

Alarming gaps in reliable data leave 28 million uprooted children unprotected – UN

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With *A call to action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data*, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed how crucial data are to understanding the patterns of global migration and developing policies to support vulnerable groups like children.

“Information gaps fundamentally undermine our ability to help children ,” said Laurence Chandy, UNICEF Director for the Division of Data, Research and Policy.

The report confirms that massive gaps in data covering refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and internally displaced populations are endangering millions of children on the move.

“Migrant children, particularly those who migrate alone, are often easy targets for those who would do them harm,” he continued, adding “We can’t keep children safe and provide them with lifesaving services, both in transit and at their destination, if we don’t know who they are, where they are or what they need.”

While an estimated 28 million children were living in forced displacement in 2016, the true figure is likely much higher.

In many countries, available national data do not include information on migrants’ and refugees’ age, sex and origin, or if they travel unaccompanied or with their families.

Moreover, nearly a quarter of countries and territories do not have age disaggregated data on migrants, including 43 per cent of countries and territories in Africa and just 56 per cent of the refugee population under UNHCR’s mandate has age information on record.

“Many refugee children have experienced or witnessed appalling violence and

suffering in their countries of origin and sometimes also during their flight in search of protection and security,” said Volker Türk, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

“They need and deserve care and protection but in order to provide this, we need data on their identity and needs. In no area is coordination on data and strengthening capacity more important than for children, especially the most vulnerable” he added.

The report underlines that differing criteria for age categories and for recoding data make disaggregation extremely challenging – particularly in estimating accurately how many children are on the move worldwide as well as those moving undocumented across borders, displaced or migrating internally, or left behind by migrant parents.

“We need reliable and better data on child migrants to protect them and guarantee their best interests,” stressed IOM Director General William Lacy Swing.

“Data disaggregation by age, sex and origin can inform policymakers of the real needs of child migrants. This will ensure that no child is left behind and that they are not exploited. All migrant children are entitled to care and protection regardless of their migratory status,” he affirmed.

The need for better data collection and analysis are key features of the related but distinct Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees currently being developed for adoption in 2018.

While there are ongoing efforts to strengthen data collection and analysis at both the global and country levels, far more needs to be done. If these gaps are not addressed, it will be impossible to implement and monitor the Compacts and the impact they could have for children on the move.

“We urge Member States to fill these gaps with reliable disaggregated data and to improve cooperation so that data is shared and comparable,” concluded Mr. Chandy.