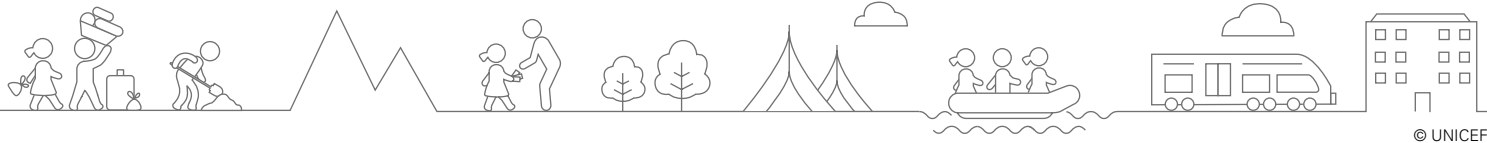


Strengthening child protection systems and ending child immigration detention

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Informing Child-sensitive Solutions for the Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Evidence from Children's and Young People's Experiences in the Horn and North of Africa

This series of briefs draws on the findings of multi-country research based on first-hand migration experiences of 1,634 children and young people moving between Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt¹ (available at www.unicef-irc.org/child-migration-hoa). The briefs highlight findings that can inform decision makers when designing child-sensitive solutions for children on the move (COM), in line with relevant objectives of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(GCM\)](#).²

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes rights for every child in a country's jurisdiction without discrimination, so that all children in the country are the subjects of rights⁴. Children and families use migration as a coping strategy when their environment compels them to seek safety, protection and/or livelihoods elsewhere.

A child's right to safety and protection does not change when they move.

The GCM further promotes existing international legal obligations on child rights; upholds the principle of the best interests of the child at all times and stipulates

child-sensitivity as one of its cross-cutting guiding principles (GCM Para. 15(h)).

In addition, the GCM includes a number of objectives for member states to support strengthening child protection systems and ending child immigration detention:

- **Objective 3: Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration**, especially the focus on providing information to migrants at all stages of migration and along migration routes, establish information points that can refer migrants to child-sensitive and gender-responsive support options
- **Objective 7: Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration**, especially the focus on including migrant children in national child protection systems and cross-border frameworks, and to protect unaccompanied and separated children
- **Objective 8: To save lives and prevent death and injury**, especially the primary objective to protect migrants' right to life that uphold the prohibition of collective expulsion, guarantee due process and individual assessments, enhance reception and assistance capacities, and

1 Primary data collection took place in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. Additional data were collected in Egypt, by reaching children through UNICEF and partners, using the same methodology for specific indicators.

2 UNICEF & IOM (2017) 'Harrowing Journeys: Children and Youth on the Move in the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation'. https://www.unicef.org/media/49046/file/Harrowing_Journeys_Children_and_youth_on_the_move_across_the_Mediterranean-ENG.pdf

3 <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/global-compact-migration-follow-and-review>

4 States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>



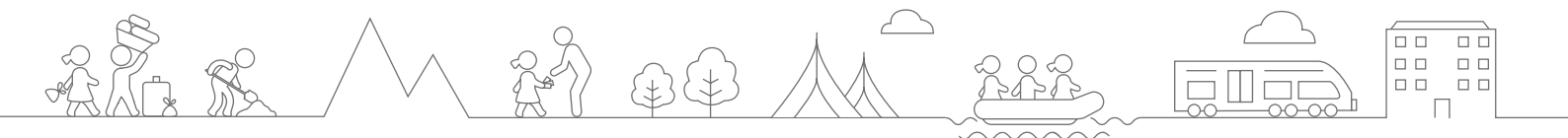
ensure that the provision of assistance of an exclusively humanitarian nature for migrants is not considered unlawful

- **Objective 9: Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants,** especially the focus on developing child-sensitive and gender-responsive cooperation protocols
- **Objective 10: Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration,** especially the focus on supporting the identification and protection of victims of trafficking, including girls and boys, and invest in awareness-raising
- **Objective 11: Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner,** especially the focus on ensuring child-sensitive border management and policies
- **Objective 12: Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral,** especially the focus on child and gender sensitive migration procedures, inclusion of vulnerable children within national child protection systems, including case management and referral to services
- **Objective 13: Use immigration detention only as a measure of last resort and work towards alternatives,** especially the focus on the availability of a range of family and community-based alternatives to detention in non-custodial contexts, and to respect the rights of children to family life and family unity

- **Objective 14: Enhance consular protection, assistance and cooperation throughout the migration cycle (while ensuring safeguards for children and families seeking asylum),** especially the focus on strengthening consular capacities to provide child-sensitive assistance as part of their response to nationals in situations of vulnerability

- **Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration,** especially to strengthen cross-border protection and provide a continuum of care for children at any stage of their migration journey

In practice, ensuring a protective environment for children on the move remains a significant challenge, and migration can be a dangerous experience for children. This brief, which highlights the most relevant evidence from UNICEF's research on child migration in the Horn and North of Africa, provides insights into key protection challenges, informed by children's own perspectives and experiences. It ends with a discussion of how these learnings can help design and deliver policies and programmes that are informed by the needs and aspirations of children and young people on the move.



KEY PROTECTION ISSUES CHILDREN EXPERIENCE WHILE ON THE MOVE

Accompanied while travelling

Eighty-three per cent of surveyed children and young people travelled with someone. However, only 50% of those who travelled with other people were accompanied by their families, 36% travelled with friends and 26% with community members.

The rest of the children made their journey in a particularly dangerous way: 1/3 of children travelled with people they did not know, and 8% travelled with smugglers.⁵
This adds to the 16% who travelled alone.

16%
travelled alone



Children moving alone or with unfamiliar networks are likely to face increased vulnerability and risks

83%
travelled with others

UNKNOWN

32%
People they do not know

8%
Smugglers

KNOWN*

50%
Family

36%
Friends

26%
Community members

*May add to more than 100% as respondents could select multiple answers

Experiences with smugglers

While a small proportion (8%) travelled with a smuggler, **19% of children used a smuggler to help plan their journey.** Views on whether the smuggler was a “good” person (43%) or a “bad” person (40%) were mixed, suggesting that many children feel that they benefit from smugglers, even where this can increase risks and harm.

The smuggler came at night and explained that it would be 24 hours to get to the border with Libya...They covered us with a sheet and some people couldn't breathe. Different smugglers tell you different things, but they all lie to you because they don't want you to run away. We were near the border with Egypt.

- Young Somali returnee, Somalia

Harms suffered since leaving home



55% felt scared



39% hurt



30% detained



21% forced to work

5 As identified by respondents.

Risks of violence and exploitation

More than half of those interviewed felt scared (of other people or wild animals) and four in ten had been physically hurt (either by someone they knew or a stranger). Approximately one interviewee in five was forced to work since leaving their home area.

Perceptions of relative risk between migration and remaining at home

Many children and young people encounter harms when they are on the move. However, it is important to note that not all migration is dangerous, and migration is often viewed as a safer or preferable option to remaining at home.

“People in Eritrea cannot envision a future there because of the military service. Even as a kid, you see bad things, and you come to not trust the government.”

– 17 year-old Eritrean boy, Sudan

I will never forget what I experienced on my journey. Worst of all, they forced us to work in private farms without any payment just like slaves. There was no one to protect you there.”

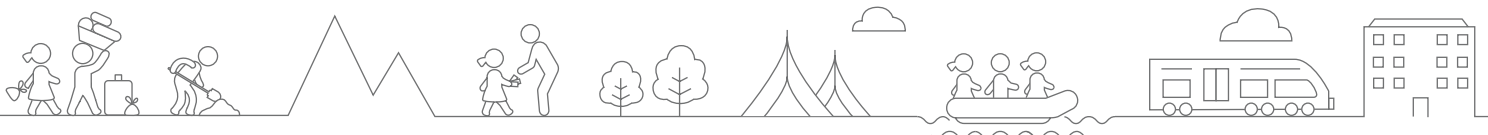
– 17 year-old Ethiopian returnee, Ethiopia

“I did not study, so my father forced me to go to work every day and sometimes beat me if I refused. My life there with my family was an intolerable hell.”

– 17 year-old South Sudanese girl, Khartoum, Sudan

Experiences of migration by girls and boys

- Boys were less trusting of services/support, particularly government officials and the police
- Boys were more likely to have been physically hurt since leaving their home area and to have experienced detention
- A higher proportion of girls said they had felt scared since leaving their home area
- A higher proportion of boys than girls travelled alone
- When boys travelled with others, they were more likely than girls to travel with friends rather than family
- More boys than girls reported negative experiences at borders



CHILDREN CROSSING BORDERS

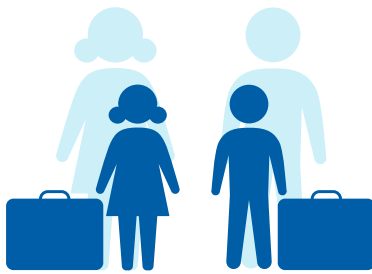
The majority of surveyed children and young people on the move crossed international borders as part of their journey.

Crossing borders can be associated with heightened risks. Children and young people typically view borders as points on the migration journey that are lonely, and where support from the authorities is lacking.⁶

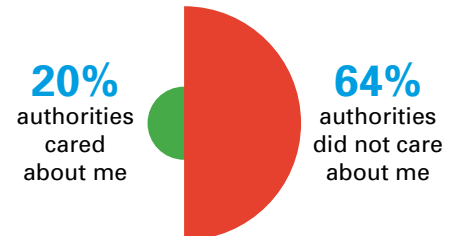
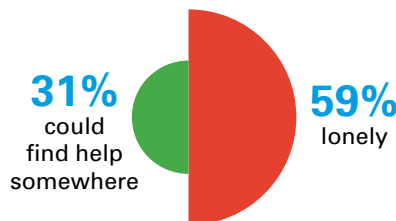
Many felt unsafe crossing borders, especially unofficial ones: 77% of those who crossed an unofficial border described it as not safe – far higher than the 28% who said the official border crossing was not safe. In this sample, more boys than girls had negative experiences at borders, and were more likely to describe them as lonely and unsafe.

“I was arrested twice. During my first attempt [at crossing the border] I didn’t receive anything bad but during my second endeavour I was arrested and beaten. Later, I was released on bail. Our journey was difficult and risky. We were travelling on foot. It was very dark. Consequently, we were falling over and getting back up, now and then. There were hyenas on our way. Besides, we had to be cautious not to be caught by security men”

– Young Eritrean man, Ethiopia



70%
of respondents had crossed an international border (either official or unofficial)



77%
crossed an **unofficial** border described as not safe



28%
crossed an **official** border described as not safe

⁶ Where percentages do not add up to 100% this may be due to rounding, multiple responses, or exclusion of “don’t know” responses.

SPOTLIGHT – DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

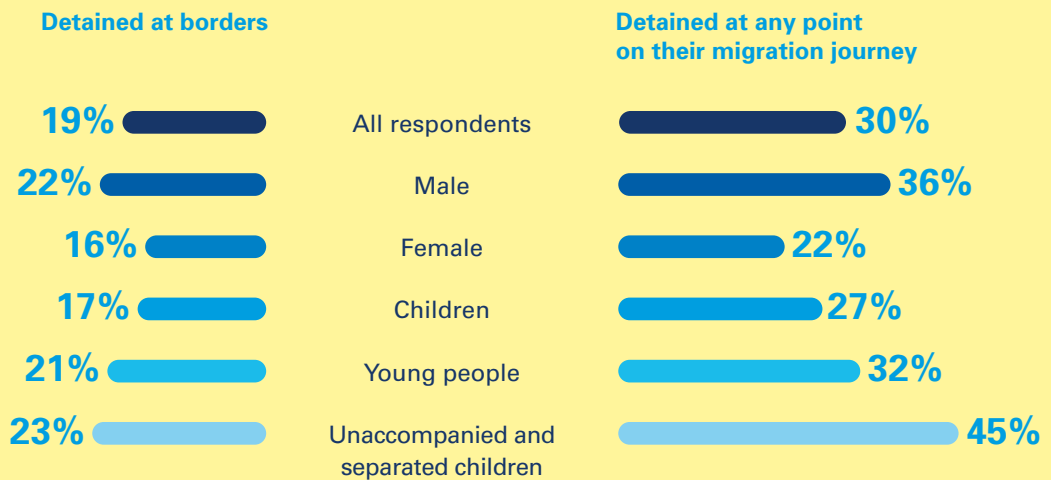
More than a quarter of surveyed children experienced one form of deprivation of liberty at some point during their journey. Children were twice as likely to have been detained by the authorities than by other people (including those who arranged their travel). Almost one in five children were detained at a border and 12% of surveyed children reported being detained by authorities during their migratory journey, even though immigration detention is never in the best interests of the child.

Serious risk and protection concerns are indicated by the findings that children on the move are subject to deprivations of their liberty, not only by governments, but also by other persons and groups.

While both girls and boys can be subject to deprivation of liberty, more boys than girls reported being detained - at borders or elsewhere during their migration journeys.



WHO is detained WHERE?



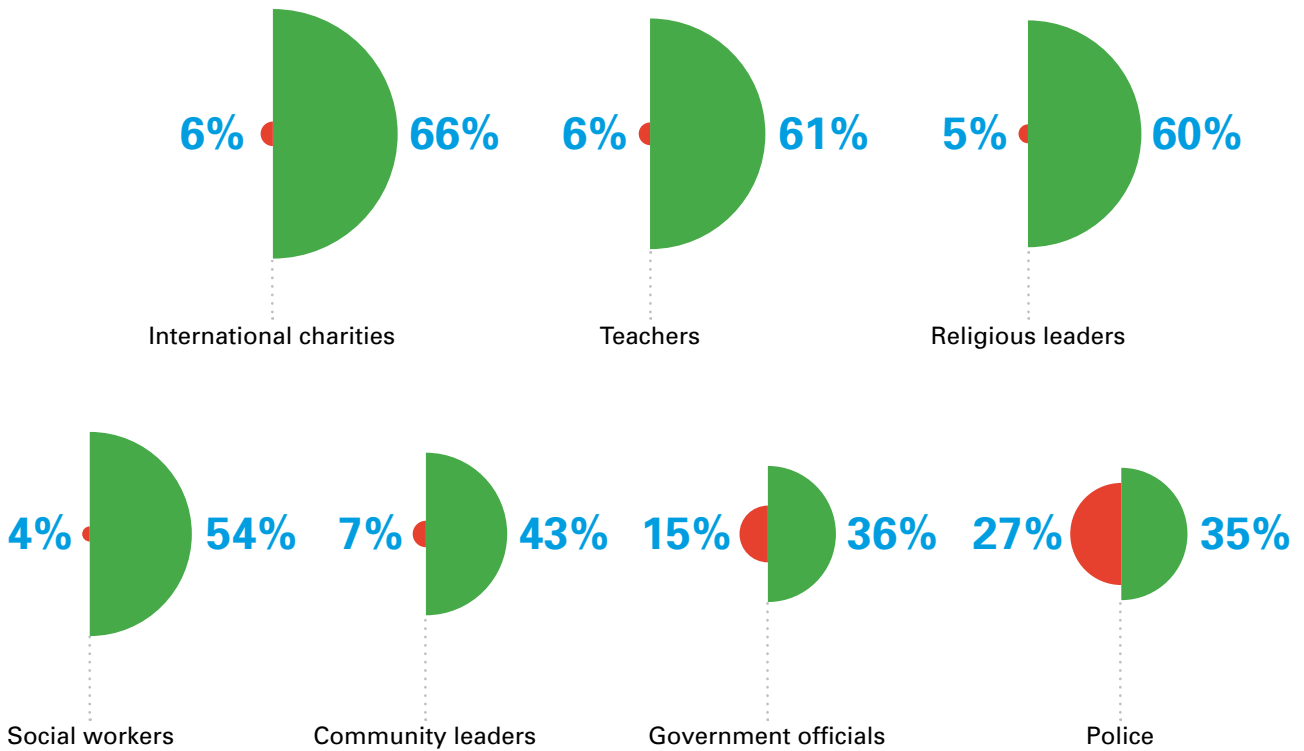
CHILDREN'S TRUST IN SERVICES AND INSTITUTIONS

Surveyed children and young people on the move were distrustful of professionals and institutions that are designed to provide care, protection and basic services. While the majority of respondents believed that international charities, teachers,

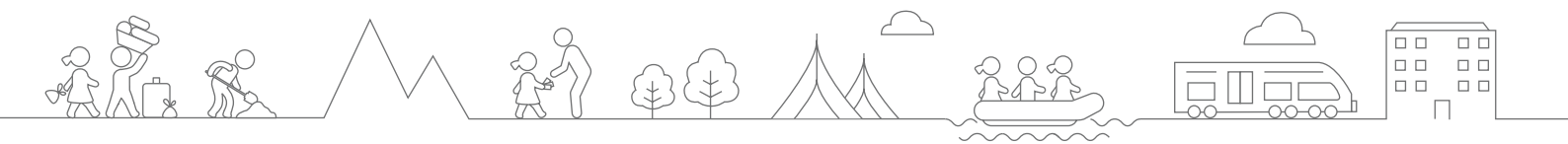
religious leaders and social workers would help them, not all were convinced. **Importantly, children and young people identified government officials and police as professionals who are least expected to help, when compared to other professionals.**

Will these people HELP or HARM people like you?

● Harm ● Help



Child protection systems can only be effective when children have trust in them





Global Compact
FOR Migration

Implications of children's experiences for policy, resourcing and services:

■ **Trust in services can be improved if professionals are selected and trained to be child sensitive.** Children are entitled to protection wherever they are, regardless of their migration status. Having trust in authorities and service providers is necessary for children to seek help in addressing many reported child protection concerns. More services should be delivered through professionals and institutions children trust – such as teachers, social workers, and religious leaders. Social workers who were identified as having a relatively high level of trust among children - and also represent a critical child protection workforce with the role of managing individual cases of children - should be integrated within border management and law enforcement structures. Strong links between border management, law enforcement and child protection services will ensure that social workers are readily available to support with case management and facilitate children's referral to services.

■ GCM Objectives
7, 11, 12

■ **Protective services along migratory routes and child-sensitive counter-trafficking and counter-smuggling operations are critical to reduce protection risks.** Smugglers are often seen as protective and enabling by children and young people on the move, especially in the absence of legal pathways to migration, information on options and ways to seek support prior to, and during the migration journey. Access to

protective, appropriately staffed services and information points along migratory routes is essential for helping children and young people in unsafe migration situations. Counter-trafficking and smuggling efforts should respect the rights of children and young people on the move and should create a protective "pull" towards less dangerous official border crossings, and encourage help-seeking behaviour when needed.

■ GCM Objectives
3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12

■ **Child-sensitive border management is needed to better protect children.** Border management needs to offer protection as well as security. Points of entry need to be child friendly: staff should be skilled and trained on working with children and be staffed with professionals who are equipped with training, procedures and mechanisms that allow protection of children, especially those moving alone or in potentially risky situations.

■ GCM Objectives
11, 12, 23

■ **Immigration detention of children should end, and children should be protected from all forms of deprivation of liberty. There are solutions that work.** Despite ongoing efforts to end the practice, children on the move are still being detained, indicating that more needs to be done. Detention by government authorities should be replaced with appropriate care and reception options and children's cases should be individually assessed to determine options

based on the child's best interests. Evidence indicates that detention by immigration and law enforcement authorities is just one form of deprivation of liberty children on the move face. Detention of children by non-governmental entities, smugglers or other actors is a serious concern and calls for additional protection, crime prevention and response measures along migratory routes.

■ GCM Objectives
9, 13, 14

■ **A combination of national actions and cross-border cooperation is required to strengthen the protection and best interests, of children on the move.** Cross-border cooperation mechanisms on migratory routes need to be established and or/ strengthened, including specific child-friendly and gender-sensitive considerations to address vulnerabilities and needs of children and young people whether in transit or return, including children on the move in national child protection systems, ending immigration detention of children, protecting children moving alone and finding appropriate immediate and longer-term care solutions. Addressing trafficking and smuggling risks and protection of victims requires effective cross-border cooperation, including appropriate consular protection and assistance.

■ GCM Objectives
7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14
and 23

Profile and Methodology

The research findings are based on face-to-face interviews with 1,634 children and young people (aged 14-24 years) who were classed as “on the move”. The research was ethically conducted by UNICEF-trained interviewers between April 2019 and January 2020 at sample points across Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.

The respondents reflected the mixed nature of migration in this part of Africa. Two in five (40%) were nationals of the country they were interviewed in (having migrated, returned or been forcibly displaced within the country) and three in five (60%) were non-nationals (‘Non-nationals’ defined as those migrant children, including displaced children, interviewed without citizenship in host country).

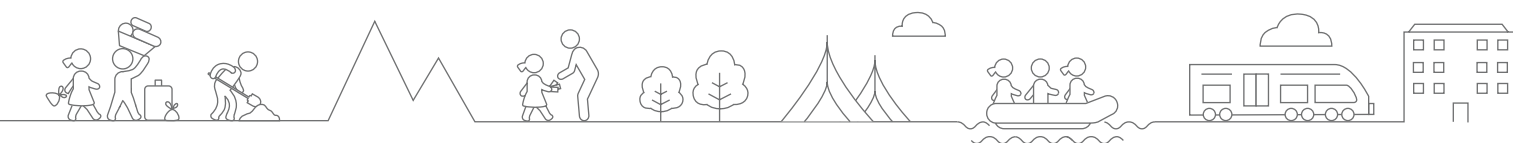
Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents were male and 43% female. The majority were aged between 18 and 24 years (59%) and the remainder (41%) were between 14 and 17 years.

Most respondents (82%) said that they were still moving in that they were not in their home area. In addition, 17% described themselves as returnees, i.e., they had moved and returned to their habitual residence in the last 12 months, and 1% said they did not know, or did not answer the question.

Other briefs available in this series:

[Brief 2: Access to Basic Services](#)

[Brief 3: Vulnerability, Discrimination and Xenophobia](#)



for every child, answers

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