

## Outcomes Summary - Roundtable 2 Children and Youth on the Move: Innovators for Tomorrow's Development<sup>1</sup>

First Roundtable (RT) Consultations – Geneva, 6 November 2024

### INTRODUCTION

This note captures concisely the main points discussed during the first roundtable consultations held in Geneva on the 6th and 7th of November 2024. The focus of the first consultations was to map **challenges and opportunities** related to the theme of each Roundtable. The outcome summary has been prepared with the following resources: flipchart protocols, recordings of the 'harvesting of ideas' and notes gathered from each small circle/host wherever available. The second consultations, which will be held in Geneva during the 19-20 February 2025, will focus on the **exchange of policies and practices in each Roundtable**. The main outcomes will be presented at the outset of the following consultations to ensure there is continuity and progression of discussions as the programme advances, allowing participants to build upon each step of the process.

### KEY OUTCOMES

- The inclusion of migrant children and youth in communities, social services, and public life is essential to their development and wellbeing.
- Children on the move are children first and foremost, entitled to the same rights and protection as all children. A rights-based approach prioritizes the protection and inclusion of children on the move in national systems, such as education, health, child protection, and social protection.
- The digital literacy of migrant children and youth present an opportunity to reduce exposure to violence, abuse and exploitation, while increasing exposure to learning and earning prospects.
- Cultivating the innovation and entrepreneurship potential of youth on the move is an opportunity for social and economic benefits to both host and origin communities.
- The participation of children and youth on the move in policy dialogue and decision making is an opportunity to shape inclusive, child-friendly and child-sensitive policies and legislation.
- Training and equipping the full range of government services providers – from border guards to teachers to social workers – who encounter children on the move present an opportunity to transform children's experience and enhance their protection.
- Expanding safe and regular mobility pathways, including specifically for family reunification, education, and entrepreneurship, would contribute to addressing many of the challenges that migrant children and youth currently face.

---

<sup>1</sup> Roundtable 2 is co-chaired by Brazil (represented by Daniele Luz, Counsellor, Permanent Mission), Honduras, represented by Andrea Jimenez, Technical Aide, Permanent Mission) and the Migration Youth and Children Platform (represented by Franchesca Regala, Global Focal Point). It benefits from the facilitation of Silvia Gomez (invited in her personal capacity), and the support of technical expert Tasha Gill, Global Lead, Migration & Displacement Hub, UNICEF.

## CHALLENGES

### **Isolation, exclusion, no sense of belonging**

When migrant children and youth do not feel included, they often experience a profound sense of isolation – losing ties with their roots and their countries of origin while not feeling connected to their country of destination. This disconnection leads to a strong lack of sense of belonging. The burden of the migration experience and having to take on additional responsibilities at a young age can deprive them of their own childhood. The psychological impact of this phenomenon poses a severe challenge, contributing to mental health struggles, trauma and exposing children to stigmatization. Often without a support system, children and youth are at risk of exclusion by society and marginalization. The need for inclusion rather than assimilation was raised across discussions, stressing the importance of providing an environment where children and youth can maintain their cultural identity while being embraced by their new community, rather than pressuring them to assimilate.

### **Risks, discrimination, and violence at all stages of the migration experience**

Many children and youth on the move are exposed to violence and discrimination throughout their migration experience, in particular when a lack of regular pathways leads them to unsafe routes and irregular situations. Children on the move without their guardians are especially vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. Risks such as human rights violations, detention, family separation, interruption of education, forced labour, forced return, gender-based violence, trafficking and abuse, sexual exploitation, disappearances, overall exposure to criminality, and associated psychological distress, emerged as significant. These risks may be amplified based on the child's age, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC), ethnicity, disability, and other factors.

Migrant children and youth may also experience disruption of education during their journey and lack access to learning-to-earning opportunities. Even when children are successful in accessing education, they may encounter a language barrier, which can slow down or hamper the education process.

Xenophobia and discrimination were identified as another substantial challenge. Often fueled by harmful narratives and an overall lack of understanding and awareness from the general public, stigmatization of migrant children and youth not only contribute to vulnerability but also increase the threat of and exposure to violence, in addition to the specific stigma faced by young male migrants. The lack of training for border officers, public administration staff and educators exacerbates discriminatory practices while hindering inclusion and integration. Stigma surrounding return, particularly from communities of origin, often creates circumstances where return is not viable.

Additionally, diaspora engagement efforts often fail to adequately consider or involve migrant children, limiting opportunities for their meaningful inclusion.

### **Legal and practical barriers lead to challenges in accessing services, education and employment**

In many contexts policy makers overlook the needs of migrants, and particular the needs of migrant children, resulting in inadequate policies. The absence of comprehensive child-friendly frameworks, coupled with administrative barriers, creates obstacles to providing access to essential services such as education, childcare systems, social protection and healthcare. There are limitations that

children and youth face because of their status or lack thereof, including some being at risk of statelessness. Limited access to information and to documentation along with a lack of firewalls hampers access to key services, in particular education. Specifically in the case of young migrants, a lack of skill recognition schemes and training opportunities coupled with restricted access to work visas after education creates major challenges. Limited representation of children and youth in decision making spaces was flagged as an additional challenge towards adequate programmes and policies.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Expanding regular pathways**

Expanding safe and regular mobility pathways for protection as well as pathways specifically related to family reunification, education, studies and entrepreneurship would contribute to addressing many of the challenges that migrant children and youth currently face. In addition, expanding regular labour mobility pathways would offer opportunities for youth in countries with high levels of unemployment.

### **Ensuring protection of rights and child-sensitive reception and care**

There is a need to mainstream protection and best interest determination in a whole-of-route approach at every step of the migration cycle. Key to ensuring this is developing child sensitive trainings for border officers and having child welfare professionals lead on interacting with and interviewing children and any accompanying adults/caregivers during screening processes, as well as prioritizing family- and community-based care and case management as alternatives to immigration detention and institutional care.

Already existing practices of non-detention of children and alternatives to detention as well as practices ensuring families stay together were identified as opportunities to learn from and expand. Strengthening multidisciplinary child protection systems in countries of origin, transit, and destination, ensuring systems are inclusive of children on the move, and improving cross-border collaboration between child protection authorities contributes to keeping children safe along all stages of the migration cycle. Integrating access to education into the development of regular pathways can help avoid interruptions in education throughout the migration cycle.

### **Building inclusive environments at national level**

The inclusion of migrant children and youth into national systems was highlighted across discussions as a key way to address the majority of the challenges identified. A child's migration status should never be a barrier to accessing basic services, such as education, health, child protection and social protection. Access to quality education is key, and when combined with a focus on skills recognition and opportunities for vocational training, creates a basis for young migrants to access employment opportunities.

Digital literacy of children and youth is an opportunity to overcome lack of access to information. In this sense, social media was identified as a tool to provide youth with information on services, documentation and regularisation processes, as well as countering trafficking and smuggling by providing information on migration routes.

Information should be provided in age-appropriate formats and language they understand. Expanding and tailoring existing firewalls so that migrant children and families can access health care and education regardless of status without fearing immigration enforcement is key. Building on

already existing initiatives providing mental health support was raised as an opportunity to address the trauma associated with isolation, discrimination and exclusion.

Further connections with diaspora members and peer mentorship programs may help in promoting a sense of belonging. Amplifying and mainstreaming existing initiatives, such as connecting with local peers, cultural sensitivity programs, school programs fostering empathy and understanding of migration from an early age, and trainings and tools for educators and public administration staff.

Sports programmes and cultural activities open to both migrant and local children and youth, as well as their families, can help foster inclusion and social cohesion. Co-designing these initiatives with migrant children, youth, parents and local communities would be an opportunity to further enhance inclusion and belonging.

Along these lines, representation and meaningful engagement of migrant children and youth to influence the decisions, processes, programmes, and policies that affect them is another opportunity, with examples such youth advisory groups or inclusion of children and youth as part of country delegations in global advocacy spaces. Youth-led advocacy that empowers young people with lived experience was flagged as a tool towards addressing harmful narratives.

Where children and youth on the move are protected, included, and can access services, they can thrive, and host communities can benefit from their skills, creativity, diverse perspectives, and cultural capital.

### **Migrant children and youth as innovators and connectors**

The potential and energy that migrant children and youth bring as innovators was discussed across groups. Children and young people, including those on the move, are at the forefront of movements calling for social and political progress. They are volunteers, artists, activists, scholars, athletes, community leaders, and entrepreneurs. There is an opportunity in harnessing this potential by creating learning-to-pathways for children and young people to ensure their access to future employment and to contribute to societies.

More resources for training and education are needed, not only for the children and youth in movement, but their families and other authorities in their environments who can facilitate the transition. Also, higher levels of digital literacy and digital skills of children and youth can be leveraged in terms of employment opportunities, in addition to green skills for a climate-resilient future. Young diasporas have the potential to bridge their countries of origin with their countries of destination, fostering cultural exchanges, supporting development and building bridges for solidarity and cooperation. In addition, children and migrant youth returning to their countries of origin bring with them new skills and knowledge.