achieve these goals. These countries are deploying resources and making efforts to adequately support practitioners engaged in protecting and assisting victims. However, additional efforts are needed to identify child victims of trafficking, to ensure safe shelter and housing, and to find appropriate and sustainable solutions for their cases.¹⁰⁰

Good practice – The Standard Operating Procedures for the Protection and Assistance of Child Asylum-Seekers, Refugees and Victims of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons in Egypt.



In 2020, the Government of Egypt, in collaboration with UNICEF, developed a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the protection of migrant children in the country, providing specific guidance for the protection of national and foreign trafficked and smuggled children.

The tool outlines a national pathway for case management, ensuring respect for their rights and providing specific care and protection. The SOPs promote coordination between national authorities, international organizations and CSOs.

The SOPs cover the different stages of child protection case management, focusing on access to services and alternative care solutions. The procedures emphasize the importance of early identification of child victims of trafficking and provide general indicators for the identification of victims of trafficking and specific indicators for the identification of child victims of trafficking.

⁹⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 2000, arts. 6 and 7.

⁹⁹ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ IOM, 2024a.

SMUGGLING AND CHILD SMUGGLING

According to the United Nations Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, smuggling is “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.” Because of their common nature as transnational criminal phenomena, smuggling and trafficking are covered by two protocols to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Smuggling and trafficking are different crimes, although they can be confused. According to its legal definition, smuggling is always consensual and transnational, and it doesn’t require an element of exploitation, which is present in the case of trafficking. Exploitation can occur during the migration journey of an adult or a child. In some cases, this shift can transform smuggling into trafficking.¹⁰¹

The three main migratory routes passing through North African countries are also affected by smuggling. The Central, Eastern and Western Mediterranean routes are usually used by mixed flows of migrants coming from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or Asia and North Africa to reach Europe.¹⁰² Within the North African region and along key routes, smuggling is often linked to local smugglers who facilitate transportation and may provide false documents. Migrants gather information through personal connections and are often recruited by fellow citizens.¹⁰³

Children on the move are some of the most vulnerable migrants smuggled through North Africa. According to UNODC, in 2020, 19 per cent of the people smuggled along this route were children, of whom 5 per cent accompanied and 14 per cent unaccompanied.¹⁰⁴ In some cases, unaccompanied children are simply transiting through European Mediterranean countries to reach other destinations. In other cases, they wish to settle and work to help their families in their countries of origin or to join family members living in Europe.¹⁰⁵

This is also confirmed in the North Africa region. Smuggled migrants face extremely high risks of abuse, exploitation and even death along the main migratory routes from West Africa to North Africa. Smuggling can also lead to criminal practices such as deprivation of liberty and exploitation, sometimes leading to cases of kidnapping and even trafficking in both adults and children when constitutive elements¹⁰⁶ for this crime are present.¹⁰⁷

The dynamics associated with irregular migration and smuggling pose risks to children on the move along migratory routes, exposing them to serious violations of their rights. This confirms the need for a coordinated and consistent response¹⁰⁸ to the protection of children affected by smuggling, and for States and stakeholders to provide appropriate assistance to children affected by smuggling, based on the principle of the best interests of the child.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ IOM, n.d.b. (accessed 2024).

¹⁰² UNODC, 2018, pgs. 143–156.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ UNODC, 2021, pg. 4.

¹⁰⁵ UNODC, 2018, pgs. 143–156.

¹⁰⁶ According to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime the constitutive elements of trafficking are for adults: acts of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons; means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits for the purpose of exploitation. For children, art. 3 the Protocol underlines that “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means [...]”.

¹⁰⁷ UNODC, 2021, pg. 15.

¹⁰⁸ IOM, 2019, pg. 225.

¹⁰⁹ UNODC, 2018, pg. 12.

► Cross-border coordination

International migration and border crossings can expose migrant children to the risk of human rights violations, violence and exploitation, especially when they are unaccompanied or separated.¹¹⁰ Cross-border coordination is key to the effective protection of children on the move. As emphasized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, States play a key role in ensuring cross-border protection of migrant children through international cooperation.

Several factors contribute to this vulnerability: on the one hand, the lack of regular pathways pushes children to migrate irregularly, at the same time border management regulations often prioritize migration status over the best interest of the child. In some cases, individual characteristics such as gender can increase risk, as is the case for young migrant girls who are at particular risk of sexual exploitation and abuse while travelling and have also been known to be used to bargain safe border crossing for themselves and others.¹¹¹

States have a responsibility to grant children on the move access to all services necessary to their life, survival and development such as shelters, or medical assistance at the time of their identification, regardless of whether the context in which they are identified is temporary and transitory or permanent.¹¹² Furthermore, migrant children must also have access to services necessary for their development such as inclusion in the educational system and integration in host communities. In this regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has clearly called on States to grant migrant children access to uninterrupted and continuous education regardless of migration status. The Committee calls on States not to create disruptions of the children's education cycle due to migration procedures or due to "ageing out" when reach 18 years of age.¹¹³

The lack of cross-border standards on child protection and specific guidance on cross-border case management (e.g. case transfer) adds to the difficulty of local and transnational coordination on the protection of children on the move. Case management often does not guarantee coordinated and harmonious responses and follow up on cases, limiting the continuous best interest analysis that should be ensured for the case of each individual child. Furthermore, the lack of formal standards to verify and recognize official documents and the non-transferability of documentation – as in the cases of documents to verify family links or of credential and qualifications – often impedes the recognition of education achievements between countries.¹¹⁴

In the case of unaccompanied and/or undocumented migrant children identified at borders, the lack of coordination between actors in origin, transit and destination countries makes the establishment of their identity extremely difficult, often hindering children's access to services, such as follow up medical care.¹¹⁵ Effective cross-border coordination between States and actors can have a significant impact on the quality and effectiveness of BIP and the ability to find long-term sustainable solutions.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ IOM, n.d.c. (accessed 2024).

¹¹¹ Save the Children, 2023, pg. 33.

¹¹² See thematic focus: [Best interests principle for children on the move](#).

¹¹³ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, 2017.

¹¹⁴ IOM, n.d.c. (accessed 2024).

¹¹⁵ See thematic focus: [The right to identity and identification of children on the move](#).

¹¹⁶ IOM, 2024b.

In North Africa, child protection actors face significant challenges in verifying the identity of undocumented and unaccompanied migrant children and therefore ensuring their access to services. Furthermore, the issue of lack of documentation also arises in cases of accompanied children born to migrating parents during the journey. These migrant mothers and parents do not always have access to birth registration in transit countries. Lastly, border authorities are often unable to identify the child when birth registration documents are not translated in languages recognizable in transit and origin countries. This situation is often exacerbated by the lack of bi-lateral and multilateral cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination, which hinders children's access to protection systems, isolates them, and puts them at heightened risk of abuse, violence and exploitation.¹¹⁷

Globally, children on the move face discriminatory and challenging contexts due to stakeholders' limited knowledge and application of international standards, but also to lack of harmonization of national migration management and child protection norms. These discrepancies between countries and the employ of procedures not adapted to the needs of children, can lead to serious children's rights violations.

Cross-border coordination to protect children on the move should be implemented through formalized partnerships and governance mechanisms.¹¹⁸ To this end, national child protection authorities and actors should pursue and contribute to the creation of bi-, multilateral, regional and international initiatives aimed at reinforcing cooperation. These can include the establishment of a harmonized case management and referral systems in line with the UNCRC that facilitates family reunification and ensures the determination of children's best interests, ensuring their access to justice.¹¹⁹ A special mention is given to the cross-border protection of migrant children by advocating for the establishment of cross-border frameworks, including consular protection policies and services to ensure the best interests of the child principle is consistently interpreted and prioritized by State authorities.¹²⁰

The Global Compact for Migration emphasizes the importance of international, regional and trans-regional cooperation. States should adopt a whole-of-government approach, particularly in transit areas, to ensure the proper identification, referral and protection of vulnerable migrants, including children on the move.

¹¹⁷ IOM, 2024a.

¹¹⁸ IOM and UNICEF, 2024, pg. 26.

¹¹⁹ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, 2017.

¹²⁰ United Nations General Assembly, 2019, pg. 16.

Good practice – The West African Network (WAN or RAO) for protection of children on the move within ECOWAS countries



In 2005 the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its partners in the West African region established the West African Network (WAN) or Réseau de Afrique de l'Ouest (RAO), a network aimed to ensure the protection of children on the move within the ECOWAS countries and Mauritania.¹²¹

The WAN is a transnational mechanism for the protection of children on the move in the subregion, promoting cooperation in the early identification, best interest assessment and referral of migrant children at risk.¹²² The WAN provides emergency responses to medium- and long-term interventions such as community and family support for child reintegration and personal development projects.¹²³

These actions are carried out thanks to the cooperation between the child protection systems of the ECOWAS members and Mauritania. The network brings together institutional and civil society actors to strengthen regional cooperation for the protection of vulnerable migrant children and to promote the adoption of sustainable reintegration.¹²⁴

► Sustainable solutions for children on the move

Children are among the most vulnerable populations on the move. Therefore, all decisions concerning their well-being and development must be taken in their best interest.¹²⁵ For this reason, stakeholders involved in the identification and protection of migrant children should aim to find sustainable solutions that protect the physical mental, spiritual, moral and psychological development of the child.¹²⁶

Durable solutions in the context of child migration are usually defined as long-term options that respond to the standards and rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹²⁷ As part of the child protection response, they entail full protection by States and should provide a safe environment where the wellbeing and development of the child can be ensured.¹²⁸

Unlike durable solutions, temporary protection measures and statuses can be useful and necessary to ensure children's safety in the short term, but they cannot be permanent and therefore create insecurity for these children. Long-term and durable solutions for migrant children are crucial, especially for those who have experienced irregular migration and cannot decide to return voluntarily to their country of origin.¹²⁹

¹²¹ IOM, 2020, pg. 267.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ RAO and International Social Service West Africa, 2018, pg. 5-6.

¹²⁴ RAO, n.d. (accessed 2024).

¹²⁵ See Thematic Focus: [Best interest principle for children on the move](#).

¹²⁶ Committee on the Rights of the Children, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1), 2013.

¹²⁷ See the definition of solutions for migrant children in the Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, pg. 8: "A comprehensive, secure and sustainable solution is one that, to the greatest extent possible, caters to the long-term best interests and welfare of the child and is sustainable and secure from that perspective. The outcome should aim to ensure that the child is able to develop into adulthood, in an environment that will meet his or her needs and fulfil his or her rights as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

¹²⁸ IOM and UNICEF, 2024, pg. 45.

¹²⁹ Save the Children, 2019, pg. 18.

According to the principle of family unity, family reunification should be the first long-term solution to explore in the case of unaccompanied and separated migrant children.¹³⁰ A family tracing and assessment together with a thorough case-based risk analysis and Best Interest Procedure (BIP) process is a necessary precondition for voluntary return and family reunification.¹³¹ The principle of non-refoulement must be a primary consideration to avoid returning them to contexts with the serious risk of irreparable harm to their life, survival and development¹³², including the risk of child detention. Indeed, unaccompanied and separated children who arrive irregularly should not be deprived of their liberty solely due to their irregular migration status.¹³³ If the Best Interest Determination (BID) findings indicate that family reunification is not in the best interest of the child, other solutions must be considered. These solutions may include integration in the host country or relocation to a third country where other family members or caregivers are located.¹³⁴

Durable solutions must prioritize the best interests of the child, whether with the family or separated and they can include family reunification, voluntary return and reintegration in their country of origin, local integration in the transit country, or even resettlement to a third country following an assessment and determination of the child's needs and preferences.

Families and communities are key actors in the protection and development of children, ensuring their well-being. For children on the move, families can facilitate their integration into host communities. In the case of unaccompanied and separated children, durable solutions should be decided on a case-by-case basis through a best interest determination, given their potential long-term impact. Family tracing and reunification are fundamental rights of the child and should be prioritized when it is in their best interest. Where this is not possible, alternative care solutions should be sought.¹³⁵

If desired by the child and in his or her best interests, a voluntary, free and informed decision to return and be reintegrated in the context of origin may be a viable option. For unaccompanied and separated children, family tracing and the appointment of a legal guardian prior to return and to support the reintegration process must be ensured. Return must always be in the best interests of the child, otherwise it should not be undertaken.¹³⁶

In all decisions related to the child's return, a child-rights approach should be ensured, prioritizing the best interests of the child. The right of the child to participate and be heard and the right to family unity should also be prioritized.¹³⁷

Multisectoral and tailor-made assistance should be ensured according to specific protection needs in the development of return and reintegration projects for migrant children. Pre-departure planning and enhanced cross-border cooperation between relevant agencies and child protection authorities should be ensured to make sure the return and reintegration are sustainable. Specifically, the pre-departure assessment of each case should include a comprehensive analysis of the various economic, social and psychosocial factors that may affect the children and the families and communities to which they return.¹³⁸

¹³⁰ Committee on the rights of the child, General comment no. 6 (2005) treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, 2005.

¹³¹ Alonso, N. and I. Todorova, 2019, p. 17.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 20.

¹³⁴ Alonso, N. and I. Todorova, 2019, pg. 15.

¹³⁵ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pgs. 200–201.

¹³⁶ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 201.

¹³⁷ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pgs. 201–203.

¹³⁸ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 199.

The return and reintegration of children on the move must be assessed and planned through structured, case-by-case child protection case management based on the individual needs of the child and the family, and should be based on the BIP in accordance with international standards.¹³⁹

Resettlement may also be a long-term option to ensure the protection of children on the move. UNHCR is the UN agency mandated to carry out resettlement and to whom IOM refers cases of children on the move who are eligible for refugee status and, where appropriate, resettlement. It is the process of transferring refugees and child refugees from the country of asylum, where specific needs cannot be met, to a new country on a permanent basis.¹⁴⁰ When resettled, children should have access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as nationals. Usually, unaccompanied and separated children and children at risk of violence and abuse are given priority, and the decision to resettle should be based on a BID and tailored recommendations. In some cases, resettlement enables family reunification in the best interests of the child. However, it may also result in the separation of the child from his or her family, community and cultural context. In these cases, the decision should consider the long-term impact this may have on the child's development and well-being.¹⁴¹

Indeed, resettled children may experience trauma or psychosocial problems as a result of cultural change and adjustment. These dynamics can affect children's development and sense of identity, especially when combined with instances of discrimination and racism in the host country. Therefore, resettlement should be supported by appropriate integration measures such as culturally sensitive and responsive education and alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children.¹⁴²

Local integration of children on the move may be combined with resettlement. Local integration in its legal, sociocultural, economic and civil-political dimensions¹⁴³ can contribute to ensuring sustainable child protection. National social systems and policies should facilitate access to health care, education and employment and ensure that specific needs are met at local, regional and national levels.¹⁴⁴ Gender- and age-sensitive rights-based approaches are needed to address specific vulnerabilities. At the same time, it is necessary to involve local communities in creating an inclusive environment to facilitate the participation of migrant and refugee children in society.¹⁴⁵ For unaccompanied and separated children, the evaluation and decision stating that local integration is the long-term appropriate option for an individual child should be based on a BID. The decision should include a strategy for effective integration of the child and specific attention should be paid to the right to their own identity.¹⁴⁶

In North Africa and neighbouring countries, child protection systems and actors are following the principles and recommendations of the UNCRC to develop and implement sustainable solutions such as voluntary return and reintegration. However, some challenges have been identified on the ground, particularly the combination of a lack of formal inter-State procedures for family assessment in countries of origin, often replaced by NGO or United Nations based on their procedures.¹⁴⁷

¹³⁹ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 206.

¹⁴⁰ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 152.

¹⁴¹ UNHCR, 2021, pgs. 152–153.

¹⁴² UNHCR, n.d. (accessed 2024).

¹⁴³ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 152.

¹⁴⁴ IOM, 2017b, pg. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 152.

¹⁴⁷ IOM, 2024a.

In parallel, an increasing pressure on asylum systems in a region facing mixed movements is also challenging national systems. This situation added to limited options for both local integration and child-sensitive regular pathways creates a complex and challenging situation for children.

► Alternative care for children on the move

Family is defined by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the natural environment which ensures the protection and development of children, and it is where ethical and cultural values are transferred to the child.¹⁴⁸ For this reason, States should avoid family separation at all costs.¹⁴⁹ However, separation can happen because of the child's best interest when the family cannot adequately care for them. It can also happen because of other dynamics, such as during a migration journey. International guidelines emphasize that children located in countries other than their habitual residence, especially if unaccompanied or separated are entitled to the same level of protection and care as national children residing in the destination or transit country.¹⁵⁰

When children are lacking parental care, including unaccompanied and separated children, and cannot be reunited with their families and caregivers, States must ensure their protection and provide alternative care. When evaluating temporary and long-term options, family-based care should be preferred to residential care especially to avoid institutionalizing children in large childcare facilities.¹⁵¹ The same approach should also be ensured in emergency contexts, such as in situations of conflict.¹⁵²

Alternative care options should be considered on a case-by-case bases through a Best Interest Determination process that include the participation of the child and respects the children's rights, including the right to be informed and not to be discriminated.¹⁵³ The best interests of the child also should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and a legal guardian should be appointed as soon as the child is identified to ensure legal representation during the identification and family tracing process.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, Preamble.

¹⁴⁹ Committee on the rights of the child, Day of general discussion. Children without parental care, 2006.

¹⁵⁰ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 20.

¹⁵¹ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 5.

¹⁵² United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 21.

¹⁵³ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 3.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 20.

Various kinds of formal and informal alternative care are approved by international guidelines.¹⁵⁵ These include:

- Kinship care, which is family-based care provided by the child's extended family or close family friends known to the child;
- Foster care, which provides a family-based environment selected by national authorities. The foster family does not belong to the child's own family and should be selected, vetted, approved and supervised according to specific procedures and standards;
- Residential care, in a non-family-based group setting, such as safe emergency care and transit centres, and other short- and long-term residential care facilities;
- Supervised independent living arrangements.

Primarily States, but also any actor operating alternative care solutions are required to ensure high standards of quality when determining the best alternative option for each individual case.¹⁵⁶ Examples of high-quality standards are adequate nutrition, clean and homely environment, informal education and entertainment with the support of trained and experienced staff.¹⁵⁷

The development of family- and community-based foster care solutions is encouraged, when adopted considering the best interests of the child. Research and child protection advocates confirm the harmful effects that institutionalization can have on children, including children on the move. That is why large-scale facilities should be replaced by individual and small-scale quality care solutions, including family and community-based care.¹⁵⁸

In these contexts, factors like separation from parents and family, the resulting absence of stable emotional bonds, along with poor living conditions and overcrowding, can significantly harm children's wellbeing. Regardless of the conditions and length of time children are detained, the harmful effects of detention are undeniable. Children's health and development are negatively affected by the experience, causing depression, anxiety and symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as insomnia and nightmares. In cases of prolonged detention, children's long-term cognitive and physical development can also be severely affected.¹⁵⁹

Family- and community-based foster care solutions may include traditional foster care systems like *kafala*¹⁶⁰ which is an instrument provided by Islamic law as an alternative care option for orphaned and abandoned children. According to Islamic law, an individual or family (*kafil*) can voluntarily assume responsibility for the overall protection of a child (*makful*) and provide care in the same way as a parent. *Kafala* is widely recognized by international law as a viable alternative protection measure for children deprived of their families. Sources such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention mention *kafala* among sustainable solutions, and the 2009 Guidelines on Alternative Care define it as a stable and permanent protection measure for children.¹⁶¹ However, the Guidelines encourage States to consider long-term options such as *kafala* and adoption only as a last resort, after attempting to reestablish family ties and placing the child with his or her parents, extended family or customary caregivers.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 6.

¹⁵⁶ Committee on the rights of the child, Day of general discussion. Children without parental care, 2006.

¹⁵⁷ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, n.d. (accessed 2024).

¹⁵⁸ IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2022b, pg. 9.

¹⁵⁹ UNICEF, 2019b, pg. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Committee on the rights of the child, Day of general discussion. Children without parental care, 2006.

¹⁶¹ UNICEF, 2023a, pgs. 4–5.

¹⁶² United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 21.

In many North African countries residential care is the main option available to unaccompanied and separated migrant children due to the emergency settings created by climate change, instability and poverty. Some countries employ other forms of alternative care solutions. For instance, in Mauritania and the Niger the institutional and regulatory framework provides foster care as an option to ensure protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant children. Specifically, in Mauritania families and child protection actors are supported to ensure migrant children adequate living conditions and access to services such as health and education. In Egypt, programmes of supervised independent living arrangements are implemented by civil society organizations (CSOs) in response to the preference of unaccompanied and separated teenage migrant children. This support is accompanied by continuous follow up and monitoring undertaken by CSOs.¹⁶³

Good practice – The foster care system for unaccompanied and separated migrant children developed by UN agencies and the Government of Mauritania



After conducting a feasibility study on the compatibility of foster care for unaccompanied and separated migrant children and the national child protection system, the Government of Mauritania in collaboration with UN agencies have established tools and procedures to ensure migrant children access to temporary foster care. Based on the principle of non-discrimination, the mechanism is accessible to national and migrant unaccompanied and separated children. Host families are identified by partner CSOs which conduct a first evaluation and presented it to the joint evaluation committee. The committee is composed of child protection institutional actors, representatives from local CSOs, and representatives from UN agencies such as IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF. The committee is responsible for evaluating the proposal according to predetermined and agreed upon criteria, voting, or requesting further information.

The selected families are supported technically and economically to ensure the well-being, development, education, and living conditions of the child. Families agree to host an unaccompanied migrant for 6 months or 12 to 24 months in exceptional cases. These exceptional cases may include: when family tracing is delayed, when children are identified as victims of trafficking, when teens are about to turn 18, when teens are enrolled in vocational trainings and internships.

The national Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family supported by international child protection actors is currently reinforcing the existent dual system of institutional and family-based care. In line with the National child protection strategy and the Child Protection Code, the Ministry is drafting a decree regulating the status of temporary foster families for vulnerable children.

Good practice – Kafala as a form of alternative care in Morocco



In most of Muslim-majority countries located in the MENA region, the Kafala system allows for the long-term fostering of orphaned children or children without guardians, in the absence of adoption provisions in national legislative frameworks.

The UNCRC also recognizes Kafala as a form of alternative care. Kafala is often an institution reserved for children who are nationals of the country in which it is requested, but in some cases, such as in Morocco, guidance on Kafala specifically includes the fostering of migrant and refugee children, children seeking asylum, as well as stateless children.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ IOM, 2024a.

¹⁶⁴ International Detention Coalition, Robert Bosch Stiftung and UNICEF, 2024, pgs. 55–56.



ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES FOR SOPS ON CHILD PROTECTION CASE MANAGEMENT AND CROSS-BORDER COORDINATION FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN NORTH AFRICA

► Introduction

In cross-border contexts, coordinated case management is key to ensuring effective protection of children on the move.

The present suggested SOPs are part of the IOM RDPP Regional Child Protection Operational Guidance and provide essential guidance on a wide range of integrated and regional best practices for the protection of children on the move with a special focus on cross-border coordination and continuum of care. The tool illustrates the different phases of child protection case management to assist child protection actors in providing timely and effective short-term assistance as well as sustainable approaches.

The SOPs are anchored in the IOM and UNICEF Interactive Tools for the Protection of Migrant Children and Their Families, which complements Module 6 of the IOM and UNICEF Reintegration Handbook and Part 6 of the IOM and UNICEF Migrant Vulnerability Handbook on “Guidance for the protection, care and assistance of vulnerable child migrants”.

This tool is intended to provide UN agencies’ country offices, as well as national and subnational child protection authorities and CSOs, with a common basis for ensuring the harmonized development and implementation of existing and future SOPs and child protection tools for children on the move in North Africa, with a particular focus on the child protection challenges on the migration corridors between West Central Africa and North Africa.

► International and regional legal frameworks

The following list represents the main sources that constitute the legal and policy framework at the international and African regional levels applicable to North African and neighbouring countries on migration and child protection. The framework provides the context for soft and binding laws and regulations that ensure the commitment of stakeholders to child protection through the obligation to respect and fulfill children’s rights. These instruments are key to identifying roles and responsibilities at national and international levels in the protection of children on the move.

International

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
- United Nations Global Compact on Refugees
- United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- United Nations Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime
- United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Regional

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)
- ECOWAS procedures and standards for the protection and reintegration of vulnerable children affected by mobility and young migrants
- Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018 – 2030)
- Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa
- Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment

► Guiding principles

Do No Harm: Actions and interventions undertaken for or on behalf of children and their families during the case management process should not cause them harm. This principle also applies to activities that collect, store or share their information.¹⁶⁵

Child-rights and child-centred approach: Human rights and children's rights as stated in the UNCRC, international and national legislation should be integrated into all stages of the case management process.¹⁶⁶ Fundamental rights such as children's right to be heard, to participate in decisions that affect them and to be free from discrimination should be integrated into all steps and case decisions. The child's best interests should be prioritized as the key consideration in all actions and decisions affecting them.¹⁶⁷

Individualized approach: Children and their needs should be at the centre of all decisions and actions taken during the case management process. Case management should focus on the individual child and family, ensuring that the best interests of the child are assessed on a case-by-case basis.¹⁶⁸

The best interests of the child: The “best interests of the child” encompasses the child's physical and emotional safety and should inform all actions and interactions with the child and family. This principle should be considered a priority and should guide all decisions and actions taken during the process to ensure the protection and safe development of the child.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Sphere, 2018, pg. 3.

¹⁶⁶ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 202.

¹⁶⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 15.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 3.

Non-discrimination: Children should not be treated poorly or denied access to services on the basis of their gender, age, socioeconomic background, race, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. The best interests of the child should be considered and assessed without prejudice to their personal characteristics. Organizations and practitioners should develop non-discriminatory relationships with children based on respect.¹⁷⁰

Child participation: Children have the right to be informed and to participate in decisions that affect them, according to their age and maturity. In cases where the participation of the child cannot be granted or the decision to be made is not in accordance with the child's wishes, the reasons should be explained and justified to the child.¹⁷¹

Informed consent and assent: Depending on the age and maturity of the child, service providers and caseworkers should inform children and their families about available options and potential risks. Child-friendly communication should be used to ensure that information is fully understood by small children. Informed consent can be given by children who have the legal capacity to understand the procedure and its consequences, while younger children (usually under 15 years) or children who are inherently incapable of giving informed consent may agree to give their assent.¹⁷²

Confidentiality: Sensitive and identifying information collected about children should be shared only on a need-to-know basis. Caseworkers and service providers should ensure that practices and systems are in place to protect the information collected and to avoid informal sharing of case and sensitive information.¹⁷³

Accountability: Accountability in child protection case management should address power imbalances between children and families, caseworkers and organizations. Systems and practices should ensure that caseworkers use their authority responsibly and are held accountable, and appropriate feedback channels should be established to allow children to provide feedback safely.¹⁷⁴

► Actors and responsibilities

The SOPs aim to provide a comprehensive framework for effective coordination, both cross-border and national, ensuring close cooperation between stakeholders. They promote tailor-made support for each child by providing clear guidelines for individual case management, while strengthening child protection systems and improve the protection of children on the move.

State actors and governments are primary responsible for child protection. Consequently, they have the main role of delivering responses through case management.¹⁷⁵ In national and local contexts where skilled and adequate national child protection actors and social services are available, third parties should not be directly involved in case management, but rather supporting and strengthening the national child protection system.

National child protection authorities have primary responsibility for the protection of children on the move, including the various steps of case management. United Nations and international actors should support strengthening national child protection authorities in cross-border coordination and mechanisms such as family tracing and assessment until case closure.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 2.

¹⁷¹ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 12.

¹⁷² The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pgs. 82–83.

¹⁷³ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pgs. 121–122.

¹⁷⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 56.

¹⁷⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 76.

¹⁷⁶ IOM, 2024b.

The following actors may be involved in implementation of the Regional Child Protection Standard Operating Procedures. Specialized training and qualifications should be required for operators and those working directly with children.

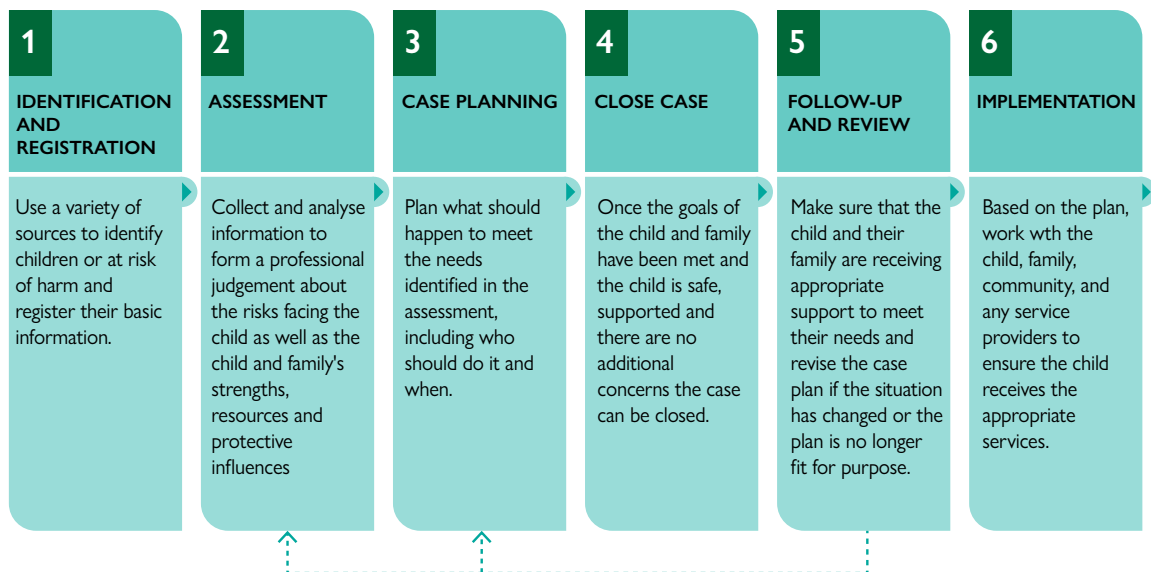
ACTORS	RESPONSIBILITIES
Child protection Regional actors, such as the African Union and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure coordination of child protection institutions and agencies at the North African level; • Advocate for and support States in the adoption of child protection policies and frameworks for migrant children at the regional and national levels; • Strengthen cross-border coordination between States within the region.
Child protection and welfare State institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure coordination of national and local child protection institutions and agencies; • Elaborate and adapt child protection policies and frameworks for migrant children; • Enhance cross-border coordination among State actors and between State and non-State actors.
Law enforcement authorities (police, border guards, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the dissemination, training and implementation of operational frameworks and tools for child protection; • Identify and refer migrant children to child protection institutions and services; • Coordinate with child protection and welfare institutions; • Coordinate with national and international actors during case management and best interests proceedings; • Support access to child protection justice for migrant children.
Justice system actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up on cases and referral to services and national and international actors; • Decide and oversees the implementation of child protection measures (e.g. appointment of legal guardians, family tracing and reunification).
Subnational and local child protection institutions and agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with local actors involved in child protection case management; • Support access to child protection judicial procedures for migrant children; • Facilitate cross-border coordination.
UN agencies and international actors (e.g. IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, RAO, ISS, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management according to mandates; • Refer migrant children to child protection institutions and actors Facilitate cross-border coordination; • Facilitate access to child protection judicial procedures for migrant children.
International and national and local CSOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrant children's identification; • Case management; • Support cross-border coordination; • Refer cases to specialized services; • Refer cases to international actors according to their mandates; • Contribute to ensure access to child protection judicial procedures for migrant children.

► Case management

Child protection case management is an approach of organizing actions aimed at meeting the needs of a child at risk or victim of harm. The process ensures individualized, coordinated, holistic, and multi-sectoral support to address complex and interconnected child protection issues. In this context, a social worker supports the child and family in a systematic and timely manner, offering direct assistance and safe referral. The child protection case management can be an integral part of protection programmes and includes preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.¹⁷⁷ It is not a type of programme or intervention – but a systematic procedure and service for identifying children’s needs and coordinating services to meet those needs. An appropriate national child protection case management system needs well trained staff, supported by appropriate supervision and is often a medium to long-term work in progress.

Case management requires several components such as institutional, workforce, operational and information management and must be sustainably resourced. As a process, it is composed of six steps: (1) identification and registration; (2) assessment; (3) case planning; (4) case closure; (5) follow up and review; (6) implementation. For children on the move, the Best Interest Determination (BID) is an integral part of this process.¹⁷⁸

Specialized protection case management for Child Protection including the Best Interests of the child Procedure follow the same system and process, but with additional applied principles aligned with relevant international legal frameworks and rights, additional minimum standards and tools and require specialized and dedicated child protection staffing and expertise.



¹⁷⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 11.

¹⁷⁸ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 13.

Identification and registration

The timely and child-sensitive identification of children on the move is crucial to understanding their needs and effectively protecting them. The identification phase can refer to two separate but related actions in the context of mixed migration flows:

- (a) Identify the type of vulnerability (or vulnerabilities) connected to the migrant child's situation: understanding the specific needs and challenges narrows down the options, ensuring an optimally appropriate referral pathway;
- (b) Ensure the personal identification of each individual child: knowing the name and the nationality of each child is key to respecting the individual child's right to an identity and facilitating family tracing and reunion or other best interest determined durable solution.

Who

- Children on the move may be identified by police or other front line national authorities who must refer the child to national child protection services. Community leaders or customary authorities and other local social services may be involved.¹⁷⁹
- A child protection caseworker is appointed by the appropriate national authority. The caseworker has a supportive role, providing case management information to the child and the child's caregivers, promoting the child's meaningful participation, and providing non-specialized mental health and psychosocial support. Support is also provided to the child and the family, if any, to find temporary and sustainable solutions (e.g. safe care arrangements, family tracing). The caseworker has a coordinating role with other key actors and stakeholders, assessing services and ensuring safe referral when needed, as well as sharing information on a need-to-know basis and managing information about the case.¹⁸⁰
- The child protection caseworker designated should clearly convey the support that the child and family can receive, as well as the case management steps and requirements for case closure. The operator should also prevent the child and family from becoming dependent on the caseworker, supporting their proactive contribution and ownership of the process.¹⁸¹
- In the case of unaccompanied and separated children, it may be difficult to provide documentation of the child's identity and/or proof of the child's relationship with the persons accompanying them if they are not their legal guardians. In such cases, the caseworker should immediately refer the child to protection authorities. If this is not possible, the child should be referred to agencies or bodies specialized in the assessment of unaccompanied and separated children. If the child is considered to be at risk, the caseworker should arrange an alternative emergency placement.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ IOM, 2024b.

¹⁸⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pgs. 130–134.

¹⁸¹ Government of the Niger, 2020, pg. 30.

¹⁸² IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 256.

When and how

- A migrant child in a situation of vulnerability can be identified in different ways: for instance, the child can self-refer or referral can be done by the family, law enforcement actors, and institutional or CSOs. In these cases, it is important that the actor establishing the first contact with the child, refers the case to child safeguarding / child protection focal points in the organizations.¹⁸³ If the needs identified cannot be met by the first organization or actor, the child should be referred to specialized and reliable service providers.¹⁸⁴
- After being identified, the child should be registered by the organization taking the lead on the case and collect background and necessary information such as:¹⁸⁵
 - Child's personal details
 - Household characteristics
 - Family details
 - Care arrangements
 - Child's situation in terms of emotional and physical safety, education, work, social network, legal status
- Child Protection specialized actors should prioritize the urgent registration of unaccompanied and separated children for case management, family tracing, and reunification due to the severe long-term impact of family separation.¹⁸⁶
- At the very start of the process, an identification code should be assigned to each case file and stored in a safe place. Coding systems protect the identification of children's personal data and the location or persons who are intervening in the case.¹⁸⁷ Whenever possible, the code should replace the child's real name.
- Part of the identification phase is also to gather information about the status of the child:
 - If the child is accompanied, the informed consent of parents or legal guardians should be obtained to collect data concerning the child. In this case, the Best Interests Assessment (BIA) and Best Interests Determination (BID) are not automatically required, as accompanying adults are the primary guardian for the child and able to decide in the child's best interests.¹⁸⁸ However, when a risk or threat to the child's well-being is identified like in cases of abuse, neglect, or separation from parents, the BIA and BID procedures might also be necessary for accompanied children.¹⁸⁹
 - If the child is separated and accompanied by adults who are not their legal guardians, it is crucial to assess and examine the family linkages or relationships between the accompanying adult/s and the child. The analysis will allow the case management worker to understand if the family members or self-designated guardians are or have been involved in exploitation, abuse or trafficking of the child.¹⁹⁰
 - If the child is unaccompanied, identification should gather all necessary information to complete the best interests assessment and determination.
- In cases when there is a doubt about the child's age it is possible to conduct an assessment. Age assessments have to be carried out after obtaining the child's assent or consent and appointing a legal guardian while following child and gender-sensitive approaches. In case of persistent doubt about the age, the individual should be considered a child.¹⁹¹

¹⁸³ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 52.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 85.

¹⁸⁶ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 119.

¹⁸⁷ Government of the Niger, 2020, pg. 29.

¹⁸⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 1989, art. 18.

¹⁸⁹ EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 1 (accessed 2024).

¹⁹⁰ IOM, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and UN.GIFT, 2009, pg. 73.

¹⁹¹ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 257.

- As soon as an unaccompanied migrant child is identified, the child should be placed in a safe environment or facility – alternative care options are preferable – following a decision by the competent national authority. Child protection authorities should be informed before beginning any activities related to the best interests procedure.
- Simultaneously a legal guardian should be appointed for unaccompanied and separated children as soon as identification takes place.¹⁹²
- Unaccompanied and separated migrant children should be promptly placed in temporary care or in child protection facilities where they can access adequate services, appropriate living standards protecting the child from violence, exploitation and abuse.¹⁹³ To avoid disrupting access to education, essential services should always include it. Placing migrant children in a temporary facility or shelter should be implemented following the best interests principle and respecting their rights.
- Practices such as the placement of migrant children in immigration detention centres are never in the best interests of the child and cannot be justified by their or their parents' irregular migration status. Children on the move have the right to be protected from violence, abuse and exploitation, regardless of their legal or migration status.¹⁹⁴

Specific considerations

- The right of the child to be informed and to participate throughout the protection process is of the utmost importance. The consent or assent of the child must be obtained at the beginning of the case management process regarding the child's willingness to participate and the collection, sharing and storage of personal information about the case.¹⁹⁵
- The requirement for the consent of both parents or legal guardian and the child may be waived in the best interests of the child, in consultation with the supervisor and in accordance with local procedures and legal frameworks. In particular, this may be done when it is not possible to involve the parents or caregivers because they are likely to cause harm to the child.¹⁹⁶
- Age assessment should be considered as a measure of last resort and should follow the best interests of the child principle.¹⁹⁷ It should be a comprehensive evaluation of elements and details assessing physical conditions but also maturity, while being careful and not assuming age based on cultural behaviors or standards.

¹⁹² Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, 2017.

¹⁹³ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 258.

¹⁹⁴ United Nations Task Force on Children Deprived of Liberty. 2024, pg. 5.

¹⁹⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 82.

¹⁹⁶ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 83.

¹⁹⁷ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 127.

CHALLENGES IN IDENTIFYING UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

Identifying unaccompanied and separated children can be challenging especially when the identification happens at borders or in a transit country. These children are characterized by high mobility and in some contexts, they can be concerned about being identified or referred to authorities. Therefore, they may fail to identify themselves as children or may provide false information.

Unaccompanied and separated children are highly vulnerable and exposed to exploitation and protection risks arising from using risky routes, which is why appropriate identification and case management is vital to ensure their short and long-term protection.

Younger separated and unaccompanied children often cannot correctly identify themselves and may not be able to share information about their origins, a behaviour that can be exacerbated by traumatic experiences.¹⁹⁸

To ensure timely identification, caseworkers should rapidly refer the case to national child protection authorities and assess if the child possesses adequate documentation to prove their identity, the identity of, and relationship to, accompanying adults to establish legal guardianship over the child.¹⁹⁹

Birth registration and certification is also a challenge in identifying unaccompanied and separated children who have never had their birth certified in countries of origin or transit during their migration journey. Without registration and identity documents, children cannot access basic services and protection measures.²⁰⁰ Birth registration also helps to protect children from various forms of exploitation and abuse.²⁰¹ In this regard, States have a key role to play in removing barriers to birth registration and the issuance of birth certificates for all children, regardless of their or their parents' migration status.²⁰² State actors and stakeholders, such as relevant UN agencies like UNICEF and IOM, can coordinate interventions where necessary to ensure birth certification and identification of children on the move.

- Specific support specialists such as translators, cultural mediators and psychosocial operators should be involved by the caseworker to ensure adequate information and communication with the child and the child's legal guardian if present.²⁰³
- A preliminary risk assessment should be conducted by the caseworker considering the different needs that the child might present, and which may require immediate intervention. The risks related to the specific case can be different according to the context in which migrant children are identified. Possible options may include the following:²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ Save the Children, 2022, pg. 29.

¹⁹⁹ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 256.

²⁰⁰ Save the Children, 2018, pg. 34.

²⁰¹ UNICEF, 2023b, pg. 6.

²⁰² Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, 2017.

²⁰³ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 96.

²⁰⁴ IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2019, pgs. 15–18.



Living conditions

- Lack of legal guardianship
- Lack of shelter
- Limited access to services (education, legal and administrative, etc.)
- Negligence



Health issues

- Psychological concerns linked to abandonment, abuse or violence
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Chronic diseases
- Psychiatric conditions
- Infectious illnesses



Gender-based violence

- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual violence
- Unwanted pregnancies
- Child marriage

DATA PROTECTION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT WHEN PROTECTING MIGRANT CHILDREN²⁰⁵

When working with children on the move, including children who have survived violence and gender-based violence,²⁰⁶ it is of the utmost importance to respect the following principles:

Transparency: The child and the caregivers have the right to be informed about the options and choices that concern the child, as well as their rights. Language and terminology should be child-friendly and accessible.

Informed assent/ consent: The collection of information about a child should be coordinated with and approved by the child's legal guardian through informed consent, unless contact with them could be harmful to the child. The child should be heard and give informed assent/ consent to all case procedures, steps and circumstances.

Confidentiality: Sensitive information about the child's identity and the case should be recorded and protected. The use of anonymized information should be preferred. Children should be informed about the data collection methods and objectives and give their informed assent/ consent.

Need-to-know based: The information gathered must be shared to the minimum extent necessary to allow the process to develop and an action to be taken.

Security and accountability: Sensitive information should be stored in a secure and protected manner. Clear roles and responsibilities should be established within organizations involved in child protection to ensure a chain of responsibility for the storage and protection of data.

²⁰⁵ UNHCR, 2021, pgs. 110–112.

²⁰⁶ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), n.d., pgs. 1–3.

VULNERABLE MIGRANT CHILDREN AND INTERSECTIONALITY

The intersection of being a child and a migrant multiplies the risks and vulnerabilities faced by children on the move. During their migration journey, children on the move may be exposed to risks and dangers such as violence, abuse and exploitation. In the context of migration, what makes an individual and a child vulnerable is the inability to effectively enjoy human rights and the exposure to risks that entitle them to seek protection from duty bearers. Unaccompanied and separated children, children who have been trafficked or smuggled and stateless children (in the context of migration and displacement) are therefore particularly vulnerable.²⁰⁷ That is why the analysis on vulnerability of a specific target population should be multi-layered.

The intersectional approach can be followed for assessing migrants' vulnerability and resilience, particularly to violence, exploitation and abuse. Experiences of migrants and migrant children are influenced by the intertwined dynamics of risk and protective factors at the individual, household, community and structural levels. The vulnerability of migrant children can be both situational and/or rooted in their status as children. Unaccompanied and separated children are particularly vulnerable and require specific responses.²⁰⁸

The following parameters can also be considered when developing an intersectional analysis:²⁰⁹

- How social categories intersect and generate social inequality;
- Inequalities and dynamics linked to relationships;
- Influence of time and location on power configurations;
- Structural and political context;
- Power relations;
- Implications for most disadvantaged groups and individuals;
- Reflection of practitioners' background on their action.

In the case of children on the move, several factors may combine to create a situation of high risk or vulnerability. Some of the factors to consider include:

- Being a child;
- Lack of caregivers;
- Different cultural backgrounds, beliefs and traditions;
- Irregular migration status;
- Xenophobia, discrimination and stigma;
- High mobility;
- Gender.

²⁰⁷ International Data Alliance for Children on the Move, Eurostat, IOM, OECD, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2023, pgs. 38–40.

²⁰⁸ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 251.

²⁰⁹ UN Women and UNPRPD, 2022, pgs. 8–10.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS) AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Migration and displacement can be linked to violent or sudden events, which can trigger reactions and responses such as stress and trauma. Challenges such as discrimination, insecurity and uncertainty are sources of deep frustration and anxiety for children on the move. Asking for and depending on outside help can frustrate migrant youth's self-esteem and sense of dignity.²¹⁰ Early identification and adequate response can help migrant children improving their mental health.

The WHO defines mental health as *"a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community."* This definition highlights the importance of a multidimensional response.²¹¹

Techniques such as Psychological First Aid can be extremely useful in improving the mental health of vulnerable migrants and children in emergency contexts. It is not a professional psychological or psychiatric intervention and therefore can be performed by caseworkers adequately trained on Psychological First Aid. Psychological First Aid provides active listening and comfort to vulnerable individuals in order to understand and effectively address their needs.²¹²

In the context of child migration, the following steps should be followed:²¹³

- Provide the child with a child-friendly space as well as with a sense of calm and security through tone of voice, facial expressions, and movement;
- Address the child's basic and immediate physical needs, such as hunger, thirst, need for toileting, etc., and provide access to a comfortable place or object. If a caregiver or trusted adult is present, they can be asked to help calm the child;
- Build trust and understand the child's current and immediate concerns;
- Ask for help and refer the child to appropriate support services. Follow up with services about the case as appropriate.

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE WITH DISABILITIES

According to the United Nations definition, *"Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."*²¹⁴ National authorities should ensure the full enjoyment of human rights and children's rights by children with disabilities and the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration.²¹⁵

Disability can be one of the vulnerabilities of children and youth in mixed migration. Adequate protection and response to the needs of migrant children with disabilities should be ensured. For example, during the Best Interests Determination process, disability should be a special consideration when gathering supporting documentation, consulting with experts, and monitoring the implementation of interventions.²¹⁶ For these children, the appointment of an individual guardian is key to ensuring the prevention of risks associated with their return to their countries of origin.²¹⁷

²¹⁰ Danish Red Cross, 2021, pg. 9.

²¹¹ WHO, n.d. (accessed 2024).

²¹² IOM, 2023, pg. 33.

²¹³ CINDI, Hope, Rotary and UNICEF, 2021, pgs. 12–15.

²¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 2006, art. 1.

²¹⁵ United Nations General Assembly, 2006, art. 7.

²¹⁶ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 273.

²¹⁷ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 266.

Good practice – Coordination procedure for identification and referral of children on the move to UN agencies for specific protection in Mauritania



The national Standard Operating Procedures for the determination of the best interests of children on the move in Mauritania foresees a clear referral pathway and attribute specific roles and responsibilities to UN agencies and international organizations active in child protection, according to their different mandates. The Standard Procedures state that:

- Local NGOs should refer cases of unaccompanied and separated children to UN agencies or other international organizations according to the child's needs to ensure technical and financial support
- UN agencies and organizations should only take on referrals of children whose profiles meet their designated mandates and expertise
- UN agencies and organizations to whom the case has been referred will be responsible for registering the case, assigning a caseworker, and coordinating with the local NGO that first identified the child for further information
- The responsible UN agency or organization is in charge of assessing the child's situation and collecting information to compile the child's Best Interests Determination (BID) file.

CHILD-FRIENDLY INTERVIEWS

Case management interviews should be conducted only by child protection experts and qualified staff, following rights-based and child-friendly approaches.

In contexts where migrant children might be in a condition of distress or trauma because of the migration journey or due to abuse and violence it is key to ensure their protection and to avoid re-traumatization in the course of case management.

The following good practices have been identified to carry out child-centred interviews and interactions while respecting the child's rights:

In general:

- Use calm, relaxed and open body language;
- Use appropriate facial expressions;
- Sit or be at the child's level and face the child;
- Summarize and give the child an overview of what they said in order to check that information are understood correctly;
- Use closed-ended questions to make it easier for younger children to understand the questions;
- Use open-ended questions to give space to the child to express themselves;
- Use leading questions to help a shy or hesitant child to open up;
- Understand cultural perspectives on communicating with children to adapt the style of communication.²¹⁸

And

- Give children time to express themselves;
- Be transparent with the child and inform the child about the procedure and possible outcomes;
- Do not minimize what the child is saying;
- Be empathetic and patient;
- Give the child alternatives to direct interviews such as drawing or playing to share information and express feelings;
- Be mindful about physical touch.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ The Alliance for child protection in humanitarian action and USAID, 2024.

²¹⁹ IOM, 2023, pg. 54.

INDICATORS OF CHILD TRAFFICKING

The identification phase during the child protection case management cycle may also be crucial to detect cases of migrant children victims or potential victims of trafficking.²²⁰

According to UNODC, child trafficking involves the use of children for the purpose of exploitation in various ways as a crime and a serious violation of human rights. The apparent consent of the child to be exploited, especially when force, deception, coercion or abuse of power or vulnerability are used is irrelevant.²²¹

During interviews, the child protection focal point/caseworker should pay attention to specific indicators that may facilitate the discovery of a case of trafficking. That is why it is highly important that front-line workers and stakeholders in the field are aware of what child trafficking is, how to detect it, and where to refer any possible victim for further investigation.

UNODC international indicators related to children who might have been trafficked²²²

The following is not an exhaustive list of indicators. These indicators may also be present in cases of other vulnerabilities or other forms of violence or abuse.

- Have no access to their parents or guardians;
- Look intimidated and behave in a way that does not correspond with behaviour typical of children their age;
- Have no friends of their own age outside of work;
- Have no access to education;
- Have no time for playing;
- Live apart from other children and in substandard accommodations;
- Eat apart from other members of the “family”;
- Are given only leftovers to eat;
- Are engaged in work that is not suitable for children;
- Travel unaccompanied by adults;
- Travel in groups with persons who are not relatives;
- The presence of child-sized clothing typically worn for doing manual or sex work;
- The presence of toys, beds and children’s clothing in inappropriate places such as brothels and factories;
- The claim made by an adult that he or she has “found” an unaccompanied child;
- The finding of unaccompanied children carrying telephone numbers for calling taxis;
- The discovery of cases involving illegal adoption.

²²⁰ See the Glossary section for a definition of trafficking, victim and potential victim of trafficking.

²²¹ UNODC, n.d.b. (accessed 2025).

²²² UNODC, n.d.c. (accessed 2024).

Good practice – Specific indicators of child trafficking - Egypt²²³

The Government of Egypt and UNICEF has identified the following specific child trafficking indicators as guidelines for identification of national and migrant child victims of trafficking:

- Signs that the child was assaulted (physically, mentally or sexually)
- The employer / the person responsible for the child keeps the child's official documents
- The child is forced to work for long hours or work in dangerous vocations/industries
- The child earns low or no pay
- The child does not go to school or drops out
- The child lives in his/her workplace or with their employer
- The child lives in large groups/crowded in very limited areas
- The child feels frightened in general and does not usually trust the police
- The child's inability to talk when they are unaccompanied
- The child works in prostitution or is forced to work in the commercial sex industry
- Child marriage
- Begging or committing minor offences like picking pockets or any other illegal activities

How to ensure cross-border coordination during migrant children's identification?²²⁴

When migrant children are identified in cross-border settings the best interests procedure should include the coordination of key stakeholders from the different countries involved and multi-lateral mechanisms complying with the respective national legislations.²²⁵

If migrant children do not have reliable personal identification documents or their parents cannot prove their identity and parent-child relationship, the following recommendations should be followed:

- Coordination with child protection national authorities should be ensured to verify if transnational or regional agreements or mechanisms are in place to facilitate the identification of migrant children
- Coordination with origin countries' embassies and consulates in the country where the child is located should be facilitated and supported to verify identification documents if presented or obtaining proofs and document attesting the child's identity, the child's origin and family
- Trusted chiefs and trusted members of migrants' communities can be appointed by countries of origin embassies and consulates or national authorities of the country where children are identified to facilitate their identification. This approach can be useful when countries of origin diplomatic missions are not available in transit and destination countries. It can be adopted only if monitored and if the risk of involvement in trafficking networks is excluded
- Migrant field operators from international and local CSOs working on child protection can be involved to mediate with migrant communities and assist in the verification of migrant children's identity
- UN agencies or international actors (including faith-based organizations) with available missions in countries of origin, transit and destination should be involved to facilitate coordination between countries to verify the identity of migrant children and their families

²²³ Government of Egypt and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 41.

²²⁴ IOM, 2024b.

²²⁵ See also the box [Cross-border protection: Case transfer](#).

TOOLS



- Operational tools on stages of Child Protection case management
[Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - Second Edition](#)
- For more guidance on Child Protection case management for children on the move:
[IOM and UNICEF Registration and Best Interests Assessment Form](#)

The best interests assessment

The second step in the cycle of child protection case management is the assessment of specific needs and vulnerabilities in light of the best interests principle. Children on the move transiting across countries and borders display a complex framework of vulnerability. That is why the Convention on the Rights of the Child and related comments exhort States to hold the best interests of the child as the main parameter and take all measures needed to avoid further exposition to risks. As children, children on the move are fully entitled to the respect of their rights and to access all the services and resources necessary to ensure their protection.

The Best Interests Assessment (BIA) is an individual and continuous process that is important for all children affected by migration, either accompanied or unaccompanied and separated in particular. The BIA starts with the identification of the child and it continues providing recommendations for immediate and short-term responses until the best interests determination procedure is finalized. Unlike a Best Interests Determination (BID), a BIA does not necessarily require a formal procedure, a panel and a review of the report, and there are not necessarily long-term solution options. The assessment can be continued and carried out while the BID process is underway to ensure immediate services, referrals and temporary solutions.²²⁶

Who

- Once the caseworker has identified the child, enquired if the child's parents or legal guardian are reachable and/or available, and has proceeded to the child's registration, an assessment is needed in the following 24 hours to address immediate needs identified.²²⁷
- The assessment and its follow up should be conducted by a qualified child protection caseworker who should observe and analyse the child's situation through the information collected, ensuring the child's active participation and giving due consideration to the child's opinion based on age and maturity.²²⁸
- In these cases, the caseworker should also analyse the causes of separation or abandonment, such as for instance: displacement, violence, lack of resources, access to services or security.²²⁹
- After the first phase of gathering information concerning the case, the caseworker should gather context data, and cross-check data for incoherent information and statements or gaps shared by the child, the child's legal guardians, or other adults accompanying the child.²³⁰

²²⁶ Government of Mauritania, IOM, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 11.

²²⁷ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 54.

²²⁸ Government of Mauritania, IOM, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 10.

²²⁹ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 266.

²³⁰ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 54.

When and how

- The BIA can take place when the child is unaccompanied, separated or accompanied when a risk for the child is identified. In these cases, the BIA should evaluate not only the immediate concrete needs of the child but also the relationship with the legal guardians and proceed to alternative care solutions.²³¹
- During the BIA, a risk assessment should be conducted and each identified vulnerability should be assessed according to the severity and likelihood of the risk.²³²
- In the case of unaccompanied migrant children identified at borders and in transit, the caseworker should first inform national child protection authorities and ensure the appointment of a qualified legal guardian by administrative or judicial actors. In these circumstances, specific standards and requirements should be granted following child-friendly and rights-based approaches. Appropriate accommodation separate from adults should be guaranteed, prioritizing family-based alternative solutions and family tracing should be initiated.²³³
- A comprehensive needs assessment assessing factors such as the child's individual development, social and family context, accompaniment status, caregivers capacity, and economic factors should complete this phase of the case management.²³⁴ This holistic assessment should include visits to observe the child's living conditions and relationships with other people in the same household or context.²³⁵
- At the end of the process, the caseworker should verify that during BIA safeguarding standards were respected during the process and tailored recommendations have been made. The final step involves a plan of action responding to immediate needs and recommendations for the medium and long term.²³⁶

Specific considerations

- Should an urgent or temporary placement of the child in a childcare facility be necessary, the treatment and living conditions should be in line with the right of the child to live in an environment that can guarantee their development.²³⁷
- Collecting data during the BIA can highlight the specific child's migration profile. While conducting the assessment, it may become apparent that the child has fled conflict or persecution. If this is the case, referral to UNHCR is essential.²³⁸
- If any decision is made about the case, the child should be informed and the following steps should be explained clearly to the child to obtain informed assent or consent in the absence of adequate legal guardians. Communicating in a child-friendly, age and culturally appropriate manner is key to ensuring the child's understanding. The child should never be put under pressure or forced to give the assent or consent. If the caseworker and the child disagree, the caseworker should provide justification for taking the proposed actions in the child's best interest.²³⁹
- Where a legal guardian has been appointed, the child's consent or assent should still be obtained if possible.

²³¹ IOM, 2023, pg. 51.

²³² Government of the Niger, 2020, pg. 31.

²³³ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 212.

²³⁴ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 56.

²³⁵ Government of Mauritania, IOM, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 10.

²³⁶ EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 1 (accessed 2024).

²³⁷ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 258.

²³⁸ IOM, 2023, pg. 51.

²³⁹ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 57.

- Cross-border and community-based mechanisms should be involved during the best interest procedure and are key to ensure a case-by-case assessment of specific needs of each child and ensure tailored response in line with the best interests of the child.²⁴⁰

IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF CHILD PROTECTION RISKS

Migrant children are vulnerable, and this vulnerability can arise both from their status as children, and therefore their lack of legal capacity and their social and economic vulnerability, and from the conditions in which they migrate. For example, unaccompanied and separated children may be considered particularly vulnerable due to their separation from their parents or legal guardians, but also more generally children fleeing persecution, exploitation or poverty, as well as children involved in trafficking or smuggling. Responses should take into account all the different factors involved in their migration, always taking into account their agency and allowing them to be heard.²⁴¹

The following protection risks may concern children on the move:

- Physical and sexual abuse or violence
- Emotional abuse and psychosocial distress
- Neglect
- Exploitation
- Unaccompanied status and separated children with vulnerable caregivers
- Child-headed households
- Early and forced marriages and pregnancies
- Disability

These risks may vary significantly among children based on factors such as their age, abilities or disabilities, sex, gender, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity and other personal characteristics.

In the context of child protection case management, to ensure tailored responses, risks are usually classified according to gravity and likelihood:²⁴²

High risk	Medium risk	Low risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High likelihood of harm • The child needs an urgent intervention (in 24 hours) • Follow up should be twice a week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child is exposed to risk of harm • An immediate child protection intervention is recommended in maximum 3 days • Follow up should be once a week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low likelihood of harm, but concerns exist • A programmed child protection intervention is recommended in 1 week • Follow up should be every 2 weeks

²⁴⁰ IOM, 2024b.

²⁴¹ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 251.

²⁴² IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 14.

RESPONSE IN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) CASES – DOs AND DON'Ts²⁴³

Whenever an incident of gender-based violence is disclosed, specialized GBV services should be provided only by dedicated and specialized GBV actors. Non-specialized actors should only be involved in timely and safe referrals. In these cases, the following recommendations should be considered:

DOs

- In case of front-line workers, they can always contact a child protection specialist from IOM or a Protection Focal Point working the same area for advice.²⁴⁴
- Check the national legal framework related to the obligation to report a GBV case, especially for children.
- Call and communicate with the child protection focal point while you are still with the child and wait for them to arrive before leaving.²⁴⁵
- In case no child protection referral pathway is available, bring the child to an appropriate service provider and/or a known and trusted adult where available.²⁴⁶
- Assess basic needs before asking about migration, experiences, etc.
- Respect and affirm the child survivor's wishes and feelings.
- Inform the child promptly about available services for child survivors of GBV.
- Ensure confidentiality and safety.
- Show honesty and transparency.
- Get informed consent before collecting data and sharing them with other actors.²⁴⁷
- Ensure attention and active listening (for instance through eye contact, empathy, understanding cultural and linguistic specific expressions, playing with the child, etc.).
- Obtain informed consent to each step of identification, referral and protection.
- Always assess that decisions made for the child by parents or legal guardians (when present) correspond to the best interests of the child.
- The accompanying adult should be selected by the child.
- Ensure the child survivor's access to services and accompany the child if needed.
- Ensure your safety, the safety of your staff and of survivors and their community.²⁴⁸
- Look out for specific signs of concern such as medical problems such as stomach pains when walking or sitting; chronic itching, pain, discharge, bleeding from the genitals; sexually transmitted diseases; pregnancy.²⁴⁹
- Watch for sudden changes in behaviour, isolation, lack of trust or fear of someone they know well.²⁵⁰

²⁴³ Global Protection Cluster GBV Prevention and Response and IASC, n.d., pgs. 15–18.

²⁴⁴ IOM, n.d.d., pg. 1.

²⁴⁵ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2024, pg. 10.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ IOM, n.d.d., pg. 2.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and USAID, 2024, pg. 91.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

DON'Ts

- Don't write anything down, take photos or record a conversation.²⁵¹
- Don't look for survivors of GBV or victims of violence.²⁵²
- Don't ask directly about violent experiences and do not re-traumatize the child.
- Don't share information about the child with anyone else aside from the child protection referral point or an appropriate available service provider where there is no child protection referral pathway or actor.²⁵³
- Don't be influenced by the organization or personal background. Don't judge or blame.
- Don't insist or push a child survivor to share information and give the opportunity to stop and re-start talking.
- Don't ask a child survivor to share their experiences in the presence of family members or friends.
- Don't touch the child and do not use negative body language.
- Don't make decisions on behalf of the child survivor.²⁵⁴
- Don't share details or talk with colleagues about cases in visible settings.

SAFE REFERRAL FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE: VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

The safe referral of children on the move when potential or actual victims of trafficking requires additional attention and a higher level of safety measures due to high vulnerability and risk of continuous violence or retaliation from traffickers.

Identification and referral of child victims of trafficking should always take into account the child's age, culture, level, development and language. Measures such as the provision of an interpreter and a trained psychologist should be ensured.²⁵⁵

The identification and assessment of the services for children should be completed by the organization managing the case with close inter-organization coordination prior to the child's referral.²⁵⁶

The following information should be carefully verified in advance:²⁵⁷

- Available and unavailable services;
- Capacities such as security measures, confidential data management, translation and cultural mediation;
- Non-discrimination and protection policies and measures;
- Safe data storage and sharing procedures;
- Referral pathways (first contact, information sharing with the potential or actual victim, transfer, escort, reception, etc.);
- Follow up.

²⁵¹ IOM, n.d.d., pg. 2.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2024, pg. 9.

²⁵⁴ IOM, n.d.d., pg. 2.

²⁵⁵ Government of Egypt and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 40.

²⁵⁶ IOM, London School of hygiene and tropical medicine and UN.GIFT, 2009, pg. 117.

²⁵⁷ IOM, London School of hygiene and tropical medicine and UN.GIFT, 2009, pg. 119.

If there is a suspicion that the parents or the members of the family accompanying the child may be involved in trafficking, the following risks should be assessed:

- The involvement of the child's family in trafficking;
- The existence of support mechanisms for the child and the family;
- Re-trafficking of the child once returned to the family;
- The ability of the family to afford treatment for a child with illness or trauma.²⁵⁸

When identification and referral of children on the move, especially when victims of trafficking, involve different agencies and organizations they should ensure close and transparent inter-agency coordination during the different phases of the process.

Good practice – IOM and UNHCR cross-border and transnational referral mechanisms



Children on the move can be identified and referred at different stages of their migration journey. On borders and in transit points it is extremely difficult to guarantee timely identification and assistance of migrant children as local services may not be available and territorial competencies may not be clearly established. In these cases, bilateral and multilateral coordination mechanisms and agreements can powerfully facilitate identification, referral and assistance of vulnerable migrant children. Family tracing and cooperation for voluntary return are also activities that benefit greatly from transnational coordination. The links and contacts established by organizations in different countries can facilitate identity checks and access to services ensuring a continuum of care across countries.

Two initiatives informed by good practices on transnational referral mechanisms have been developed and implemented by IOM and UNHCR:

IOM – The [TACT project](#) aimed to enhance the capacities of the involved countries in the field of protection, assistance and return and reintegration of victims of trafficking also through the development and improvement of national and transnational cooperation mechanisms.

In collaboration with local institutional and non-institutional stakeholders, IOM developed a transnational referral mechanism between France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Albania, Morocco and Ukraine for the return and reintegration of victims of trafficking.

Replicable actions:

- Establishment of a Transnational Referral Mechanism as an operational framework linking different actors from two or more countries involved in identification, referral, assistance, repatriation and monitoring.
- Realization of an online platform providing tools and operational framework for identification of victims of trafficking and their referral.
- Development of a free online directory for Consulates and Embassies with key information on counter trafficking per country and useful contacts for referral.
- Development of a free online repository of key international literature, research and operational tools on counter trafficking for practitioners.

²⁵⁸ Government of Egypt and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 43.

UNHCR – The [Regional Safe Spaces Network \(RSSN\)](#) seeks to improve access to services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, children at risk, people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, people with disabilities, indigenous population and other vulnerable individuals at every phase of the displacement cycle throughout the Americas.

The RSSN can count more than 50 members including United Nations and non-UN agencies, civil society, faith-based organizations, national institutions and community-volunteer networks working in seven countries (Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela).

Replicable actions:

- Development and sharing of a regional service mapping of multisectoral service providers that provide counselling and referrals across borders.
- Creation of an online service mapping for regional network members that provides updated geographic location of active RSSN partners in different countries.
- Development of a customized regional case management and information management toolkit.
- Creation of self-assessment and self-audit tools to measure performance and adjust interventions.
- Organization of regional workshops for RSSN members to ensure training and coordination.

SAFE REFERRAL OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE SURVIVORS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

According to the IASC Guidelines, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) *is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.*²⁵⁹

In the context of safe referral, when the child identified is or could be a child survivor of GBV, specific pathways for the child's referral may be required, especially in a context where the organization in charge of child protection also assists adult beneficiaries.

Specific entry points for the referral will differ based on the legal context of the country. Only child protection specialized staff should receive the report and follow up with the child. If other GBV referral pathways are already established, the child referral system should be aligned with the requirements and standards set by these specialized systems especially regarding interviews and contacts with child survivors of GBV to avoid duplications. Specific and confidential referral tools should be available for the confidential exchange of information.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Global Protection Cluster GBV Prevention and Response and IASC, 2015, pg. 5.

²⁶⁰ International Rescue Committee and UNICEF, 2023, pg. 167.

Good practice – Thematic coordination Groups for vulnerable migrants' protection in Morocco



The GTP (*Groupes Thematique Protection*) are joint coordination working groups established by UNHCR with the collaboration of international and local civil society organizations working on the protection of vulnerable migrants, including children on the move in Morocco. The GTP was initially established in Oujda, Tangier and Casablanca, and was duplicated in the cities of Fes-Meknes, Marrakech and Beni Mellal in response to new migration trends. The GTPs meet monthly to discuss migration trends, exchange information, discuss the needs of vulnerable migrants like children on the move and victims of trafficking, as well as providing safe referral services. In addition to CSOs, the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights, and UNHCR the GTPs invite IOM, UNICEF and local child protection authorities to advise and coordinate on specific topics. GTPs also periodically organize activities such as trainings, awareness sessions, and round tables on specific issues related to migrant protection involving local institutional actors.

TOOLS



- Operational tools on stages of Child Protection case management
[Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - Second Edition](#)
- For more guidance on Child Protection case management for children on the move:
[IOM and UNICEF Registration and Best Interests Assessment Form](#)

Family tracing and assessment

As recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, families, households and legal guardians play a pivotal role in the growth and development of children, regardless of their status. The right to a family and family unity is recognized by art. 9, art. 10 and art. 22 stating respectively that States Parties are engaged to:

- Avoid separation of children from the parents or legal guardians, except when stated by national law or authorities in case unity conflicts with the child's best interests.
- Deal with a child's or parents' request to enter or leave a State for family reunification in a positive, humane, and timely manner.
- Take all necessary actions to assist any child on the territory of the States Parties qualified as refugee or seeking refuge regardless of the child's accompaniment status and to trace the parents or other members of the family to allow reunification with the child's family.

Who

- Family tracing and assessment should be done by local social services in the child's country of origin. In cases where this is not feasible, other child protection organizations and actors and UN agencies at the national and subnational levels may be involved in these activities.²⁶¹ They assist in family tracing and reunification in cooperation with national authorities.²⁶²

²⁶¹ IOM and UNICEF, 2022, pg. 7.

²⁶² IOM, 2024c.

- Once the family is identified and located, the caseworker should verify the information and conduct an evaluation on family and household relationships, living conditions, access to proper care as well as economic and emotional support. During the evaluation the caseworker should also assess challenges and opportunities related to the reintegration of the child within the family if the reunification will occur in a different country. In this case, the migration status of the family and the stability in the host country should be assessed.²⁶³
- When family tracing is completed, the caseworker should integrate conclusions and recommendations in the case and/or the BID file. The caseworker should share the assessment and its conclusions also in case the actor in charge of the family assessment is different.²⁶⁴

When and how

- The family tracing assessment is part of the BID procedure and based on the findings of the BIA²⁶⁵ and can be initiated upon the child's request. The tracing assessment does not necessarily lead to reunification, but can at least restore family ties through communication, when in the best interests of the child.²⁶⁶
- For unaccompanied children, family tracing and reunification must be in the child's best interests. This evaluation should also be made in case of voluntary return, which must be excluded contrary to the best interests of the child.²⁶⁷
- If family reunification is not a viable option, the child's right to remain in contact with the parents should be recognized and supported.²⁶⁸
- If, following the relationship verification and the social assessment, family reunification is determined or suspected of posing a risk to the child, the BID panel must carefully evaluate if family reunification is in the best interests of the child.²⁶⁹

Specific considerations

- If the BIA identifies a possible risk associated with family tracing, it should not be pursued. If there is a need for international protection, the case should be referred to UNHCR or competent actors.²⁷⁰
- Any doubt or reluctance shown by the child, or the family should be assessed and evaluated.²⁷¹

²⁶³ UNHCR, 2021, pgs. 136–137.

²⁶⁴ EU–IOM Knowledge Management Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 1 (accessed 2024).

²⁶⁵ EU–IOM Knowledge Management Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 2 (accessed 2024).

²⁶⁶ Government of Mauritania, IOM, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 11.

²⁶⁷ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 201.

²⁶⁸ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 137.

²⁶⁹ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 159.

²⁷⁰ EU–IOM Knowledge Management Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 1 (accessed 2024).

²⁷¹ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 136.

How to facilitate cross-border coordination during the family tracing assessment?²⁷²



Once migrant children have been identified, an assessment of their family and the identity of their family members in countries of origin should be ensured. In this context, cross-border coordination is essential to ensure family reunification and unity.²⁷³ To do so the case worker should:

- Gather detailed information about the identity of the family from the child and other children or adults accompanying the child;
- Facilitate communication between the child and family members, if requested by the child;
- Verify that other family members reside or are present in the country of transit in cooperation with national authorities;
- Coordinate with the embassy or consulate of the country of origin to assist in verifying the identity of family members and their family relationships. Diplomatic missions can also assist in gathering other information that may be useful in assessing the household and relationships;
- Coordinate with trusted chiefs and members of migrant communities or migrant field workers to trace and collect information about the family;
- Coordinate with UN agencies and international organizations (including faith-based organizations) with missions in countries of origin, transit and destination to verify family members' identities, relationships and support during the family assessment.

TOOLS



- Operational tools on stages of Child Protection case management
[Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - Second Edition](#)
- For more guidance on Child Protection case management for children on the move:
[IOM and UNICEF Registration and Best Interests Assessment Form](#)

Case planning

Once the child has been identified and the BIA has been conducted, a case plan must be developed and implemented by the caseworker in the country where the child was identified:

Who

- After completion of the assessment a case plan should be developed by the case manager in collaboration with the child – if appropriate – considering the child's short, medium and long-term needs and actions.²⁷⁴
- Parents and relatives as well as other service providers can participate to the case planning if necessary and after getting the child's informed assent and the family consent.²⁷⁵

²⁷² IOM, 2024b.

²⁷³ See also the box [Cross-border protection: Case transfer](#).

²⁷⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pgs. 87–89.

²⁷⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 89.

When and how

- The plan should define the strategy to implement the measures decided in the BIA. The plan should also specify objectives, actions, deadlines and responsibilities and it should be accompanied by a follow up and evaluation plan.²⁷⁶
- When the child is accompanied by family or guardians or when the family has been traced, the caseworker must develop a case plan following a family-centred approach, after verifying that the guardian/family does not pose a risk to the child. According to the assessment of the family's capacity to take care of the child, the caseworker should develop actions to support and fill the gaps. The family should be involved during the elaboration of the plan.²⁷⁷
- For children on the move, the case plan is part of the set of recommendations presented to the BID panel prior to implementation.²⁷⁸

TOOL



- Operational tools on stages of Child Protection case management
[Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - Second Edition](#)

Best interests determination

The Best Interests Determination is a formal procedure to ensure long-term decisions affecting a child are taken following strict procedural safeguards and to ensure the child's best interests.²⁷⁹ According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States are the primary entities responsible for conducting the BID. Only in exceptional cases, as a last resort, and when all means have been exhausted and circumstances or procedures do not allow for State authorities to lead the BID, other qualified actors should take the lead in the process, in such case their responsibility should be clearly defined and limited.²⁸⁰

The procedure should be used to provide durable solutions for:

- unaccompanied and separated children;
- accompanied children who have been found to be at risk from their parents or legal or customary caregivers and for whom alternative care arrangements need to be identified.

Who can participate on a BID panel?

- The BID case worker should be an accredited and qualified social worker or professional specialized in child protection.²⁸¹
- The BID Reviewing Officer should assist in the review of cases prior to submission to the BID panel by providing quality control and technical guidance. Depending on the context, BID Reviewing Officers may be senior case workers, case worker supervisors or protection focal points. The appointment of a BID Reviewing Officer is recommended in operations with a particularly high number of cases requiring BIDs.²⁸²

²⁷⁶ Government of the Niger, 2020, pg. 32.

²⁷⁷ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014 , pgs. 59–60.

²⁷⁸ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 90.

²⁷⁹ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 10.

²⁸⁰ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 264.

²⁸¹ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 276.

²⁸² IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2022a, pg. 20.

- The BID Supervisor should prepare, oversee and coordinate the implementation of the BID process, including establishing the BID panel and convening BID meetings. Depending on the context, this role may be covered by a child protection officer or focal point in the relevant actor or agency.²⁸³
- The role of the state in the establishment of BID panels is fundamental. National child protection authorities, such as child protection departments and involved child protection centres and institutions, should lead and – if not possible – participate in BID panels.²⁸⁴
- The BID panel should be composed of multidisciplinary professionals to ensure the inclusion of different factors in the analysis and decision, such as migration, age, and cultural origin, respect for a rights-based and gender approach. The panel should include experts from national institutions, international organizations and civil society. If possible, the panel should be chaired by the child protection authorities in the country where the child is located at the time of the BID.²⁸⁵

When and how

- Once the BIA and the Family tracing assessment are finalized, the caseworker should prepare the BID report and draft preliminary recommendations for the specific case. Peer review is recommended when multiple caseworkers or specialists are involved in the case.²⁸⁶
- The BID case worker should collect and analyse all necessary data to develop recommendations following a sustainable approach. The BID case worker should schedule case planning meetings. The BID case worker may invite to these meetings different actors involved in the case such as the parents or family, the legal guardian, social workers, child specialists, psychologists and child protection authorities to ensure a participative approach.²⁸⁷ Depending on the specific context, the caseworker should plan the participation of actors in advance and convene them in an appropriate manner. With regard to the child and the family, the BID caseworker should organize and prepare the meeting to ensure their full and meaningful participation.²⁸⁸
- Before starting the case file preparation, the following should be appointed: a BID caseworker in charge of gathering information and preparing the file and is usually the caseworker assigned to the child; a BID Reviewing Officer, responsible for a general review; a BID Supervisor responsible for the final review and the communication of any comment or endorsement in writing and motivating the final recommendations.²⁸⁹
- The individual circumstances of the child (accompanied, unaccompanied, separated) or characteristics (age, gender, disability, minority) should be systematically taken into account when determining the best interests of the child.²⁹⁰
- Each BID report should be carefully reviewed by the caseworker for completion and consistency to be presented to the BID Panel. The caseworker should also ensure that information has been gathered in accordance with child safeguarding principles.²⁹¹

²⁸³ IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2022a, pg. 19.

²⁸⁴ IOM, 2024b.

²⁸⁵ IOM, 2023, pg. 52.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 60.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2022a, pg. 5.

²⁹⁰ Save the Children, 2019, pg. 97.

²⁹¹ EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 2 (accessed 2024).

- The BID panel should be nominated to ensure the decision is made according to the following principles: the child is a rights holder; the child's view should be given due weight in the decision; BID Panel members act as an advocate for the child; and BID panel members are objective and neutral.²⁹²
- The presentation of the case, options and recommendation should be overseen by the BID Supervisor. The BID case worker may also attend the panel. The presentation should be followed by a discussion among members of the panel and a decision should be taken to approve or reject the recommendation, as well as the follow up actions voted on by consensus. If a decision cannot be made, it may be deferred.²⁹³
- The BID panel should decide on the long-term solution in the best interests of the child. The panel must consider factors that are often contradictory, must include documentation justifying their decisions and why they are in the best interests of the child.²⁹⁴
- The final BID decision must include and justify measures in the best interests of the child detailing whether the child will remain in the hosting country, return voluntarily to the country of origin or resettle in a third country. The BID decision should include information about the implementation of protection measures and sustainable solutions proposed. An action plan based on input from the child and the child's guardian should be also included.²⁹⁵
- If it is not possible to establish a BID panel, simplified procedures may be considered, consisting of reducing or adjusting the panel membership or replacing the panel with a reviewing officer with child protection expertise. The decision to use a simplified procedure should be taken by the most senior representative of the agency/actor conducting the procedure. If the panel membership is adjusted, remote participation of members may be arranged. If the panel is replaced by a reviewer, the reviewer should be the most senior child protection specialist working for the relevant actor or agency.²⁹⁶
- In the simplified procedure, the BID case worker is responsible for assessing the case, gathering information and writing the BID report. The BID case worker should submit the BID report and recommendations to the BID supervisor of the reduced BID panel or to the reviewing officer within 48 hours of the decision to use a simplified procedure. The reduced BID Panel/ Reviewing Officer will provide feedback, decide on the case and determine follow up actions within 24 hours of receiving the report.²⁹⁷

²⁹² IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2022a, pg. 8.

²⁹³ IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2022a, pg. 9.

²⁹⁴ Government of Mauritania, IOM, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 15.

²⁹⁵ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 283.

²⁹⁶ UNHCR, 2021, pgs. 188–189.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

Specific considerations

- Given the existing relationship of trust, the caseworker should keep the child informed about the process and decisions and should ensure the child's participation throughout the procedure in a child-friendly manner and depending on the age and maturity of the child.²⁹⁸
- The participation of children in the BIP should be ensured when it is in their best interests according to their age and maturity. The views and wishes of the child should be taken into account when making decisions about long-term protection solutions, without putting pressure on them. The opinion of the child can also be shared by guardians who can submit further statements to ensure the child's views is clarified to the BID panel and considered in BID report.²⁹⁹
- If, during the BID procedure, the child or the family expresses a wish to seek international protection or status determination on other grounds under national law, or if information emerges indicating that the child or the family may be eligible, appropriate referrals to relevant actors should be ensured.³⁰⁰
- At all stages of the BID procedure, the child and/or the family should have access to pathways such as international protection, other status determination procedures or voluntary return.³⁰¹

Good practice – Interagency standard operating procedures for the implementation of the Best interests' determination process for children at risk in Libya



In 2022 IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF cooperated in the elaboration of joint Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure the best interests assessment and determination of vulnerable migrant children, especially for unaccompanied and separated children.

The SOPs compile detailed good practices following international standards on BIA and BID with the aim of establishing an agreed framework and formal interagency process related to the determination of assisted migrant children's best interests when making durable solutions.

The interagency SOPs are tailored to the Libyan context and foresee specific orientations in line with international standards on child protection regarding:

- Steps and phases of the BID procedure;
- Composition and responsibilities of the BID Panel;
- BID Panel and the decision-making process;
- A BID simplified procedure for cases of specific risks and need for urgent action.

²⁹⁸ Government of Mauritania, IOM, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 16.

²⁹⁹ IOM and UNICEF, 2019, pg. 279.

³⁰⁰ Save the Children, 2019, pg. 97.

³⁰¹ Save the Children, 2019, pg. 94.

How to ensure cross-border coordination for best interests process and continuum of care?³⁰²



Children on the move are characterized by a high degree of mobility. It is possible that during the delays of a BIA or BID, migrant children continue their journey and cross borders, leaving the organizations responsible for their protection unable to follow up the case.³⁰³ To enhance cross-border coordination on BIA and BID, organizations should:

- Map and regularly update national child protection authorities, UN agencies, international actors (including faith-based organizations), CSOs and service providers active on child protection and identification of children on the move and exchange information among the concerned countries.
- Collaborate with UN agencies and international actors with case management database to facilitate case tracking.
- Foster harmonization of national standard operating procedures (SOPs), case management tools and monitoring matrices in the countries concerned.
- Facilitate the creation of a network of child protection focal points and dedicated communication channels.
- Collaborate with national and migrant associations involved in national and regional child protection networks.
- When in the best interests of the child, engage families, caregivers and legal guardians in case tracking and follow up on cases.
- Once a child has been identified, share case files according to confidentiality and data collection and management policies to facilitate case transfer and follow up.
- Transfer the case to a child protection caseworker in the country where the child was located to review and update the BIA report or gather information to update the BID report.
- Ensure case management according to harmonized SOPs in the new country and refer the child for continuum of care.

TOOLS



- Operational tools on stages of Child Protection case management
[Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - Second Edition](#)
- For more guidance on Child Protection case management for children on the move:
[IOM and UNICEF Registration and Best Interests Assessment Form](#)

³⁰² IOM, 2024b.

³⁰³ See also the box [Cross-border protection: Case transfer](#).

Plan implementation and follow up

Case implementation and follow up is key to help stakeholders to determine the adequacy of decisions and recommendations mentioned in the BID and to assess adjustments to the case plan are necessary.

Who

- Based on the recommendations and actions outlined in the case plan, the caseworker should assess whether the services needed for the child can be provided in-house or if a referral is required to ensure the child's access to adequate services. The following are examples of services that may be offered to children on the move in a sustainable case plan:
 - Psychosocial support
 - Temporary and/or alternative care (shelter, health, food, clothing, education, etc.)
 - Family tracing/reunification
 - Reintegration
 - Legal assistance
 - Family and/or community mediation
 - Family support
 - Support for survivors of gender-based violence.³⁰⁴
- The case follow up should be carried out by stakeholders designated by each agency or organization. It should begin after the initial case registration and continue until the case is closed.³⁰⁵ In the case of BID, follow up activities should be reported and coordination with the panel coordinator should be ensured. When a case is referred to different organization or services, the caseworker should coordinate with them to document activities.³⁰⁶

When and how

- When a referral to different organizations or actors is needed, updated services mapping and safe referral pathways³⁰⁷ should clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of each organization involved in the process. The measures foreseen and the actors engaged should ensure that referring the vulnerable children to other entities does not put them at risk or worsen the health or safety of the individual. To this end preparatory activities should ensure that the actors identified are adequate, safe, trustworthy and competent.³⁰⁸
- Referral should be done only after obtaining the child's and family's permission and when the organization cannot provide the needed services.³⁰⁹
- For complex cases, a case conference may be organized by the case manager to bring together caregivers and other relevant stakeholders involved in the case to discuss specific risks associated with the case and responses. The conference may be held at any time during the case management process.³¹⁰

³⁰⁴ Government of the Niger, 2020, pg. 33.

³⁰⁵ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 64.

³⁰⁶ Government of Mauritania, IOM, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 16.

³⁰⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 92.

³⁰⁸ IOM, London School of hygiene and tropical medicine and UN.GIFT, 2009, pg. 117.

³⁰⁹ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 61.

³¹⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 92.

- Follow up and review meetings should be periodically held involving the case manager, experts or supervisors if needed as well as the child and the family when appropriate. Review meetings should take place at least every 3 months.³¹¹
- During follow up and review meetings activities can be scheduled depending on the case, specific needs and risks. The caseworker should be responsible of their implementation and record. The following cases are examples of activities :³¹²
 - Meetings with the child and/or family to record improvements or challenges;
 - Home visits or scheduled home visits to ensure direct service delivery and follow up, or to review situations where the reliability of caregivers needs to be checked;
 - Phone calls to ensure close follow up early in the process and facilitate follow up in remote areas;
 - Communication with service providers to confirm service delivery and quality;
 - Informal community-based follow up when community actors are involved in the case plan.
- Monitoring of the case implementation should be planned and carried out in meaningful moments to measure progress towards objectives. The activity plan implementation should be evaluated, ensuring that the child's needs are in line with the plan. The number and frequency of assessments depend on the level of risk to which the child is exposed to and it should decrease as the child's situation improves.³¹³

TOOL



- Operational tools on stages of Child Protection case management
[Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - Second Edition](#)

Case closure

Case closure represents the final phase of the case management procedure, and it normally happens once the recommendations have been implemented and the child protection issue related to the case has been resolved.³¹⁴ Otherwise, it can also be motivated by some specific events that may happen, for instance:

- The family or the child do not wish to continue benefitting from support and there are no reasons for actors in charge of the child's protection to oppose the choice;
- The child's location is unknown despite efforts to find them;
- The death of the child;
- The child has turned 18 and the case should be transferred to competent authorities.³¹⁵

Who

- Before case closure, the caseworker should prepare the beneficiary sharing all useful information and coordinating with other service providers to ensure continuity of care when needed.³¹⁶
- The case manager should discuss the case closure and its details with the case supervisor who should give approval before informing the child and their caregivers.³¹⁷

³¹¹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 93.

³¹² Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 64.

³¹³ Government of the Niger, 2020, pg. 34.

³¹⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 93.

³¹⁵ UNHCR, 2021, pgs. 82–83.

³¹⁶ IOM, 2023, pgs. 44–45.

³¹⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 94.

- Children and caregivers should be involved in the decision-making process for case closure. In addition, channels should be in place for them to provide confidential feedback on the case management process.³¹⁸

When and how

- The case should not be closed right after the implementation of the case plan, but after a transition period during which follow up visits and review meetings should be carried out.³¹⁹
- Following the end of the activities set in the case plan, visits, assessments and/or an evaluation should be carried out to ensure the goals set in the case plan are concretely met and the child's well-being can be ensured.³²⁰
- Follow up activities should be conducted within 3 months after the closure to monitor the child's safety and well-being.³²¹
- Once the case is closed, all documentation related to it should be safely stored for a period of time according to the applicable confidentiality and information-sharing standards as well as data protection protocols and national legislation.³²²

Specific considerations

- Information about the case closure should be notified to responsible agencies and other stakeholders involved in the best interests procedure to facilitate coordination of case management, protection and assistance services.³²³
- For children approaching the age of majority, specific solutions in their best interest should be sought in some cases, as their eligibility for protection may change. If the case manager considers that the child is still at risk at the age of 18/majority, the need for short-term or long-term assistance should be assessed. If short-term assistance is needed, the case manager should continue to work on the case until the risks have been addressed. If long-term help is needed, the case manager should identify other service providers who can help the child after the age of majority.³²⁴

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Government of the Niger, 2020, pg. 35.

³²⁰ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 68.

³²¹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 94.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ UNHCR, 2021, pg. 122.

³²⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 95.

CROSS-BORDER PROTECTION: CASE TRANSFER

The transfer of a case can be internal or external and it should be done only when necessary and under specific circumstances:³²⁵

- A child in the care of a case management system moves to a different location.
- The organization or caseworker who has been following the case is no longer considered suitable to or cannot for other reasons continue protecting the child.

In these cases, the full responsibility of the case including planning, implementation and follow up is transferred to another organization, agency or department.³²⁶ The decision regarding the transfer should be carefully analysed and balanced with the best interests of the child. Before identifying the new organization, an assessment should be conducted to ensure the child will receive better assistance.³²⁷ The case manager should inform the child and caregivers of the details and reasons for the transfer and any additional useful information.³²⁸ The case manager should plan and provide a complete and detailed handover of the case plan and its implementation to the new manager or organization, following clear procedures and always ensuring confidentiality.³²⁹ Before sharing documents and information the assent or consent of the child and the consent of the parents or guardian should be obtained.³³⁰ The case manager should accompany the child and the family – if present – through the transition.³³¹

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

After immediate and urgent needs have been met, durable solutions specific to the migration context should be considered for each child. In particular, a durable solution is also a comprehensive, safe and sustainable solution when it prioritizes the long-term well-being of the child and ensures an environment conducive to the child's development and rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³³²

The expression of sustainable solutions for children on the move is used to indicate all different options that can be taken once the BID has been done and terminated to ensure the child is oriented towards a long-term solution. These options should ensure the child's development following the rights provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and away from any form of harm. Examples of sustainable solutions include:

- voluntary return and reintegration;
- family reunification in the country of origin, in a host country or a third country;
- integration in a host community;
- resettlement in a third country.

³²⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pgs. 95–96.

³²⁶ Global Protection Cluster – Child Protection, 2014, pg. 68.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 96.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 95.

³³¹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024, pg. 96.

³³² Save the Children, 2019, pg. 14.

The BID is the adequate tool necessary to identify a sustainable solution and ensure its implementation when the case is referred to unaccompanied and separated children or accompanied children who have been found to be at risk from their parents or legal or customary caregivers and for whom alternative care arrangements need to be identified.

In the BID decision, the panel should also identify the national or local authority that should monitor the implementation of the decision taken in the best interests of the child.

ALTERNATIVE CARE FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN

Alternative care solutions are applicable for all children without parental care or at risk of losing it, including when located in a different country than their usual residency³³³ like in the case of unaccompanied and separated migrant children.

Different forms of formal and informal alternative care options are foreseen at international level such as family-based care, residential care and supervised independent living arrangements for children.³³⁴

During the BIA or BID procedure and the evaluation of the appropriate alternative care solution, family and community-based options should be preferred.³³⁵

Migrant children can find themselves in need of temporary care solutions in countries of transit or destination or upon voluntary return in their countries of origin in cases where reintegration in their family wasn't in their best interests or wasn't feasible.³³⁶ In such cases, foster families and family-based alternative care arrangements, such as host families, should be the first choice. Placement in host families should only be considered where a system for proper screening, selection, training, monitoring and support is in place and sustained by national child protection actors.³³⁷

In case of need of temporary care, child protection facilities can be considered as temporary measures. Child protection facilities should be state-run or formally recognized and monitored by institutional actors. The establishment of specific centres for children on the move should be avoided.³³⁸ They should ensure a child friendly environment and the permanence of the child should not exceed 2 months.³³⁹

National authorities in collaboration with relevant UN agencies and actors should promote the harmonized adoption of minimum international standards for child care facilities to ensure quality services and qualified staff to support children on the move.³⁴⁰

The proposed accommodation should be child-specific and spaces for boys and girls should also be ensured following gender-specific standards and norms creating safe emotional and physical spaces for girls.³⁴¹

³³³ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 6.

³³⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 6.

³³⁵ United Nations General Assembly, 2010, pg. 5.

³³⁶ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 3 (accessed 2024).

³³⁷ IOM and UNICEF, 2022, pg. 7.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, 2023, pg. 6.

³⁴⁰ IOM and UNICEF, 2022, pg. 7.

³⁴¹ IMC and IRC, 2020, pg. 13.

Childcare facilities should also effectively facilitate referrals and provide access to child protection services for all accommodated children. In particular, quality health care and psychosocial support should be provided, as well as education, vocational training and recreational activities.³⁴²

In contexts where specialized child care facilities are not available and children are placed in ordinary public facilities, separate quarters should be provided for boys and girls and they should not be placed with adults except for small children.³⁴³

When placing an unaccompanied or separated child in a temporary child care facility during the delays of family tracing assessment of the best interests process, the legal responsibility should be given to a trusted person or entity to ensure decisions on the case are authorized and shared with the child. National authorities should ensure that a mechanism is in place to allow the appointment of a person or an entity as legal guardian.³⁴⁴

While the child is in temporary alternative care, the caseworker should start or continue the family tracing assessment. In case the family is untraceable despite all efforts and/or family reunification is not a viable option in the best interests of the child, a permanent alternative care solution as foster care should be adopted.³⁴⁵

The medium- and long-term decision regarding foster care should be taken in the context of a BID procedure to make sure the child's best interests the primary consideration.³⁴⁶ In parallel, children should be informed about the foster care system and their rights.³⁴⁷

Supervision mechanisms and support for foster families should be put in place to ensure the well-being of the child. Additional visits and activities should take place in case concerns are raised.³⁴⁸

TOOL



- IOM and UNICEF [Minimum Standards for Temporary Child Protection Care Facilities and Foster Care, in Countries of Transit / Destination During the Process of Family Tracing and Assessment / BIA / BID and/or as Alternative Care in Countries of Origin](#)

Good practice – The Government of Mauritania formal foster family system



The Government of Mauritania and UN agencies have established tools and procedures to ensure migrant children access to temporary foster care. Based on the principle of non-discrimination, the mechanism is accessible to national and migrant unaccompanied and separated children. Host families are identified by partner CSOs who produce a first evaluation report that is presented to the joint evaluation committee composed by child protection institutional actors, representatives from local CSOs, and representatives from UN agencies such as IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF.

The selected families are supported technically and economically to ensure the well-being, development, education, and living conditions of the child.

³⁴² EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, 2023, pgs. 8–9.

³⁴³ IOM and UNICEF, 2022, pg. 7.

³⁴⁴ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, 2023, pg. 6.

³⁴⁵ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, 2023, pg. 10.

³⁴⁶ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, 2023, pg. 13.

³⁴⁷ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, 2023, pg. 15.

³⁴⁸ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, 2023, pg. 15.

CHILD SAFEGUARDING

Child safeguarding, including SEA, ensures that all children who come into contact with operators of organizations providing assistance are protected from direct or indirect harm as a result of any action taken by any staff or non-staff member in the context of project implementation, or as a result of any organizational policy or practice. Complaints and feedback mechanisms should be established and potential violations should be reported through appropriate channels. A zero-tolerance approach to child exploitation, abuse, violence and other forms of harm should be ensured in all programmes and actions.

Organizations and facilities should sensitize and develop adequate codes of conduct, procedures and safeguarding policies informed by the following six PSEA core principles developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in 2019:³⁴⁹

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Any sexual relationship between those providing humanitarian assistance and protection and a person benefitting from such humanitarian assistance and protection that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he or she must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.

³⁴⁹ IASC, 2019.

Good Practice – Alternative care – The Alternative care model for migrant, asylum seeking and refugee children and adolescents in Mexico developed by the Mexican National Welfare System and UNICEF



In 2019 UNICEF and the Mexican National Welfare System, Vulnerable Persons Support Unit engaged in a joint effort to end migrant children detention and identify adequate alternative care solutions for migrant, asylum-seeker and refugee children in Mexico. According to the scheme, the migrant child or asylum-seeker is identified and accommodated in a temporary reception centre for maximum 45 days. During this stay a caseworker assess the child's situation and primary needs to understand what form of alternative care could be more appropriate to the case. An "individual plan" is developed on a case-by-case basis. In the temporary reception centre each child is followed by a team composed of educators, psychologists, social workers, lawyers and other operators. The team assists the child and refers the case to specialized professionals (e.g. psychiatrists for children displaying mental issues). Following analysis during this first temporary accommodation, the team refers the child to long-term solutions, such as:

- Fostering with extended family
- Fostering with unrelated family
- Residential care in social assistance centres
- Residential care in small groups
- Family reintegration
- Independent living

Good Practice – Alternative care – Identification and referral of migrant children to national child protection delegates in Tunisia

In Tunisia, once vulnerable migrant children have been identified, particularly by border officials, they are referred to national child protection authorities or IOM for protection and support. Tunisian child protection delegates assist in the identification of unaccompanied and separated migrant children and carry out risk assessments. The delegates then refer the children to family judges who, with the support of social workers, decide on alternative placement in cooperation with organizations such as IOM and civil society.³⁵⁰

VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

Voluntary return and reintegration are a sustainable solution for migrant children when in line with their best interests and wishes, based on child rights' and when they doesn't pose a risk of harm or danger in line with the non-refoulement and do no harm principle. Sustainable reintegration³⁵¹ in the family or community of origin paired with adequate support is a key element of the return process, allowing the child returnee to develop into adulthood within an environment that promotes their rights.

In the case of voluntary return of a child, social workers in the country of origin should take the lead in case management, monitoring and the reintegration process.

³⁵⁰ International Detention Coalition, Robert Bosch Stiftung and UNICEF, 2024, pg. 41.

³⁵¹ According to the IOM Reintegration Handbook: "Sustainable reintegration is achieved when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability, and psychosocial well-being that make their further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity".

Where family reunification is not in the best interests of the child or is not feasible, family-based alternative care options should be sought in the country of identification and/or origin. UN agencies and actors involved in family reunification and return, as well as their partners, can provide support in line with existing national frameworks for alternative care, and national child protection authorities should take the lead in deciding which alternative option should be pursued.³⁵²

In the case of unaccompanied and separated children, the reintegration assistance should be based on the recommendations agreed by the BID panel.³⁵³ The involvement of national child protection actors in the reintegration process is critical. The BID for return and reintegration should provide sustainable solutions for long-term protection decided with the child's participation in the host country and prior to the child's return.³⁵⁴

Risk factors such as trafficking and exploitation should be identified and assessed through individual risk assessments and addressed via risk management plans if significant risks are identified by caseworkers. In some cases, even family members and caregivers can be a source of threat for migrant children during their journey or even upon return. As a result, risk mitigation measures must be identified whenever IOM or other child protection partners proceed with the return of a child.

Where possible, the reintegration assistance is prepared as soon as the return decision is taken.

The caseworker should elaborate a reintegration plan together with the child whether unaccompanied and separated or with a family. The plan must assess specific parameters such as the economic needs related to reintegration; social needs including housing, social services and psychosocial needs.³⁵⁵ The duration of the reintegration process is usually determined by the regular assessment of the child's case.

During voluntary return and reintegration phases, coordination between child protection actors and institutions in host countries and countries of origin should continue while respecting confidentiality.³⁵⁶

Monitoring of the reintegration process should be ensured for at least 2 years or until the child's living conditions and life are stable and sustainable. Specific child-sensitive indicators should be developed with the participation of children, families and stakeholders to assess the sustainability of the reintegration process.³⁵⁷

TOOLS



- IOM and UNICEF [Reintegration Assistance Plan Template for Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#) and the [Reintegration Plan Template for Families with Children](#)

³⁵² IOM and UNICEF, 2022, pg. 10.

³⁵³ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., pg. 1 (accessed 2024).

³⁵⁴ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 212.

³⁵⁵ EU-IOM Knowledge Hub, IOM and UNICEF, n.d., accessed 2024.

³⁵⁶ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 213.

³⁵⁷ IOM and UNICEF, 2020, pg. 242.

Good practice – IOM Assisted Voluntary Return And Reintegration (AVRR) for migrant children and cross-border coordination



According to IOM's procedure for voluntary return and reintegration, predetermined steps are followed to ensure the best interests of the child once the child has voluntarily expressed his/her will to return to the country of origin:

Step 1 – Family tracing and family assessment in the country of origin: IOM AVRR team in the country of departure and IOM AVRR team in the country of origin collaborate to assess the family's willingness and capacity to receive and care for the child upon return. Written consent of parent/legal guardian for child's return to the country of origin is requested at this stage. Proof of the parents' identity is also required, as well as birth certificates or other official documents confirming the child's family relationship.

Step 2 – BID administrative or judicial procedure in the country of departure: IOM's AVRR team in the country of departure coordinates with institutional or administrative actors that conduct the best interest determination process and make a formal decision stating that the return is a viable option in the child's best interests.

Step 3 – Preparation of the child's return: an individual reintegration plan is developed according to the child's wishes and best interests by the IOM AVRR teams in countries of departure and origin. In country of departure IOM AVRR teams, family, parents the legal guardians as well as embassies and consulates of the origin countries coordinate to ensure all needed documentation for the child's departure, travel and arrival.

Step 4 – Travel: For children under 15 years of age an escort is mandatory and travel is planned only when needed authorizations are received and assistance is arranged. The IOM AVRR team establish contact with relatives in the country of origin beforehand and remain in contact during travel. Members of the AVRR team in the country of departure must accompany children aged 15 to 17 to the airport and through the check. The AVRR teams in the countries of departure and origin must coordinate with the child's family for pick up at destination.

Step 5 – The child's reintegration process – the IOM AVRR teams in the country of departure and origin coordinate to implement the individual reintegration plan which facilitates the child's reintegration at school, vocational trainings and jobs for young migrants, and within his/her family and community. The process of reintegration is closely monitored by caseworkers appointed within the IOM AVRR team in the country of origin.

TOOL



- Operational tools on stages of Child Protection case management
[Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - Second Edition](#)

► Children on the move case management resource handout

Repository

- Child Protection Area of Responsibility. [Case Management Resource Handout \(Dec2020\)](#)
- The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. [Child Protection Case Management Resource Hub](#)
- The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. [Unaccompanied and Separated Children Task Force Resources](#)

Case management guidance and tools

- GBV AoR Global Protection Cluster. [Cross-Border Care, Safety and Risk Mitigation for Child and Adolescent Survivors on the Move: Practical Guidance for Frontline Services and Workers](#)
- Global Protection Cluster GBV Prevention and Response and IASC. [GBV Pocket Guide](#)
- Global Protection Cluster GBV Prevention and Response, IASC and UNICEF. [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action – Child Protection](#)
- IFRC. [Hotline in a Box](#)
- IOM and UNICEF. [Reintegration Handbook: Module 6 - A Child Rights Approach to The Sustainable Reintegration of Migrant Children and Families](#)
- IOM. [Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers](#)
- IOM. [Case Management Guidelines](#)
- IOM, Save the Children and UNICEF. [Return Counselling of Children and Their Families](#)
- IOM. [Technical Note: Adaptation of Child Protection Case Management to the COVID-19 Pandemic V2](#)
- UNICEF. [Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse Resource Package](#)
- Plan International [Remote Case Management Session Guidance for Caseworkers](#)
- Save the Children. [Psychological First Aid Training Manual for Child Practitioners](#)
- Save the Children. [Durable Solutions for Children Toolkit](#)
- The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. [Inter-Agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection - 2nd Edition](#)
- The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)
- The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. [Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\) Template](#)
- The IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse
- UNHCR. [BIP Toolbox](#)
- 2021 UNHCR [Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child](#)
- UNICEF. [Protection From Sexual Exploitation And Abuse \(PSEA\): A Practical Guide and Toolkit for UNICEF and Partners](#)

Trainings

- IOM e-course [Identification and protection of children and youth, migrants and refugees in Morocco \(french\)](#)
- IOM e-course on [Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse](#)
- The alliance for child protection in Humanitarian Action. [Child Protection Case Management Training Package for Caseworkers in Humanitarian Settings](#)
- UNICEF e-course on [child protection case management for front liners \(Lebanon\)](#)
- UNICEF e-course on [child protection case management for social workers and caseworkers \(Lebanon\)](#)
- UNICEF e-course [Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse \(PSEA\)](#)

► Recommendations

The following recommendations are the result of a regional research activity that included a desk review of the most current literature on protection of children on the move combined with field data collection and analysis. Feedback from key national and international actors engaged in migration and child protection in North Africa and along key migration routes are also integrated.

The recommendations are divided by thematic focus. The recommendations informed by North African key stakeholders involved in migration and child protection contribute toward the practical subregionalization of promising practices, lessons learned and insights toward overcoming challenges to the continuum of care and route-based protection of children on the move within and from North Africa.

The right to identity, birth registration and family tracing

Governance and advocacy

- Facilitate implementation of child protection tools and mechanisms to ensure timely access to justice, remedies and protection for children on the move. Strengthen partnerships between migration, border management and child protection stakeholders at the national level for safe identification and referral.
- Promote “one-step, one-visit” systems to allow simultaneous birth registration and certification.
- Continue to promote secure and cost-effective digitalization to facilitate accessibility and improve service delivery.
- Foster harmonization of birth registration procedures and recognition of identity documents.
- Facilitate communication between institutions in transit and destination countries, embassies, consulates, and civil and birth registration institutions in countries of origin.
- Establish frameworks and procedures to recognize the equivalence of foreign official documents, such as marriage certificates, to ensure birth registration.
- Develop bilateral, regional and transnational cooperation agreements/practices to facilitate the exchange and recognition of identity documents of children on the move and migrant parents among countries of origin, transit and destination.
- Develop and disseminate official instruments (e.g. memos) on the right to identity of children on the move and on birth registration and certification.
- Simplify birth certification and registration national procedures and ensure free access for vulnerable communities, such as migrant parents and mothers.

- Strengthen advocacy and cooperation to facilitate access to identity documents for children outside the formal birth registration process.
- Reduce statelessness by adapting national citizenship laws and making them accessible to children on the move.
- Share information and sensitize migrant children, caregivers, and both migrant and host communities to improve the safe identification and referral of children on the move.
- Ensure that women on the move are systematically sensitized and informed about birth registration and national procedures in the country where they are.
- Raise awareness among communities and families in countries of origin, transit and destination about birth registration and its implications for social protection and access to services.
- Sensitize national child protection institutions and national authorities involved in border management on the right to family unit and family tracing guidelines.
- Establish frameworks and procedures to facilitate the involvement of communities and community leaders in verifying the identity documents of children on the move and foreign migrant parents of young undocumented children.
- Revise and expand the interpretation of family in child protection procedures. Include other trusted members of communities and large families following a culturally sensitive approach allowing unaccompanied and separated children to join relatives and members of the communities of origin who cared for them.
- Promote national, regional and transnational interagency and stakeholder cooperation to harmonize legal frameworks, guidelines, data collection and monitoring for birth registration and identification of children on the move.
- Promote a whole-of-government approach that involves ministries of justice, interior, social affairs, education, and health on protection policy for migrant children design and implementation including birth registration and identification.
- Integrate birth registration with National Referral Mechanisms to facilitate early identification and referral of at-risk migrant children.
- Sensitize and train front-line workers (police, border guards, immigration officials, military, security) on child protection frameworks and case management to ensure rights-based identification and referral to child protection authorities at subnational or national level.

Case management

- Train and support peer sensitization of members of CSOs and communities on the identification and referral of migrant children to subnational or national child protection authorities in accordance with international standards on child protection case management.
- Develop and disseminate practical common tools to facilitate migrant children's identification.
- Support and engage national social services and actors involved on the case management of vulnerable migrants and child protection to establish priority and confidential communication channels for the verification of documentation and birth registration of migrant children.
- Build the capacity of actors involved in migration, protection, voluntary return and reintegration – with a focus on front-line workers – on birth certification procedures in countries of origin, including delays and requirements foreseen by national legislations.
- Ensure communication and involvement of diplomatic missions of countries of origin in national and cross-border coordination for the identification of migrant children and family tracing.
- Where necessary and safe, coordinate with national authorities and/or diplomatic missions of countries of origin to involve trusted members of migrant communities and community leaders in national and cross-border identification of migrant children and family tracing.

- Develop and strengthen services in transit countries to accompany migrant parents who wish to return to their countries of origin in the process of registering births in the country of origin as part of their reintegration process.
- Sustainably strengthen inclusive national child protection systems and services with capacitated staffing.

Best interest procedure

Governance and advocacy

- Standardize and harmonize national Best Interest Assessment (BIA) and Best Interest Determination (BID) procedures with international child protection guidelines and recommendations, including safe identification and referral, family tracing and sustainable alternative solutions.
- Raising awareness of international and legal frameworks on migration and child protection among migrant populations.
- Support national child protection authorities' participation and ownership of BID procedures and panels.
- Mainstream non-discrimination and inclusion principles, with a focus on gender and disability, into legal frameworks, technical guidelines, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and case management tools for child protection.
- Support existing BID panels to include all available sustainable solutions when deciding a case.
- Develop and implement legal frameworks, tools, and mechanisms for the rapid and systematic appointment of legal guardianship for unaccompanied and separated migrant children. Ensure identification of suitable and trusted guardians, reduce the number of cases per guardian, and monitor case management of guardians.
- Ensure the collection of reliable, disaggregated, and comparable data on unaccompanied and separated migrant children and coordinated M&E actions based on common quantitative and qualitative indicators to allow an evidence-based response for children on the move. Qualitative indicators should be determined through consultations with children on the move and caregivers.
- Promote the development and implementation of border management procedures child-rights oriented, following the best interest principle.
- Support family tracing and reunification of separated migrant parents and siblings in legal frameworks, public policies, and technical guidance on case management.
- Develop and disseminate awareness-raising and training materials on the BIP for all child protection stakeholders at national and local level.
- Develop or improve the existent monitoring system for BIDs at the national, regional, and international levels.
- Develop and coordinate monitoring systems on BIAs undertaken by child protection authorities and case management stakeholders involved in the best interest process.
- Ensure adequate financial and technical support to transnational, regional, and national coordination mechanisms (e.g. joint working groups) focused on protection of vulnerable migrants.
- Promote advocacy for the adoption of specific common guidelines and tools to ensure the durable protection of children on the move, including internally displaced children.

Case management

- Harmonize and consolidate child protection tools across countries in the region, especially those related to child protection legal frameworks.
- Ensure child protection caseworkers are supported by skilled multidisciplinary teams including health-care providers, psychologists and gender experts.
- Ensure a child-rights based approach in case management and non-discrimination and inclusion principles are respected throughout case management and best interest determination processes. There should be a specific focus on gender, disability and mental health.
- Ensure national, regional and transnational coordination of working groups to facilitate the continuum of care for vulnerable cases requiring follow up.
- Provide and monitor referrals to specialized organizations and/or case workers based on the best interests of children that are survivors of gender-based violence.
- Ensure child protection caseworkers are trained and sensitized on prevention and child-friendly responses to caring for children on the move survivors of abuse, violence and neglect.
- Build the capacity of stakeholders involved in child protection (e.g. government officials, specialized national authorities, social workers) and on migration, human rights, child protection (legal frameworks and case management guidelines), trafficking and smuggling as well as gender and gender-based violence.

Cross-border coordination and continuum of care

Governance and advocacy

- Institutionalize a whole-of-government/whole-of-society approach to cross-border child protection coordination, involving national institutional actors, CSOs and international actors such as UN agencies.
- Establish system strengthening mechanisms, such as a national coordinating body led by relevant ministries to align policies, resources and operational mechanisms, and multi-stakeholder forums to improve coordination and continuum of care.
- Integrate and harmonize national legal frameworks on child rights and child protection regulations as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements on migration and border management.
- Mainstream child protection in cross-border coordination mechanisms and meetings at national, regional and transnational levels.
- Map, analyse and update regional and national child protection and migration legal frameworks, strategies, and tools including for case management and monitoring. Identify common ground and discrepancies that need to be addressed.
- Map and update key national and local stakeholders involved in border management, migrant assistance, and child protection located along migration routes (such as local government, national authorities, border control, CSOs and front-line workers).
- Develop case management coordination mechanisms and guidelines (for instance Standard Operating Procedures) for transnational, regional, national and local coordination. Disseminate this guidance to child protection authorities and law enforcement actors, especially those involved in border management or in direct engagement with children and families.
- Create joint multilateral committees / mechanisms involving key child protection and migration stakeholders to coordinate and cooperate on protection of children on the move.
- Support the establishment of formal or operational bilateral, regional and transnational agreements to cooperate on protection of migrant children.
- Ensure adequate human and financial resources to implement coordination frameworks and case management guidelines on the protection of children on the move.

- Ensure the collection and analysis of reliable, disaggregated, and comparable data to assess the migration patterns, risks, and vulnerabilities of children on the move as well as the capacities and resources to provide cross-border protection and a continuum of care.
- Ensure that SOPs are child-rights-based and gender-oriented integrating child protection into border management and immigration procedures and systems.
- Develop and disseminate common tools and standards (e.g. bi-multilateral memos; notes on legal interpretation, etc.) to ensure a harmonized understanding and application of national and international child protection norms and procedures as well as cultural and customary principles.

Case management

- Establish bi- and multi- lateral joint coordination to strengthen national child protection case management, inclusive of CSOs and international organizations toward harmonizing frameworks, case management procedures, and tools for the protection of children on the move within and across borders.
- Disseminate transnational, regional, national and local child protection SOPs that include guidance on communication and coordination among stakeholders. The SOPs should include gender-specialized support for migrant girls and women.
- Map international and regional stakeholders (for instance international NGOs, UN agencies, religious organizations, etc.) to enhance their internal and international coordination and communication mechanisms regarding cases of children on the move and their protection needs.
- Map and update accredited and reliable stakeholders, services and providers along migration routes to enhance assistance to and protection of migrants in vulnerable situations, including children victims of trafficking, smuggled children and survivors of gender-based violence.
- Strengthen the capacity of these mapped stakeholders on migration, child protection, counter trafficking and gender-based violence.
- Ensure effective communication and clear information on national and local legal and customary practices by creating common tools such as whole-of-government/whole-of-society SOPs and bi- or multilateral technical notes, involving stakeholders in countries of origin, countries of transit and possible countries of further movement, to support BIA and BID assessments and inform available sustainable solutions and implement them.
- Establish common cross-border mechanisms among child protection actors to exchange information, facilitate case transfer and synergize in tracing families and assessing.
- Ensure regular involvement of diplomatic representatives from country of origin in the various stages of case management.

Trafficking of children on the move

Advocacy and governance

- Promote dialogue and exchange on child protection legal frameworks and policies focused on counter trafficking.
- Share information and train relevant national authorities and institutions on developing identification, referral, and regulatory frameworks on child trafficking, and migration.
- Organize and facilitate trainings for national child protection, migration, and border management actors on trafficking, gender-based violence and protection of children on the move.
- Establish bilateral and multilateral coordination and information sharing mechanisms based on respective national counter-trafficking frameworks that are inclusive of the special needs of children victims of trafficking.

- Ensure national authorities and institutional actors cooperate across borders on the identification of victims, access to services, and prosecution of traffickers.
- Ensure a child-centred approach that prioritizes the identification of victims and the care and reception of migrant children, including during border management operations.
- Ensure specialized childcare facilities and services for child victims of trafficking, abuse and exploitation.
- Develop adequate protection frameworks for children on the move victims of trafficking to remain in a state's territory, temporarily or permanently, in appropriate cases and to take into consideration the special needs of children, including appropriate housing, education and care.
- Apply the decriminalization of criminal acts committed by child victims of trafficking in the context of their trafficking situation.
- Establish safe communication and monitoring mechanisms between child protection and counter trafficking national institutional actors and international actors.
- Improve existing common legal frameworks on combatting trafficking and foster cross-border coordination in referral of children on the move victims of trafficking.

Case management

- Establish local, national, regional and transnational joint coordination mechanisms of CSOs, institutions, and international organizations for improved identification and referral of child victims of trafficking. These mechanisms should also share and update information regarding children on the move and child trafficking.
- Develop and/or share existing stakeholders and service mappings for children on the move and victims of trafficking. Include emergency contacts of actors involved in migrant children's case management.
- Train case workers and front-line responders on child trafficking, and protection of child victims of trafficking and exploitation including specific rights of children VOTs.
- Strengthen common dialogue and exchange on prevention and safe solutions for protection of children on the move from trafficking, involving migrant communities.

Alternative care

Governance and advocacy

- Support and promote the development of family and community-based solutions for all children without parental care at both national and subnational levels.
- Ensure the integration of children on the move as beneficiaries of national child protection systems and arrangements for alternative care solutions, especially community and family-based solutions.
- Promote traditional forms of community and family-based care for children on the move supervised and monitored by child protection state actors. Ensure that residential care facilities are accessible to children on the move and that services and structures meet international standards and guidelines.
- Ensure the involvement and oversight of family caregivers and legal guardians in the processes and decisions related to alternative care solutions.
- Develop monitoring systems and tools to enable regular evaluation of the functioning and performance of alternative care systems at local and national levels, including children's participation and feedback.
- Ensure regular and systematic collection of data on accessibility and quality of services, including children's feedback, collected in a child-friendly manner.

- Prevent the detention of children and promote a child-friendly interpretation of legal and policy frameworks on regular/irregular migration including for family reunification purposes, should the family be in administrative detention.
- Collaborate with national, regional and international observatories on migration and child protection to prevent the detention of children, promoting the development of and providing financial support for child rights-based community and family-based alternative care arrangements.
- Collect and analyse disaggregated, reliable and comparable data on the detention of children on the move and alternative solutions at the national, regional and international levels.
- Build the capacity of state and non-state actors involved in the protection of migrant children who are not specialized in migration and child protection.

Case management

- Prioritize individual care plans, based on in-depth assessments of each case and on a best-interest procedure offering options that enhance children's individuality and capabilities.
- Ensure the child's long-term well-being through family- and community-based solutions, favouring solutions such as foster care to ensure a stable and protective family environment for the child.
- In the absence of other suitable solutions, ensure high-quality long-term care in specialized facilities, always with a view to promoting the child's well-being and development.
- Ensure a holistic and protective care environment for children on the move without parental care providing each child with a safe, welcoming and familiar environment where they receive comprehensive health care, adequate nutrition and opportunities for physical, cognitive and emotional development through educational and social activities.
- Build the capacity of actors and practitioners involved in the alternative care of children on the move on child protection case management and response to specific needs such as psychosocial support or situations of violence and trafficking.
- Promote the use of blended care arrangements, combining family fostering with institutional care options, especially in cases of urgent placement pending a more in-depth assessment and the identification of a stable foster family.
- Ensure foster families continuous support through training and constant psychological and social counselling to facilitate the management of situations and relationships.
- Ensure regular and in-depth monitoring of foster families to assess the quality of foster care and ensure the well-being of the children.
- Facilitate the participation of children and caregivers in decisions about alternative care solutions, such as residential care or family and community-based arrangements.
- Ensure appropriate living conditions in residential care facilities that meet international child protection standards for safe and dignified living, combined with services such as education and health care.
- Ensure mediation and sensitization of host communities about the rights, needs, and vulnerabilities of children on the move.

Sustainable solutions

Governance and advocacy

- Prioritize the strengthening of existing national child protection systems including children on the move in their scope, to ensure sustainability.
- Sensitize state actors and child protection actors at subnational level on inclusion of children on the move in existing community-based child protection mechanisms.

- Promote regular data collection and analysis at transnational, regional and national levels on the reintegration of migrant children. Ensure a focus on the dynamics associated with new attempts to migrate following voluntary return.
- Promote cooperation at national, regional and transnational levels between national and international actors in the field of voluntary return and reintegration.
- Strengthen existing exchanges and practices on intra-regional and international regular pathways for children on the move. Adapt and develop more inclusive solutions that allow regular migration of marginalized and low-income children and families.
- Promote child-friendly border management and migration policies and practices. Promote the development of regular pathways and improved regularization policies for undocumented migrant children and their families.
- Sensitize stakeholders to manage voluntary returns following international child protection standards and guidelines, linking returns with the development of sustainable reintegration plans.
- Collaborate with national, regional and international observatories on migration and child protection to ensure data collection and analysis, development and implementation of recommendations for sustainable solutions for children on the move.
- Promote embedding reintegration into wider child protection systems.
- Promote multi-sectoral budgeting and cost-sharing mechanisms across relevant ministries and actors following a whole-of-government approach.
- Align protection of children on the move funding within broader national protection programmes, ensuring sustainability and avoiding duplication of fundings.
- Ensure National Referral Mechanisms include dedicated financial resources to support the identification, referral, case management and long-term care of migrant children.

Case management

- Facilitate family tracing and reunification for migrant children through national and international coordination mechanisms.
- Enhance international coordination between institutions and country missions of international actors where the child is located and in countries of origin on legal frameworks and procedures related to birth registration and certification.
- Strengthen international coordination between institutions and country missions of international actors where the child is located and in countries of origin to facilitate access to birth certificates and their copies or extracts.
- Promote the involvement of communities in countries of origin to support and enhance the economic, social and psychosocial reintegration of migrant children.
- Include monitoring and evaluation indicators in reintegration plans, following a participative approach.
- Facilitate the participation of children in the return process and during the development of reintegration plans.
- Ensure durable solutions plans are child-sensitive and child-centred.
- Involve a range of different and specialized stakeholders in the decision-making and implementation of sustainable solutions in line with the best interests of the child.



OPERATIONAL COUNTRY PROFILES

► Regional overview

North Africa is a pivotal area for international, regional and intraregional migration. A massive share of migrants travelling irregularly across the MENA region transit through North Africa to travel along the West and Central Mediterranean routes³⁵⁸ en route to other countries in North Africa, Europe and other destinations.

In 2023 child migrants represented the 32 per cent of the migrant population in North Africa.³⁵⁹ Mixed migratory movements in MENA include asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking, as well as migrant children. Unaccompanied migrant children travel along the main migration routes, including those crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa or the Atlantic Ocean from Morocco and West Africa.³⁶⁰

Insecurity, violation of human rights, lack of protection, and limited access to services are key drivers of child migration.³⁶¹ This is even truer for women and girls who suffer from discriminatory gender norms and struggle significantly to access services, including education and employment.³⁶²

Migration movements in North Africa are closely linked to migration dynamics in West and Central Africa. Common reasons for child migration from the subregion are poverty, insecurity, education, but also family reunification in third countries and fleeing natural disasters. Children and adolescents may migrate inter-regionally or towards Europe and North Africa. The Niger is one of the main transit countries for accompanied and unaccompanied migrant children heading to North Africa. These children and youngsters come from the Gambia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, among others.

Migrant children may be accompanied by their parents or caregivers, but many are unaccompanied or become separated from their parents and families along the journey, such as in the case of children left behind identified by IOM in North African countries.³⁶³ Separation from their families and safety nets exposes unaccompanied migrant children to the risks of violence, discrimination, and detention – a concerning trend for children on the move.³⁶⁴

Given the limited opportunities to migrate regularly, unaccompanied child migrants often resort to hiring smugglers exposing themselves to the risk of violence and exploitation.³⁶⁵ Phenomena such as child begging, trafficking and forced labour are present in the subregions and can be linked to migration.³⁶⁶

³⁵⁸ According to IOM there are four principal migration routes: the Central Mediterranean route (CMR), the Western Mediterranean route (WMR), the Western African Atlantic route (VAAAR), and the Eastern Mediterranean route (EMR).

³⁵⁹ IOM, 2024d, pg. 39.

³⁶⁰ IOM, 2024d, pg. 22.

³⁶¹ African Union and IOM, 2019, pg. 184.

³⁶² Save the Children, 2023, pg. 59.

³⁶³ IOM, 2024a.

³⁶⁴ African Union and IOM, 2019, pg. 186.

³⁶⁵ African Union and IOM, 2019, pg. 187.

³⁶⁶ UNODC, 2022, pg. 79.

Regional child protection framework

African regional instruments and bodies exist and are applicable to the case of migrant children moving to and through North Africa. The main institution involved in child protection at the regional level is the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), which is mandated to implement the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Despite the existence of child protection institutions, policies, and legislative frameworks at the national level, child protection systems in North Africa and West and Central Africa show need for improvement concerning children on the move, especially regarding identification, legal guardianship and cross-border coordination.

Direct assistance is provided by child protection actors along North, West and Central Africa migration routes, including through temporary child protection facilities, usually run by national child protection authorities supported by international actors, as in the case of the Niger.

Best Interest Determination (BID) panels and mechanisms exist in most in North, West and Central African countries. Sustainable solutions for migrant children in the subregions are mostly represented by voluntary return and based on joint BID procedures. In some countries, such as Mauritania, foster care solutions are available and provided by the government in close coordination with international actors. IOM and UNICEF in West and Central Africa have developed joint case management guidelines for children on the move to promote common standards and procedures.

Main sources

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of 1990
- African Union. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa of 2003
- African Union. Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa of 2009
- African Union. Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment of 2018
- Africa's Agenda for Children 2040
- ECOWAS. Child Policy 2019–2030
- ECOWAS. Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children on the Move and Young Migrants
- ECOWAS. Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment
- Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018–2030)
- OAU. Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of 1969

► Country profile – Algeria

Context³⁶⁷

IOM data collected in the context of the assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programme in Algeria indicates that since 2023 the number of migrant boys from countries such as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea and Senegal, requesting voluntary return has increased. For these boys, Algeria is a transit country to earn money to continue their journey or to hide while attending further instructions from smugglers and traffickers to cross to Europe. These children migrate to escape poverty and improve their lives and the lives of their families.

Children left behind are also present in the country. These little children and adolescents often become unaccompanied or separated due to the death of their parents and they are identified by stable migrant communities across country and diplomatic representatives.

Child trafficking is also a reality in Algeria. A large share of small migrant children and adolescents hails from Benin and the Niger. In these countries, traditional practices can lead parents to entrust their children to community representatives, who facilitate their migration to Algeria. In some cases, this has resulted in trafficking for the purpose of begging. Young Nigerian girls and young men, are increasingly being trafficked by Nigerian women to be exploited in prostitution in the country.

National child protection framework and system

The National Child Protection System is overseen by the Ministry of National Solidarity, the Family, and the Status of Women through child protection mechanisms such as the management of the local Shelters for Assisted Children, which provide accommodation and protection to abandoned or orphaned national children, until they are placed in a family under Kafala regulation.

According to the National Child Protection Law, the National Office for the Protection and Promotion of Childhood (ONPPE) is designated as the primary authority responsible for safeguarding and advancing children's rights, as well as coordinating the efforts of all stakeholders in the field of child protection.

A national BID panel exists in Algeria and is composed by representatives from IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF covering voluntary return and asylum claims.

Regarding alternative care and sustainable solutions for migrant children, IOM and UNHCR collaborate with the National Joint Ministerial Committee on Migration on voluntary return and asylum.

³⁶⁷ The country profile is based on IOM and UNICEF (2025) internal data sources.

Main sources

- Child protection law No. 15/12 of 2015
- Law No. 08/11 of 2008 on Conditions of entry, residence and movement of foreigners in Algeria
- Decree No. 63/274 of 1963, implementing the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees
- Law No. 23/04 of 2023 on preventing and combating human trafficking

Key services and contacts

National Office for the Protection and Promotion of Childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Referral 	» Hotline: 1111 +213 21362998 +213 23362142 » contact@onppe.dz
IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Legal assistance • Socioeconomic assistance • Direct assistance • Voluntary return 	» +213 661 46 46 22
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal assistance • Tracing • Asylum 	» Hotline: 0661696841 » algalreg@unhcr.org

► Country profile – Egypt

Context³⁶⁸

Egypt is a country of origin, transit and in some cases destination for children on the move. These children are often unaccompanied and separated hailing from Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Yemen and other Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries. Generally, child migrants arrive to Egypt in order to reach Europe through Libya. However, in many cases Libya is their final destination to find better job opportunities.

Smuggling and trafficking of migrant boys and girls is common. Sudanese gangs have been known to run child trafficking networks by recruiting unaccompanied and separated boys from the Sudan.

Migrant girls experience a high rate of gender-based violence especially along borders. These violations include cases of feminine genital mutilation and child marriage represents a push factor for many migrant girls that cross into Egypt.

National child protection framework and system

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) is in charge of the implementation of the National Child law and legal framework on child protection. NCCM cooperates with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Social Services and the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking on the protection of children on the move. The NCCM is also responsible for coordinating local Governorate and District Child Protection Committees involved in the identification and referral of migrant children.

A National taskforce for children on the move composed of governmental representatives, IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF has been established in 2018 to support the Government to facilitate a coordinated assistance and protection response.

A national Best Interest Determination (BID) panel chaired by UNHCR exists for refugee and asylum-seeking children. A temporary BID panel for migrant children asking for voluntary humanitarian return was established by IOM in cooperation with UNICEF and Save the Children in 2023 for children with dual nationalities who were being evacuated out of Gaza.

National Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the assistance and protection of refugee children and child victims of trafficking and smuggling have been developed and include a system for automatically appointing the NCCM as the legal guardian of unaccompanied and separated migrant children.

Alternative care solutions are provided to migrant children including informal fostering by families from the migrant communities under the monitoring of civil society actors.

Main sources

- Child Protection Law No. 12 of 1996, amended by Law No. 126 of 2008
- Law No. 64 of 2010 regarding Combating Human Trafficking
- Law No. 82 of 2016 on Combating Illegal Migration and Smuggling of Migrants
- Strategic Framework and National Plan for Childhood and Motherhood in Egypt (SF&NPCM) 2018–2030

³⁶⁸ The country profile is based on IOM and UNICEF (2025) internal data sources.

- National Strategic Framework for Ending Violence against Children of 2018
- National Strategy for Combating and Preventing Human Trafficking 2022–2026
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Protection and Assistance of Child-Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Victims of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons, 2020

Key services and contacts

National Child Helpline provided by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral to services 	» Child Helpline +20 16000
CARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Legal assistance • Housing/Alternative care 	» Helpline: +20 01028859777 +20 01028859666 +20 01120486345 » Emergency Overnight hotline: +20 01028062178 » egycareintake@care.org
St. Andrew's Refugee Services StARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Tracing • Housing/Alternative care 	» Helpline: +20 2 25759451 » info@stars-egypt.org
IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Socioeconomic assistance • Direct assistance • Voluntary return 	» referrals@iom.int » Registration: +20 1033398239 » Helpline: +20 01032046064
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct assistance • Legal assistance • Tracing • Asylum 	» Infoline: +20 0227390400 » Referrals for Child Protection: arecacp@unhcr.org
UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological support through family clubs established in primary health-care units • Case management • Cash assistance • MHPSS • Positive parenting • Referrals 	» youstinanabil@caritasalex.org » 002 01103358875

► Country profile – Libya

Context³⁶⁹

Libya is a country of origin, transit and destination for national and foreign migrant children. Foreign children on the move come mainly from Chad, Egypt, the Niger, Nigeria and the Sudan. While Libya is mainly a destination country, a small number of children transit through Libya to reach Europe. This can leave children vulnerable to key child protection risks including trafficking and smuggling.

Taking advantage of the country's instability, large networks of smugglers and traffickers operate in Libya, and human trafficking, including of migrant children, is common. Migrant children, even with the knowledge of their parents, follow traffickers, usually from the same tribe, to help them cross borders and find work. Along the way, children can also be sold from one smuggler to another and end up being exploited in forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Migrant girls are highly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, with sexual violence often resulting in unwanted pregnancies.

National child protection framework and system

The Government of Libya signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1993 however to date there is no comprehensive child rights law. The Ministry of Social Affairs has the mandate for Child Protection in Libya, though the child protection agenda remains fragmented across a number of Ministries including the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Justice. UNICEF and IOM work in collaboration with the Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration, an agency of the Libyan Ministry of Interior, which manages the immigration detention centres where migrant children are held. In some specific cases, the Libyan Border Guards are responsible for rescuing and assisting children separated from their families or stranded at the border.

By law, legal representation and guardianship of unaccompanied and separated migrant children is provided by diplomatic representatives from embassies and consulates of countries of origin. Legal guardians are responsible for following up on individual cases, issuing travel documents and being heard by caseworkers to compile the case for the Best Interest Determination (BID).

Interagency BID panels are present in the country and decide on the refugee status and voluntary return of unaccompanied migrant children. National authorities and institutions do not participate in the panel's deliberations and decisions.

IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF have developed joint interagency Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for BID and BIA, which have been highlighted as best practices in the MENA region.

Local integration and long-term alternative care solutions are limited. As a result, the only option for many migrant children may be to return to their country of origin.

Main sources

- Law No. 6 of 1987 regulating the entry, stay, and exit of foreigners in Libya and its amendments
- Law No. 19 of 2010 on Combatting Illegal Immigration

³⁶⁹ The country profile is based on IOM and UNICEF (2025) internal data sources.

Key services and contacts

UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Referrals • Psychosocial support • Awareness-raising (including GBV risk mitigation) • Parenting programmes • Accelerated education • Lifeskills • Legal support including enrollment in schools 	» Services provided through UNICEF Baity centres in Tripoli, Benghazi, Ajdabiya, Al Kufra, Sabha, Brak, Ubari, Ghat, Misrata.
IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Mental health and Psychosocial support • Referral for legal assistance • Direct assistance • Voluntary return 	» Hotline: +218 910011491
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral • Asylum 	» Registration Hotline: +218 911633466 (Phone calls only) +218 910021631 (WhatsApp messages only) » Protection Hotline: +218 917127644 » Tawasul Common Feedback Mechanism Hotline: 1404
CESVI Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial assistance • Direct assistance (gender-based violence; child protection; cash assistance) • Appointments for visiting the community day centre 	» Hotlines: +218 910027716 +218 922767166
IRC International Rescue Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health assistance 	» Medical emergency hotline: +218 910354839 » Hotline for general consultations: +218 910347365

► Country profile – Mauritania

Context³⁷⁰

Migrant children residing or transiting in Mauritania are mainly West African children and they can be accompanied, unaccompanied, or separated. They come to Mauritania for several reasons, including to transit for migration to S Europe or seek employment in Mauritania to potentially continue their journey later.

A large number of them are separated migrant children who are accompanied by a family member or who want to join a relative already living in Mauritania. In some cases, accompanying family members exploit children in exchange for “helping” them cross the border, which can lead to situations of child smuggling or trafficking.

Mauritania is renowned in Western Africa for the quality of the Koranic schools. Migrant children from neighbouring countries such as the Gambia, Senegal and Sierra Leone come to Mauritania to be enrolled in Koranic education programmes. Trafficking and smuggling networks often take advantage of this reason to lure families and migrant children into exploitation.

Young Malian girls are highly vulnerable to human trafficking for forced domestic labour. These young girls are recruited and then forced to work as maids without pay. These girls are often victims of gender-based violence.

National child protection framework and system

The child protection system in Mauritania is managed by the Ministry of Social Action, Childhood and the Family and its Child Protection Directorate which supervises the implementation of the national law and strategy for the protection of children on the move. In parallel, the interministerial National Executive Secretariat for Migration Management is in charge of enacting the National Strategy for Migration Management.

The National Children’s Council has also been established and it is responsible for supporting the Government in the coordination, development, implementation and monitoring of child protection programmes.

A Best Interest Determination (BID) Panel led by institutional actors in collaboration with UN agencies such as IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF is present and should decide on sustainable solutions for refugee and migrant children.

Joint National Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the protection of children on the move have been developed by the Government of Mauritania in collaboration with UN agencies and International organizations.

The most common durable solutions for migrant children are voluntary return to their country of origin and foster care. Key actors in Mauritania have developed a regional best practice, collaborating with the national government in the establishment and implementation of a mechanism of temporary foster care for unaccompanied and separated migrant children waiting for family tracing and reunification, voluntary return, or other long-term solutions.

³⁷⁰ The country profile is based on IOM and UNICEF (2025) internal data sources.

Main sources

- Child Protection Code Law No.018 of 2018
- Decree No. 64/169 of 1964 and Decree No. 65/110 of 1965 on immigration system in Mauritania
- Law No. 025/2003 of 2003 on the repression of human trafficking
- Law No. 2010/021 of 2010 on fighting smuggling of migrants
- National strategy for child protection 2020–2025
- National strategy for better migration management of 2010
- Legal framework relating to the status of Temporary Host Families

Key services and contacts

Assistance et Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Education • Socioeconomic assistance • Alternative care/ Foster families 	» Helpline: +222 46720704 » asseong@yahoo.fr
Initiative et Développement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Education • Socioeconomic assistance • Alternative care/ Foster families 	» Helpline: +222 41 07 07 16 » ideveloppement@yahoo.fr
Sante et Éducation pour le Développement Familial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Education • Socioeconomic assistance • Alternative care/ Foster families 	» ong.sedf@yahoo.com
IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Socioeconomic assistance • Direct assistance • Voluntary return 	» Helpline AVRR: +222 48 88 11 55 » iomnouakchott@iom.int
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracing • Asylum 	» Helpline: +222 5257415
AMSME (With UNICEF support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child helpline • Case management • Psychosocial support • Health care 	» 1013 » AMSME99@yahoo.fr

► Country profile – Morocco

Context³⁷¹

Morocco is a country of origin, transit, and destination for children on the move, including unaccompanied and separated children. Most of the migrant children transit through Morocco to reach Europe, primarily Spain. Migrant youth and children arriving or passing through Morocco are mainly Moroccan and foreigner aged between 15 and 17 years of age. Child migrants in Morocco tend to hail from sub-Saharan African countries such as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and the Sudan. A significant number of accompanied children, either who have travelled with their parents or born in Morocco, are also present.

Unaccompanied and separated migrant children transiting through Morocco are more susceptible to smuggling and trafficking than accompanied children. Migrant girls are exponentially more at risk of trafficking and various forms of gender-based violence.³⁷² Globally, trafficked migrant children are exploited mainly for begging in large cities such as Marrakech and Casablanca. These children and youth turn to smugglers and traffickers, who often come from the same countries of origin as the children, for help in their irregular migration to Europe and are then end up being caught in exploitation and trafficking networks.

It should be noted that under the direction of the Presidency of the Public Ministry and with the support of UNICEF Morocco, Morocco has established standards operational procedures for the care of children on the move in 2023. These procedures have been developed in a participatory manner and with multisectoral institutional and civil society actors. The French version of the standards operational procedures for the care of children on the move is available and the Arabic one is being finalized.

In addition, a territorial protocol for the care of vulnerable children and those in contact with the law including children on the move in Morocco was adopted and signed on 27 May 2024 by six key ministries.

National child protection framework and system

The protection of children on the move is ensured by different institutional actors and frameworks in Morocco. The National Strategy on Migration and Asylum, which is implemented by the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates guarantees migrants (including children) access to services and assistance.

The Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection in Morocco (PPIPEM), which is implemented by the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family and other institutions, is also applied in favour of migrant children. The PPIPEM has established a system of integrated territorial child protection bodies, including the creation of local child protection support centres (CAPE) in several Moroccan provinces. The CAPE is also accessible for migrant children, among other populations. The social child protection services provided by the CAPE, offer an alternative or a complement to the judicial procedures for specific cases and allow local centres to systematically assess migrant children's needs and vulnerabilities and to ensure appropriate referrals. Furthermore, the Ministry of Solidarity, Social integration and Family with the support of UNICEF, has developed a set of tools to ensure the complementarity of interventions by decentralized public services involved in child protection.

³⁷¹ The country profile is based on IOM and UNICEF (2025) internal data sources.

³⁷² UNICEF, 2019c, pg. 44.

In 2019, a national commission for the coordination of measures to combat and prevent human trafficking was established. It proposes mechanisms combining prevention, awareness, imperatives of sanction, and deterrence of human trafficking with a focus on child victims of trafficking or potential child victims of trafficking.

Separated and unaccompanied children are entitled to legal guardianship under Moroccan law. Juvenile court judges are identified as legal guardians and preside upon decisions regarding the children's protection, such as placement in shelters.

Residential care and placement in shelters, family reunification, integration into schools, are the main long-term alternative solution available for migrant children in the country. Some CSOs provide shelter and assistance also to unaccompanied migrants that have recently "aged out" of the system by turning 18.

Main sources

- Family Code, Law No. 70/03 and Dahir n° 1-04-22 of 2004
- Law on the entry and residence of foreigners No. 02/03 of 2003
- Law No. 27/14 of 2014 regarding Combating Human Trafficking
- Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection in Morocco (PPIPEM) 2015–2025
- National Immigration and Asylum Strategy of 2013
- National plan to combat and prevent human trafficking 2023–2030

Key services and contacts

Commission nationale de lutte contre la traite des êtres humains (National commission to combat human trafficking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a National Action plan • Coordination between authorities, NGOs and international organizations • Support for victims via NGOs' projects • Creation of a database on human trafficking • Development of training and awareness programmes • Involvement of the Commission in the development of legislative texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Address: Ministry of Justice, Place Mamounia, Rabat » Hotline for children victims of trafficking: 0800004747
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Entraide nationale (National Mutual Aid) Child support and protection centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Humanitarian assistance • Referral to services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Rabat +212 07 00 08 85 23 upe.rabat2017@gmail.com » Salé +212 07 00 09 93 70 upesale2017@gmail.com » Casablanca Anfa +212 07 00 09 94 69 halimjamila.entraide@gmail.com » Casablanca Sidi Bernoussi +212 07 00 08 93 41 alaa.bodir@gmail.com » El Jadida +212 06 22 31 73 87 sanoussi.hiba2012@gmail.com » Beni Mellal +212 07 00 09 93 79 naima.bigane@gmail.com » Fes +212 07 00 08 84 90 encapefescape@gmail.com » Meknes +212 06 88 15 70 68 wafae_zizi@hotmail.com » Tangier +212 07 00 08 84 98 el.aaddaoui@gmail.com » Tetouan +212 07 00 09 94 24 elazifimohammed@gmail.com » Oujda +212 07 00 09 94 20 zekraouibenamar@gmail.com » Berkane +212 07 00 08 84 89 cape.berkane@gmail.com » Nador +212 07 00 09 93 84 Oumeima.dahmane1995@gmail.com » Marrakech +212 07 00 09 94 59 m.rida.fahmi@gmail.com » Agadir +212 07 00 09 94 26 zainanefatima5@gmail.com » Laayoune +212 07 00 08 85 19 abdsselamaayoune2018@gmail.com
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Association AL KARAM Marrakech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Tracing • Housing/Alternative care • Leisure activities • Humanitarian assistance • Family reunification • Sensitization activities 	<p>» Helpline: +212 524308695</p> <p>» alkarammkh@yahoo.fr</p>
Association ASTICUDE Nador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Tracing • Alternative care • Leisure activities • Humanitarian assistance • Family reunification • Sensitization activities 	<p>» Helpline: +212 536604541</p> <p>» asticudecontact@gmail.com</p>
Association Association Voix de Femmes Marocaines Agadir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management for children victims of trafficking • Health care • Psychosocial support • Legal assistance • Alternative care • Leisure activities • Humanitarian assistance • Sensitization activities 	<p>» Helpline: +212 528215917</p> <p>» voix.femmes.maroc@gmail.com</p>
Association BAITY Casablanca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Tracing • Housing/Alternative care • Leisure activities • Humanitarian assistance • Family reunification • Sensitization activities 	<p>» Helpline:</p> <p>+212 522756965</p> <p>+212 661748575</p> <p>» contact@association-bayti.ma</p>

Association FONDATION ORIENT OCCIDENT Rabat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Tracing • Alternative care 	» Helpline: +212 537793637
Association MS2 Oujda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Tracing • Housing/Alternative care 	» Helpline: +212 0808504829 » Coordoprojetoujda@ms2oujda.com
Association TADAMON Tanger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Family tracing • Alternative care • Leisure activities • Humanitarian assistance • Sensitization activities 	» asso.tadamon@gmail.com
IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Legal assistance • Socioeconomic assistance • Direct assistance • Voluntary return 	» Helpline Rabat: +212 537658859 +212 662794366 +212 655091687 » iommoroccoavrr@iom.int
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal assistance • Tracing • Asylum 	» Helpline: +212 537757992

► Country profile – the Niger

Context³⁷³

The Niger is an origin and transit country for migrant children and youth who are primarily escaping from poverty and seeking better work and education opportunities for themselves and their families.

The main destination of migrants in the Niger is Europe, more specifically, countries such as France, Italy and Spain. Migrant children transiting through the Niger often also remain in Libya to work.

Migration patterns involving children on the move from the Niger and neighbouring countries are deeply rooted in the traditional custom of entrusting children to other families known to the community of origin, which encourages parents to trust family or community members to take care of their children.

Young teenagers from 15 to 17 years old from Cameroon, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria, migrate alone or in groups and are usually accompanied to Algeria by their parents or family members.

Trafficking and smuggling practices have been identified in these migratory flows, leading to the exploitation of children, especially boys or adolescents, particularly for begging.

National child protection framework and system

The Niger's child protection system, policies and legal framework coordinated by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection are applied to the protection of children on the move. The national child protection system is decentralized and organized into different levels. Child protection Committees are established at the national, regional and local levels including also village and tribal child protection committees.

The national child protection policy, which is currently under evaluation, includes indicators on children on the move. After the evaluation and assessment phase, a new child protection policy will be adopted which will address the protection needs of children on the move in all aspects.

The National Migration Strategy is implemented by the Permanent Secretariat of the Concertation Framework on Migration which is mandated to coordinate stakeholders in migration management.

In the absence of a Best Interest Determination (BID) Panel, identification and family tracing are validated by juvenile court judges, who may also issue temporary placement orders in child care facilities.

Joint child protection Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been developed by the Government of the Niger in collaboration with UN agencies and International organizations.

The law provides alternative care solutions such as foster families for vulnerable children including migrant children without parental care and victims of trafficking. IOM in the Niger works closely with institutional actors to facilitate the placement of migrant children in foster families while waiting for voluntary return to their countries of origin. The adoption of family-based care solutions for foreign migrant children will be expanded in the future and the mechanism will allow migrant families settled in the Niger to be selected as foster families.

³⁷³ The country profile is based on IOM and UNICEF (2025) internal data sources.

Main sources

- Ordinance No. 81/40 of 1981 on the entry and residence of foreigners in the Niger
- Decree No. 87/076/PCMS/MI/MAE/C of 1987 regulating entry and residence conditions for foreigners in the Niger
- Law No. 97/016 of 1997 and Decree No. 98-382/PRN/MI/AT of 1998, determining the application of law No. 97/016 of 1997 on the status of refugees in the Niger
- Ordinance No. 2010/86 of 2010 on fighting against Human Trafficking
- Child Protection Framework Document of 2011
- National Youth Policy 2023–2032
- National Migration Policy 2020–2035
- Law n°2019–29 of July 1, 2019 governing civil registration status in the Niger and decree n°2019–463 of 23 August 2019

Key services and contacts

Direction Régionale pour la Protection de l'Enfant (Regional Directorate for Child Protection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Family tracing • Direct assistance 	» Helpline: +227 20737411
General Directorate of Civil Status, Migration and Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of birth certificates for any civil status event occurring in the Niger 	» BP 622 Niamey-Niger Tel: +227 89 14 11 00
Association Nigérienne pour le Traitement de la Délinquance et la prévention du crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Socioeconomic assistance • Direct assistance 	» antdniger@yahoo.fr
ICRC Niger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Tracing • Health care • Psychosocial support • Direct assistance 	» Helpline: +227 92199385 » nia_tracing_services@icrc.org

Save the Children (the Niger)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection • Health care • Nutrition and livelihoods • Education • WASH 	<p>» National and Niamey helpline: +227 20 72 54 74/75 - 75 25 52/ 53</p> <p>» Zinder helpline: +227 20 510 843/20 510 845</p> <p>» Maradi +227 20 4115 48 / 49</p> <p>» Wadata +227 20 418 307/20 418 308</p> <p>» Diffa +227 20 540 038</p> <p>» Niger@savethechildren.org</p>
IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Education • Legal assistance • Socioeconomic assistance • Direct assistance • Voluntary return 	<p>» Helpline : +227 20752507</p> <p>» iomniger@iom.int</p>
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal assistance • Tracing • Asylum 	<p>» Helpline: +227 20752064</p>
UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection • CP sector coordination • Capacity-building • Assistance • Case management • Psychosocial support • Birth registration 	<p>» Helpline: +227 20 72 71 00</p> <p>» niamey@unicef.org</p>

► Country profile – Tunisia

Context³⁷⁴

Tunisia is primarily a country of origin and transit for migrant children, both Tunisian and foreign. Children on the move cross into Tunisia through the northwestern and southern borders with Algeria and hail from several west African countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone but also Eritrea, Somalia and the Sudan.

Migrant children often rely on smugglers' networks to cross land borders and the Mediterranean Sea. Many unaccompanied migrant children are pushed by their families to migrate to reach Europe to seek employment and contribute to the family's livelihood.

Unaccompanied migrant children often rely on national and African criminal networks to help them cross borders irregularly. In this context, cases of exploitation of unaccompanied and separated migrant children through kidnapping are reported throughout the country.

Young migrant women and girls face an increased risk of sexual abuse and violence, often resulting in unwanted pregnancies.

National child protection framework and system

Tunisia's child protection legislation and National Integrated Public Policy for the Prevention and Protection of Children (PPIPPE) (not yet passed) are aligned with international standards and should be applicable to migrant children. The Child Protection Code is enforced by the Ministry of Family, Women, Children and the Elderly which coordinates the Child Protection Delegates which are in charge of managing cases of children at risk such as homeless, begging, or abused children, etc.

Tunisian legislation also requires a legal guardianship system for children lacking parental care. This system appoints the directors of hosting centres or hospitals or the governor of the region as legal guardians to these children. Despite some cases where the national guardianship procedure has been followed, decisions regarding migrant children are generally made by family judges.

The IOM and UNHCR facilitate the tenure of joint Best Interest Determination (BID) panels that includes child protection authorities as well as UNICEF and CSOs that assess and determine durable solutions for children on the move.

Durable solutions for migrant children are available and include family tracing, family assessment and reunification in countries of destination and origin. Integration in Tunisia is considered in very limited cases when possible. Unaccompanied migrant children are usually placed in temporary residential care in public centres administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs. In some cases, unaccompanied migrant children are hosted in mixed juvenile centres for children in conflict with the law, however they are under a different regime and are allowed to leave the centres during the day.

³⁷⁴ The country profile is based on IOM and UNICEF (2025) internal data sources.

Main sources

- Child Protection Code, Law No. 95/92 of 1995
- Law No. 68/7 of 1968, on the status of foreigners in Tunisia
- Law No. 75/40 of 14 May 1975, relating to passports and travel documents
- Law No. 2004/6 of 3 February 2004, amending Law No. 75/40 of 14 May 1975, relating to passports and travel documents
- Law No. 2016/61 of 2016 on preventing and combating Human Trafficking
- Decree No. 2003/777 of 2003 ratifying the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land
- Integrated Public Policy for the Prevention and Protection of Children 2021–2030 (draft)
- National Migration Strategy of 2017

Key services and contacts

IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Legal assistance • Socioeconomic assistance • Direct assistance • Voluntary return 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Tunis helpline: +216 80101566 » Sfax helpline: +216 80105561 » IOMTunis@iom.int
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Health care • Psychosocial support • Legal assistance • Tracing • Asylum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Helpline: +216 71963383
Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care • Psychosocial support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Reception desk Tunis: +216 71 720 200 » Reception desk Sfax: +216 54 006 964

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