

Children in West and Central Africa moving in greater numbers than ever before, finds UN report

5 July 2017 – With more than seven million children in West and Central Africa uprooted from their homes each year due to violence, poverty and climate change, and projections that this number will continue to rise, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has called for greater efforts to ensure that migrant and displaced children are protected from exploitation and abuse.

In its latest report, [In Search of Opportunities: Voices of children on the move in West and Central Africa](#), the UN agency noted that almost a third of that number remained in Sub-Saharan Africa and less than one in five headed to Europe.

“Children in West and Central Africa are [moving in greater numbers than ever before](#) [...], majority of them within Africa, not to Europe or elsewhere,” Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF’s Regional Director for the region, said in a news release announcing the findings.

“We must broaden the discussion on migration to encompass the vulnerabilities of all children on the move and expand systems to protect them, in all their intended destinations.”

The report, based on a series of interviews with migrants and their families from several countries, has revealed a complex set of drivers for migration beyond poverty.

In addition to conflict, insecurity, poverty and lack of services, climate change is also forcing many in West and Central Africa to leave their homes.

Furthermore, with estimates that the region could see a three to four degree Celsius rise in temperature this century – more than one and a half times higher than anywhere else in the world – increased tensions and hostilities over access to resources could push even greater numbers of people to move elsewhere.

In the midst of such projections, the region’s lack of sufficient protection systems – both within and across borders – to ensure the safety and wellbeing of refugee and migrant children is particularly concerning, said UNICEF in the news release, calling on policy makers to place children at the centre of any response to migration.

“This can be done by strengthening the chain of protection for children between countries of origin, transit and destination,” noted the UN agency.

“The close cooperation of governments, UN, and non-governmental partners

is critical in to ensure children's access to healthcare, education and other essential services, regardless of their migration status,” it added.

UNICEF has also called on all governments, in the region, in Europe and elsewhere to adopt the six-point Agenda for Action for the protection of refugee and migrant children.

The Agenda for Action calls for greater protection of child [refugees and migrants](#), particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence; ending detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating, by introducing a range of practical alternatives; keeping families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status; keeping all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services; acting on the underlying causes of large scale movements of refugees and migrants; and promoting measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalisation in countries of transit and destination.