



Migrant children represent a significant share of the migrant and refugee population; one in every eight migrants worldwide being a child (UNICEF, 2016). Children migrate for multiple reasons: to flee persecution, war and violence; to reunite with family members abroad; and to seek better economic and educational opportunities. Migrant children are susceptible to violence, abuse, exploitation and human trafficking.

Different factors contribute to migrant children's vulnerability, including pre-existing risk factors at individual, household, community, and structural levels; the specific reasons why they have migrated; and the specific conditions they face during travel, transit, and at destination. These vulnerabilities are intensified for those migrant children who are unaccompanied or separated.

IOM's work with and for migrant children aims to promote and uphold the guiding principles and rights of children as established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including but not limited to non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, life, survival, development, participation, adequate food, shelter, clean water, formal education, primary health care, leisure and recreation, cultural activities, information, and protection from all forms of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and cruelty.

IOM's child protection and assistance activities aims to prevent unsafe child migration, prevent exposure of children to violence, exploitation, and abuse while migrating, and to ensure that children have access to continuity of care throughout their migration experiences.

IOM believes that migration which takes place in a safe, orderly and dignified manner is beneficial for migrants, governments and societies.

IOM's Migrant Protection and Assistance Division (MPA) provides protection and assistance to migrants in need, including trafficked persons, smuggled migrants with protection needs, (rejected) asylum seekers, migrants in irregular situations, stranded migrants, unaccompanied and separated migrant children, and migrants subjected to violence, exploitation or abuse.

Together with its partners MPA has:

- *Helped more than 1.5 million migrants return voluntarily to their countries since 1979.*
- *Supported returning migrants to reintegrate within their communities.*
- *Assisted close to 100,000 victims of human trafficking since 1994.*
- *Assisted more than 60,000 vulnerable migrants in 2017 alone.*



IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN (PRE-DEPARTURE)

IOM's programming in countries of origin aims to prevent unsafe and exploitative migration that is inherently injurious to children, while at the same time working towards safe and regular migration opportunities for children and their families that preserve family unity, help families provide for their household, and allow all family members to meet their needs and aspirations.

IN TRANSIT COUNTRIES

IOM aims to respond to challenges in transit countries by building the capacity of national child protection systems to identify and protect vulnerable migrant children, including by strengthening local capacities to conduct best interest assessments and determinations for migrant children; strengthening guardianship procedures; finding appropriate alternative care arrangements for separated and unaccompanied children; and conducting family tracing, assessment, and reunification. IOM provides direct case management services for vulnerable migrant children and their families and assists them in finding appropriate sustainable solutions, including assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR), family reunification, third country relocation or resettlement, and other forms of or regular onward migration.

IN DESTINATION COUNTRIES

In countries of destination, IOM aims to protect migrant children from violence, exploitation, and abuse and to foster their successful integration, be it temporary or permanent. This involves work with host communities to increase their ability to absorb and integrate new arrivals and to counter xenophobia, as well as working with national child protection systems to identify and protect vulnerable migrant children. IOM also works with partners to ensure that the best interest principle is always the primary consideration when decisions about a migrant child's status and future are made, and that migrant children have the right to participate in such decisions in an age-appropriate manner.

When migrant children are in an irregular status, IOM believes that they have the right to speedy and just resolution of their cases, taking into full account their development needs at the time and in the future, which may include pathways to regularization and assisted voluntary return and reintegration. The willingness of the child to return and the best interest determination procedures guide the whole AVRR process.

IOM ensures that a formal best interest determination procedure is completed, that a legal guardian is appointed in the host country as well as country of origin, and that the child is involved throughout the return and reintegration process.

IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN (POST-RETURN)

IOM supports and assists migrant children in successfully and sustainably reintegrating into their families and communities, including through access to health services, education opportunities, psychosocial support, housing, livelihoods, etc. IOM advocates, where possible, to provide reintegration assistance to the whole family unit as well as the community to allow the individual child, families and communities to cope with (re)migration drivers; to ensure that return decisions taken are in their best interest; and that they are protected from violence, exploitation, and abuse.

IOM considers reintegration to be sustainable when those who have returned achieve economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Further, sustainable reintegration requires that children and their families are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity. This requires a three-pronged approach, with individual-level assistance addressing the specific needs of migrant children and their families; community support to foster a participatory approach in the reintegration process (recognizing that returnees, their families, and their communities all have a stake in return); and structural interventions aimed at improving service provision for both returnees and non-migrant populations alike; and overall good migration governance.

AT BORDERS

Migrant children may cross multiple borders during their journeys. IOM works with law enforcement and border management officials to ensure they have sufficient capacity to detect protection concerns and refer migrant children to appropriate protection and assistance actors; to disrupt, investigate, and prosecute criminal elements that seek to exploit or otherwise harm migrant children; and to uphold migrant children's rights. This involves training, support for the development of standard operating procedures, and construction of child-friendly spaces.