

✦ INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ✦

PROTECTING
AND SUPPORTING
**CHILDREN
ON THE MOVE**



5, 6, 7 OCTOBER 2010
BARCELONA



Global Movement
for Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



| With support of

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INTRODUCTION

The I International Conference on Protecting and Supporting Children on the Move was held in Barcelona on 5-7 October 2010. Organized by the Global Movement for Children (GMC), it aimed at analysing and debating the current status of the issue of children on the move and presenting some key recommendations on the way forward to initiating the revision of policy and programmatic responses to the protection and support of these children.

It gathered 120 participants from 63 countries, including representatives from governmental agencies, international organisations, civil society organisations, academics and researchers and children.

The Conference concluded with a call for joint coordinated action in promoting a more comprehensive approach to public policies in various areas directly affecting children on the move. As a result, several UN Agencies, international NGOs and independent experts came together in London in January 2011 to form the Global Working Group on Children on the Move (GWG COM)¹.

The Conference Report is expected to be a road map for topics of debate initiated at the Barcelona meeting with a view to building national and international work agendas.

¹ Membership to date includes ENDA Tiers Monde, Global Movement for Children, International Labour Organisation, Intervida, International Organisation for Migration, MAEJT, Oak Foundation, Plan International, Save the Children International, Save the Children UK, Terre des Hommes, UNICEF, UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and child Pornography, World Vision International, Chris Mongue, Mike Dottridge, Olivier Feneyrol.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Protection of children on the move should be higher on the agenda in a time when internal and international migration is on the rise across the globe. An estimated 214 million persons worldwide are international migrants, along with an estimated 740 million internal migrants². Youth make up a disproportionate share of migrants from developing countries; about one third is between 12 and 25 years old³. This includes millions of children under the age of 18 who migrate internally or across national borders, with or without their parents. In the coming years an unprecedented number of young people are expected to follow this massive exodus and shift population dynamics further, driven by demographic factors, economic disparity, violent conflict, state failure, natural disasters, and resource and environmental pressures, especially climate change.

There are a myriad of reasons why children move. For many, leaving their home communities promises the chance of a better life. They may be running away from violence and abuse in the home or at school, the announcement of an arranged marriage or cultural practices and in search of access to education or employment, a driver of migration that is likely to become stronger in the coming years. However, once children move against their will, and /or in absence of protection services and actors, they become highly vulnerable to worst forms of child labour, exploitation and other abuses, either during their trip, or once they reach the new destination

Yet, despite the numbers of children involved, the needs and interests of children on the move are largely absent from mainstream debates on child protection, child labour and migration. As a result, most governments and international institutions have failed to develop effective policy responses to assist and protect these vulnerable children, and international migration instruments are not necessarily child sensitive. Despite being obliged under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect all children - irrespective of their status or place of origin - many governments still perceive children on the move as outsiders, threats or offenders of migration laws, leaving them without adequate protection and often subject to prosecution, detention or unsafe return.

Who are Children on the Move?

Children on the move is an umbrella definition for persons under the age of 18 who have left their place of habitual residence and are either on the way towards a new destination, or have already reached such destination. Children can move across State borders or within countries and their movement can be of a seasonal or more permanent nature. Movement of children can be voluntary or forced; they can be accompanied by parents, peers or others, or not, and can be children who are, for example: internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees, migrants or trafficked persons.

During movement, a child can float from one sub category to the other. For instance, an internally displaced child can be recruited by armed forces or moved across borders for the purpose of exploitation. The risks and opportunities differ per trajectory and conditions of movement.

² ILO, *Migration and child labour; Exploring child migrant vulnerabilities and those of children left-behind, Working paper*, 2010.

³ World Bank, *World Development Report*, 2007.

Main Conference Conclusions

1. Inefficient protection mechanisms before, during and after movement.

Responses to date often aim at addressing the phenomenon of migration, without necessarily aiming at the protection of the children involved and without having their best interests at heart. This is best exemplified by efforts to return migrant children to their place of origin despite the threats they may face again and which triggered their out-migration in the first place. A challenge facing agencies and donors is to find protection and intervention solutions during movement, in other words to adapt protection systems to child mobility.

2. Prevention does not stop migration but it can stop exploitation.

The root causes for child migration are only partially acknowledged. Current paradigms maintained by national and international public policies still focus on the “immigration problem” and not on the deep-seated and growing intra and inter-state social inequalities.

3. Lack of true child participation

Many decisions are taken without considering at all the views of the children concerns. In other cases, the child’s views are not looked at when making the substantial decisions, with ‘child participation’ remaining limited to details of arranging implementation (i.e. very often the case with decisions regarding return of migrant and trafficked children).

4. Social ambivalence towards immigrant children

Child migrants are seen in today’s societies as ‘poor and innocent’, ‘not really our children’ or even as a ‘threat’. Ambivalent perceptions affect public policies concerning child migrants. Current attitude of most societies towards migrant children deepens sense of exclusion. What needs to be tackled head-on is the sense of threat often associated with migrant children and justification for removal in the ‘best interest of society’

4. Inefficient strategic coordination among main actors

Many bodies, organisations and institutions often superimpose operations in the same territories without any coordination or knowledge.

5. Gap between Best interest determination and CRC implementation by States still not bridged.

Although important advances in the methodology for Determining the Best Interests (DBI) of the child have been achieved, there is a gap between these and the problems involved in activating state mechanisms to make the rights established in the 1989 Convention effective.

6. The search for employment: a sensitive and increasingly prominent trigger for child migration

Access to work is an open, ambivalent and provocative subject that lays bare the structural problems faced by modern societies and, in the midst of all this, are child migrants.

7. Establishing Identification Systems for stateless children

The duty of states is to have identification systems for stateless children. Being equipped with a birth certificate is the first prerequisite in the path towards nationalisation or citizenship.

Ways Forward

1. Prevention: the root causes of child migration must be addressed

- Providing them with meaningful opportunities for education and youth employment, and protection from harm in their home communities, as well as with information about safe migration and decent work elsewhere, can help both children and their families make informed and safer choices.
- More work is needed with community and religious leaders in countries of origin, transit and destination to promote a culture of acceptance of children's mobility and their entitlement to care and protection.

2. Ensure immigrant children's rights are protected and respected throughout the migration process (pre-mobility, mobility and post mobility)

- National and regional legislation and policies that promote and protect the rights of children on the move must be adopted and implemented.
- The best interests of the child should always be the primary consideration and children should never end up in detention or situations that amount to detention.
- At destination children should have the same rights and access to services, including education, health, protection, decent work if in working ages, and family-based care, as national children.

3. Strengthen and expand child protection systems

- Child protection policies and services must be harmonized and inclusive strategies must be developed and financially supported to protect all children on the move.
- The role of peer support networks and children's associations, where children help other children on the move in securing protection and in improving their chances for integration, needs to be acknowledged and supported by local and national governments, international organizations, civil society and local communities alike.
- Parallel actions both to protect children and in advocacy to achieve strategic changes in policies and practices must be taken.

4. Enabling children's participation to influence policies and strategies.

- Children's views, experiences and recommendations must be taken into consideration and be an essential part of all protection responses. The engagement of child-led movements and their positive input in national and regional policy development is particularly visible in Latin America and the Caribbean.

5. Enhancing and expanding lines of research

- The role of research is becoming increasingly important in the area of child migration. More emphasis needs to be placed on monitoring the lives of child migrants, exploring risk and vulnerability factors in the different context and phases of the mobility processes, analysing the environment in which the migration process occurs, and documenting good practices and lessons learnt in terms of policy formulation.

6. Promote joint and coordinated action from all actors

- To generate a common vision to form the basis for the dialogue between actors, cooperation (north-south and south-south) and the creation of common databases and identify opportunities to improve protection during the different stages of the process.