

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

They have rights, and their rights move with them!

2024 report to the Human Rights Council

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

"Boys and girls have little sparks of light that are so small, it's actually a talent, a goal, a wish, a dream or a hope. Help them shine and brighten the world. Even if you don't help them, don't shut them down."

Refugee boy, 15

"I just want to be safe together with my family."

Refugee girl, 16

"Our dreams are full of peace, education, and endless possibilities."

Refugee boy, 12



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The Special Representative and the Team



United Nations

The 'United Nations' or the UN, is an organization of almost all the countries in the world, created to promote development, peace and security, and human rights.

The UN is a place where Member States (countries that are members of the UN) discuss common challenges and find solutions TOGETHER, for all humanity, including CHILDREN. The head of the UN is called the 'Secretary-General'. The UN Secretary-General selects people to work with him on specific issues.



The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (or SRSG-VAC), Najat Maalla M'jid is one of them.

Najat and her team help countries end all forms of **violence against children**, in all settings, everywhere, always putting children first!



WHO ARE 'CHILDREN ON THE MOVE?'



Children on the move are those who had to leave their homes to go and live somewhere else, Whether by themselves or with their families. Many are forced to leave, and some are unaccompanied (alone).

They all face multiple risks, and they have less protection, which leaves them in great danger.

Children on the move include children in different circumstances. They can be:

- Migrants
- Asylum seekers
- Refugee children
- Internally displaced

The differences between these definitions depend on the reasons why they leave, the situations they're running from, if they move to another country, and their legal situation, among others things.



Migrant

Is a person who moves for a wide range of reasons, within their country or to another.



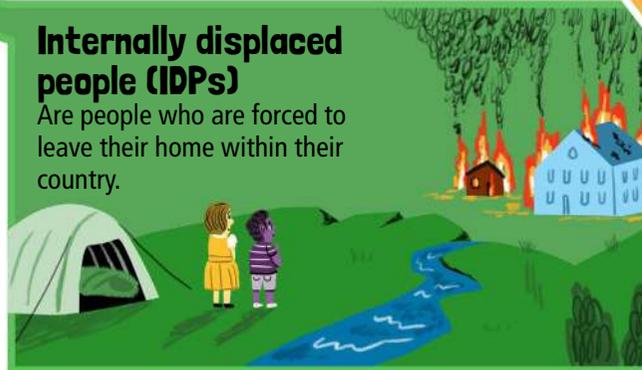
Asylum Seeker

People who are requesting international protection are called asylum seekers.



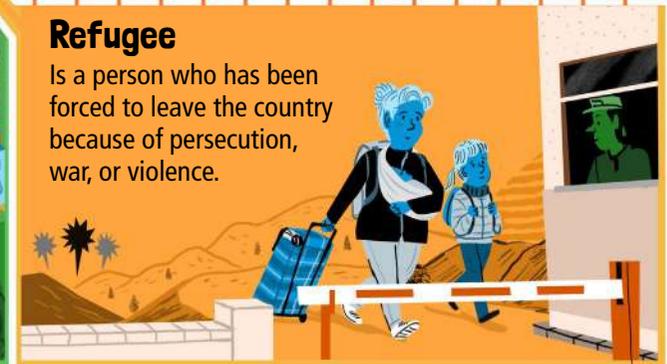
Internally displaced people (IDPs)

Are people who are forced to leave their home within their country.



Refugee

Is a person who has been forced to leave the country because of persecution, war, or violence.



What's important for you to know is that the number of children on the move has never been so large before.

Children may move from one category to another, depending on different factors, like their countries of origin, their destination, and the reason why they are forced to leave their homes.



CHILDREN ON THE MOVE ARE VULNERABLE FOR MANY REASONS.

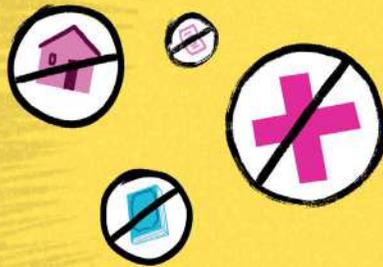


They are not protected.

It is not always clear who are the authorities in charge of protecting them, the ways for them to report harm, or who to turn to if they need help. They can even face dangers at the hands of those who have to protect them at border, in transit or in countries of destination. For these reasons it is important that all children are considered as children first and foremost.

It's even worse if they are unaccompanied.

Sometimes children move alone, or are separated from their families, leaving them at even greater risk.



They often find themselves without access to services, even to cover their basic needs.

Children on the move may not have access to cover their basic needs, like food, water, or housing. Also, they don't often have access to education, health, legal advice, justice, and humanitarian assistance.



They remain invisible and unaccounted for.

It can be difficult to keep track of them because they may not be staying in one place for long. Or, it could be that no one knows where they have moved to.



They may not report abuse.

Because they may be afraid of being arrested or sent back to their country or place of origin. Or they may not report abuse simply because they don't know how to or don't know the language.



CHILDREN MOVE FOR DIFFERENT REASONS

Conflict and war

Unfortunately this continues to be one of the main drivers behind displacement.



Political instability and widespread violence

Sometimes people have to leave because the political situation where they live makes them feel insecure.



Discrimination

Discrimination can happen for multiple reasons, like their race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religious and political beliefs, and others.



CHILDREN MOVE FOR DIFFERENT REASONS

Climate change

People often have to leave their home because of weather-related disasters, like floods, droughts, typhoons, cyclones, or others.



Poverty and inequalities

Sometimes families fall into poverty, and they move with the hope of finding a better life somewhere else.



Food insecurity

Food insecurity means being unsure if you have enough food. Sometimes there is not enough food because of conflicts, floods, drought, poverty, and other reasons, so people have no choice but to leave and find food elsewhere.





AND HOW MANY PEOPLE AND CHILDREN ON THE MOVE ARE IN THE WORLD TODAY?

Children are on the move all over the world more than ever

It is difficult to know exactly how many children are on the move, but we have some ideas.

2010

2022

2023

In the past 12 years the number of forcibly displaced children more than doubled.

In 2023, approximately **43 million children** were forced to leave their homes because of conflict, violence, human rights violations, climate change, natural disasters, economic necessity or social insecurity
(Data from the United Nations Refugee Agency)

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE FACE THREATS AND DANGERS AT ALL STAGES OF THEIR JOURNEY



When children are forced to leave their home, they are exposed to similar threats that they are escaping from.



When they are on the move, they face new threats such as:

Being victims of physical violence



Children are often victims of physical violence. These can happen at the hands of thieves, police, border patrol or others.

Being trafficked



Child trafficking is when children are tricked, forced to leave, and are moved or transported to be exploited in different ways.



Children get trafficked to be forced into child labor, child sexual exploitation and abuse, illegal adoption, enrollment in criminal groups, etc.

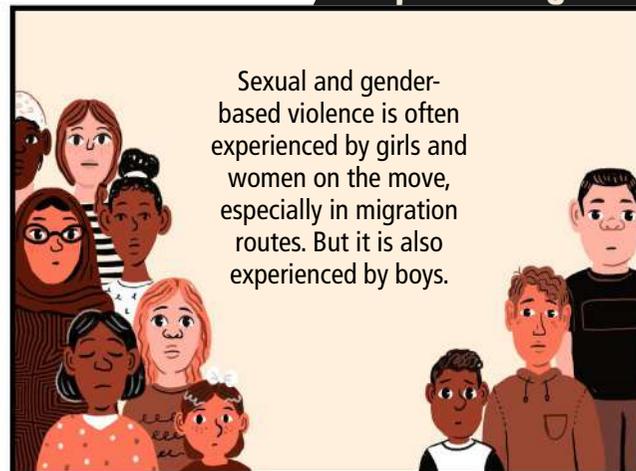
Risking their lives



They could lose their lives. For example, when being smuggled...

...Smuggling is when something or some one is moved illegally

Experiencing sexual and gender-based violence



Sexual and gender-based violence is often experienced by girls and women on the move, especially in migration routes. But it is also experienced by boys.



It can happen at all stages of a migrating child's journey.

For example, children may be forced into what is called "survival sex", in other words, to take part in sexual activities in exchange for shelter or to gain passage to continue their journey.

"Create safe spaces where girls can go in cases of risk or when they feel vulnerable."
Refugee girl, from Peru



THESE ARE SOME OF THE THREATS CHILDREN ON THE MOVE FACE AT ANY STAGE OF THEIR JOURNEY

Being victims of child labour or child marriage



Because of poverty, families may end up forcing their children into child labour, or sending them into child marriage, increasing their vulnerability.



"Help our parents find jobs so we are not involved in child labour activities like digging for food in the host community, selling of charcoal and hawking food stuffs to earn money for the family"

Refugee boy, 13, from the Democratic Republic of Congo

Being detained and losing their liberty

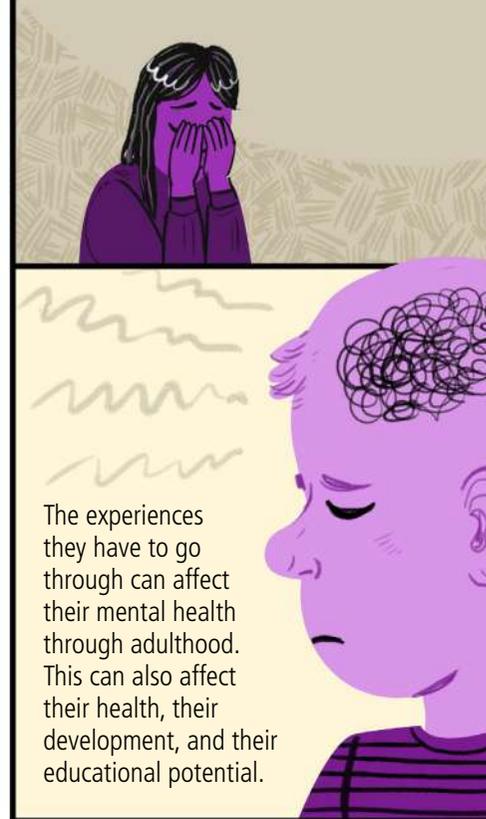
Children on the move may also be **'deprived of their liberty'**. They could be detained themselves or be impacted by the detention of their parents or adults they were traveling with. Children should not be detained and deprived of their liberty.



Unfortunately, at least 80 countries have laws and policies that allow children to be detained based on their legal or migratory status.

Suffering long lasting trauma

Children on the move are **very often affected by trauma**.



The experiences they have to go through can affect their mental health through adulthood. This can also affect their health, their development, and their educational potential.

Suffering discrimination

Because they are **foreigners** or **outsiders** in their new destination, they could be victims of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

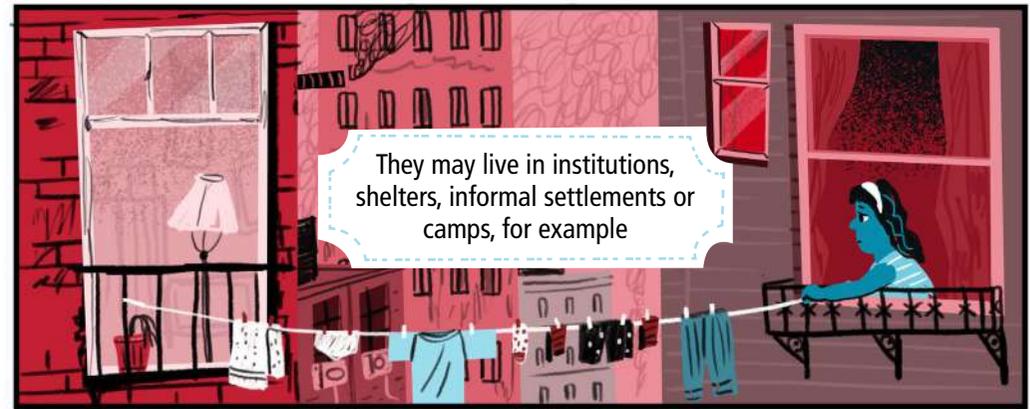


"Don't discriminate against us. Help us to be equal. I just want people to act normal with us."

Refugee boy, 10, from Afghanistan



WHERE DO CHILDREN ON THE MOVE LIVE?



HAVE YOU HEARD OF REFUGEE CAMPS?

About a third of refugees live in refugee camps.

These are places that receive people who have been forced to leave their homes because of multiple reasons and provides immediate protection and assistance. In refugee camps children can access food, security, education, health, legal representation, among others.

They are supposed to be temporary (for families to stay for a short period of time while a more permanent solution is found), but unfortunately, sometimes they become permanent, and people end up living in them for years and years, even for generations.

"They gave us shelter, food and water as well as blankets and beds."

Boy, 17, from Eritrea



THE SOLUTIONS:

What needs to be done, and needs to be done NOW

"Millions and millions of children are on the move. The number of displaced children has never been so large before. The world needs to act NOW. Protecting the rights of all children including those on the move in these times of crisis is needed more than ever."



CHILDREN HAVE RIGHTS, AND THESE NEED TO BE RESPECTED

Children on the move are children first and foremost. They should not be invisible. They need to be protected, and cared for.

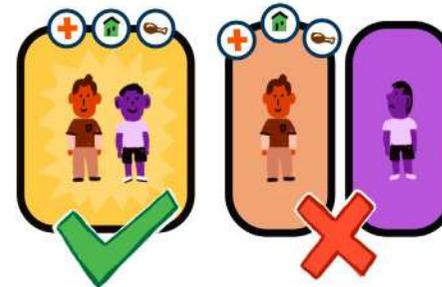
Children on the move need to be integrated into communities just like any other children, where they can play, go to school, and have their rights respected.

TO PROTECT THEM, GOVERNMENTS AND OTHER ACTORS SHOULD ACT NOW:



CHILDREN NEED TO HAVE A LEGAL IDENTITY TO ACCESS SERVICES TO COVER THEIR NEEDS

Governments should legally register children when they arrive in a new country. This provides them with easy access to all the services they need, like clothing, housing, health services, education and legal advice.



AND THOSE PROTECTION SERVICES SHOULD BE FOR ALL CHILDREN

Governments and other actors should invest in services that are clearly defined and accessible to all children, including children on the move. They should be included in these existing national protection systems, instead of creating systems especially for them.

"I think that the authorities in the country should enable us to be visible, that is, to have documents. I am now in the process of obtaining asylum. I don't know how long that will take."

Refugee boy, 12, from Iraq



TO PROTECT THEM, GOVERNMENTS AND OTHER ACTORS SHOULD ACT NOW:



ALWAYS LOOK TO PREVENT HARM

Governments and decision makers should prioritize the prevention of harm, by addressing the problems that drive people and children to move, like the climate crisis, conflicts, violence and poverty, discrimination and others, in the places of origin.



DO NOT TAKE CHILDREN'S LIBERTY AWAY

Countries need to strengthen the role of the justice systems, and complying with international human rights laws, prohibit the detention of migrant children.



ALWAYS INCLUDE CHILDREN AS PART OF THE SOLUTION

Engage children and young people on the move, in shaping the responses. This means empowering them, listening to them and learning from them in a safe manner.

"If the messages we passed on during our discussions reach the decision makers, I think things will change."

Refugee girl, 17, from Niger

"Create safe and accessible spaces for all children."

Refugee child, from Lebanon

"We have recognized several critical issues within our village, but articulating our concerns has proven to be challenging as our status as children often means our voices are not given due consideration."

Refugee girl, 17, from Thailand



CHILDREN ON THE MOVE KNOW WHAT THEY NEED, AND THE WORLD NEEDS TO LISTEN CAREFULLY

In **2023**, almost **500 children** on the move, participated in a consultation to put together a manifesto, which was presented at a major global meeting, the **'Global Refugee Forum'**, which brought together experts and decision makers to discuss how to better protect refugee children.



"Every child deserves a safe and supportive environment to learn and grow. Let's work together to create schools where every student feels accepted and valued for who they are."
Refugee child, from Iraq

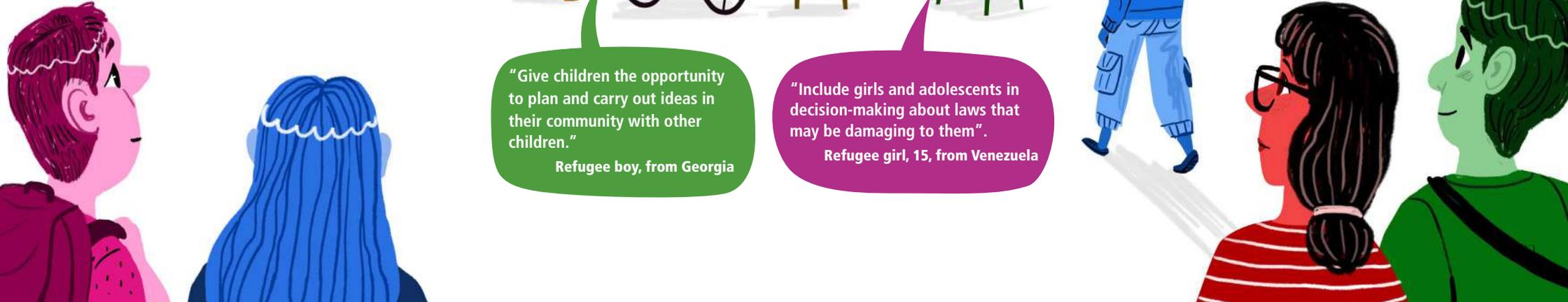
"Provide cheap counselling, therapy, and psychiatric services in complete mental health care programs."
Refugee child, from Lebanon

"We dream of a healthy future. Limited healthcare facilities, nutrition worries, and having no specialized care challenges us. We plead for an inclusive healthcare system, with access to essential services, nutrition support, and caring doctors. Let's build a foundation of health empowering every child to thrive."
Refugee girl, from Kenya

"It is our right to live with dignity, and we require more support to do so."
Refugee child

"Give children the opportunity to plan and carry out ideas in their community with other children."
Refugee boy, from Georgia

"Include girls and adolescents in decision-making about laws that may be damaging to them".
Refugee girl, 15, from Venezuela



CHILDREN ON THE MOVE KNOW WHAT THEY NEED, AND THE WORLD NEEDS TO LISTEN CAREFULLY

"What I want and will make me happy is to live in a safe place, go to school, and build my future so that I can help others in the country that I live and, in my country, as well"

Girl, 17, from Afghanistan,

"Governments should respect the displaced people, and offer humane and safe facilities and services, where they will be respected no matter their country of origin."

Refugee boy, 17, from Afghanistan

"The most important thing for a child is inner peace, nothing should hurt a child's feelings."

Refugee girl, 16, from Afghanistan

"We don't feel safe. How can you ensure the safety of children so that they do not become victims of violence, including shootings?"

Refugee child

"We ask for safety, education, and chance to be kids, even in challenging times."

Refugee boy, 14, from Iraq



Children published a Manifesto with their recommendations. This is a document with their views, ideas and suggestions. Many quotes spread throughout this report, have been borrowed from it.

[Download the manifesto here](#)



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Check
out other
child-friendly
reports and
resources
[here](#)

Let's
continue the
conversation

 violenceagainstchildren.un.org

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