



4 CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Crime, conflict, terrorism, economic inequality and lack of opportunities can push children on the move. Today, the effects of climate change are exacerbating this with 920 million children currently exposed to water scarcity and 820 million exposed to heatwaves.[37] The climate crisis, which the OSRSG-VAC has identified as a “threat multiplier” for violence against children, [38] is accompanied by extreme weather events and resource scarcity, exacerbating forced displacement.

When in transit, children may be travelling unaccompanied or with family members; they may be seeking asylum or social prospects; and they may be targeted by traffickers and smugglers, including recruiters from organized criminal groups and terrorist groups. Often, these situations overlap.

While children can participate in their migration choices to varying degrees, it is important to recognize that, when on the move, their exposure to crime and violence increases. They can become separated from family members or caregivers, and may experience injury, lack of assistance and maltreatment. When reliant on migrant smugglers and traffickers they can face exploitation neglect, harassment, deprivation, abuse, violence, and even death. The risks are higher for girls, who are disproportionately exposed to gender-based violence.

Children on the move may also be more vulnerable when dealing with public authorities and accessing justice: they are likely to see their rights denied and to be treated with hostility, often as criminals. These children may end up in administrative detention, in spaces that are often overcrowded with no separation of children and adults. They may be prosecuted for offences associated with their situation as victims of trafficking, or for having been smuggled.

[37] The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index, UNICEF publication (2021) p. 10.

[38] A/77/221; The climate crisis and violence against children (United Nations publication, 2022).



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Through this Strategy, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC aim to:

- Produce further research and raise awareness of the specific forms of crime and violence to which children on the move are exposed, particularly by including children's descriptions of their experiences;
- Strengthen coordinated multistakeholder approaches to ensure appropriate protection and assistance for children on the move, with a particular focus on unaccompanied and separated children;
- Develop more knowledge on and build capacity for understanding the non-punishment principle in the context of trafficking, and the non-criminalization provisions of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol;
- End all immigration-related detention for children on the move, including the use of administrative detention for the purpose of deterring irregular migration.