

International Dialogue on Migration: Coordinating United Nations Support for Capacity

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UNICEF STATEMENT

Thank you Mr. Nadir, Excellencies.

First, let me congratulate Mr. Lauber and Mr. Camacho as co-facilitators and others in this room for a Global Compact that is truly a breakthrough in its commitments to children. Amongst other provisions, the GCM commits to:

- include migrant children in national child protection systems,
- ensure safe access to basic services regardless of migration status, and
- uphold the principle of the best interests of the child at all times and in all situations.

We have demonstrated our capacity to negotiate. Now we need to examine our capacity to implement. Whom do we rely on to implement the GCM? Whose capacity do we need to build?

To answer this question, I would like to introduce Eric. Eric and his family left Honduras by bus nine years ago to escape poverty. After transiting through Guatemala, they were stopped at a police roadblock in Mexico, where a policeman took Eric—a nine-year old boy—off the bus at gunpoint and threatened to separate him from his mother. Then, after spending four months in jail, Eric and his family were deported back to Honduras. Today, nine years later, Eric acknowledges that he still has psychological problems from his experience.

It is for children like Eric that capacity building on migration issues is vital. Was information available for Eric's family on the risks of migration? Were there codes of conduct in place for the police? Were there alternatives to detention available? Were consular officials trained to detect their protection needs? Was there a reception centre in Honduras to help Eric and his family re-integrate?

The example of Eric confirms the critical importance of building capacity in both the child protection and the migration management systems.

What do we mean by child protection? Child protection systems can be distilled into 4 P's—the policies, the procedures, the people, the places—that need to be in place and working hand-in-hand with migration management systems to protect migrant children. The UN should only be providers of last resort when there is no child protection system in place. The success of UN capacity-building should rather be measured by the strengthening of local, national and regional protection systems.

I would like to share four critical capacity needs that the UN could play a role in addressing:

- **The first** is the need for child protection and migration management systems to work together.
- **Second** is the need to strengthen the policies, procedures, people and places that comprise these systems.
- **Third**, is the need for cross-border cooperation.
- And **fourth**, is the need for data.

First, child protection systems need to work hand-in-hand with migration management systems. The GCM commits states to ensuring “child protection authorities are promptly informed and assigned

to participate in procedures for the determination of the best interests of the child once an unaccompanied or separated child crosses an international border...including by training border officials in the rights of the child and child-sensitive procedures.” There are good examples globally of these two systems working together to prevent children from falling through the cracks. **Zambia**, for instance, adopted Guidelines and a National Referral Mechanism to enable police and migration authorities to identify and refer vulnerable migrant children to appropriate protective services.

Second, is the need to strengthen policies and procedures and the capacity of people in places where they are in contact with migrant children. Here, I would like to cite examples of how child-sensitivity has been integrated into the core capacity building of those working with migrant children.

- Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has developed a child protection strategy, code of conduct and trainings, including trainings for border guards and airport staff to spot children who may be victims of trafficking.
- In Serbia and Slovenia, UNICEF worked with national authorities and partners to set up tools and mechanisms to ensure the best interests of migrant children are respected and protected.
- In Honduras, UNICEF, IOM and the national Red Cross provided trainings and kits to Ministry of Health social workers and psychologists to expand access to psychosocial support for returned child migrants.

Third, the nature of migration, means that cooperation needs to happen not just at national level and local levels, but across countries. Here the GCM commits states to enhancing “international, re-

gional and cross-regional border management cooperation.” This is another area where the UN Network on Migration can clearly add value. For example, as UNICEF we are supporting the Economic Community of West African States in the adoption and now implementation of region-wide procedures to identify, refer, assist, return and reintegrate vulnerable children on the move. There are other regional bodies and mechanisms, like the AU and the Bali Process, that can also play a critical role in protecting children across borders.

Fourth, data. Almost 1 out of 4 countries do not have age disaggregated data on migrants. We know that what we do not count often does not count. Here again the GCM includes an important commitment for states to “develop a global programme to build and enhance national capacities in data collection, analysis and dissemination.” There are examples of partnerships that we could learn from. For example, in 2017, UNICEF and IOM jointly launched the *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) for Children on The Move* project to improve the evidence-base of needs and risks faced by children in situations of forced displacement or migration, and to facilitate timely and informed child protection and education interventions. At the regional level in Europe, UNICEF, IOM and UNHCR joined forces to fill in critical data gaps on children on the move through joint data analysis and publications, coordinated research initiatives and joint advocacy on improving national and European administrative data systems. In Greece, the three agencies also supported the National Solidarity Center for Social Services and the Hellenic Statistical Authority in strengthening capacity to track and place unaccompanied children

Finally, let me highlight one more important aspect. Those who know best of what is working and what is not are migrants themselves. It is our own best interest to also build the capacity of young

migrants themselves to co-create solutions and provide evidence and feedback on the impact of migration practices. Anas Ansar, a young migrant who addressed policymakers in June put it this way: *“One way of making migration safer and better for young people is to have us be part of the discussion...There needs to be space offered which allows young people to meaningfully contribute throughout the process of setting strategies, planning and implementing accordingly.”*

To conclude, as we think about capacity building, let us be bold and take a 360-degree view on whose capacity needs to be built to make migration safe, orderly and regular for all, including children. As concerns UNICEF, we are fully committed to playing an active part in the new Migration Network and capacity-building mechanism.

We owe it to Eric and the 50 million children who have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced to get it right.