

# Children on the move

## Key terms, definitions and concepts



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## WHAT IS IDAC?

The International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC) is a cross-sectoral global coalition that aims to improve data and statistics and support evidence-based policymaking for migrant and displaced children. Jointly led by Eurostat, IOM, OECD, UNHCR and UNICEF, IDAC brings together

governments (including experts from national statistical offices and migration- and displacement-related ministries), international and regional organizations, NGOs, think tanks, academics, civil society and youth.

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# Why Definitions Matter:

## Guaranteeing the rights of every child

**Around the world, there are millions of children whose lives are being dramatically shaped by migration and displacement.** Many have been forced from their communities by urgent circumstances that threaten their well-being – such as conflict, violence or disasters. Some will cross borders, continents and oceans, some will move within their home country. Others will experience profound impacts when parents or caregivers migrate without them, or when their migration ends in a return to their place of origin. Many of these children, no matter the specifics of their circumstances, will face serious rights violations because they are on the move.

**These children have come to be known by the international community as children on the move. But who are these children? Which groups of children are included in this umbrella term?**

While there are some internationally agreed upon definitions for certain migrant and displaced populations, other groups may be defined differently by governments, international organizations, statisticians, researchers and members of the public. Furthermore, children directly or indirectly impacted by migration and displacement may not be defined or recognized in any way in some contexts. This presents complications when it comes to protecting these children's rights: Without clear and standardized definitions, quality data cannot be collected to accurately reflect the situations of children on the move and the many ways in which migration and displacement affect their childhoods. These data are necessary to ensure that evidence-based policymaking and programmes are in place for all children.

**This reference document aims to promote a conceptual understanding of children on the move – who they are, the subgroups they constitute, what differentiates them and how they are counted (or not counted) – and unpack key migration and displacement terms that relate to children. It aims to serve as a key reference for researchers, policymakers and organizations involved in migration and development.**

The brief begins with a conceptual framework that illustrates IDAC's definition of children on the move, identifying the key groups that comprise this large and diverse population. It then defines, discusses and presents the latest global data for each of these groups, highlighting the children on the move for whom there are limited or no available data. Sample scenarios are included to illustrate how this terminology can be applied to real-life situations and how children may shift from one category to another. The brief concludes with a table summarizing the data and the data gaps for each of the groups of children discussed.

This reference document covers a broad range of terms frequently used to describe and count various subgroups of children on the move. It is important to note that migration terms may be defined differently according to their purpose – legal, statistical and conceptual definitions can vary substantially, which may be necessary to serve distinct ends (see Definitions, p. 3). IDAC uses an inclusive approach for its definition of children on the move to ensure that all groups of children directly and indirectly impacted by migration and displacement are counted and protected.

Publication of this brief coincides with an IDAC sister document, *Data and Statistics for Children on the Move: Essential sources and good practices*,

which unpacks the data sources behind many of the statistics discussed in these pages and identifies opportunities to improve data on migrant and displaced children.

While statistical frameworks and definitions are referenced to unpack the groups of children on the move included in international statistics, this publication does not strictly put forth statistical definitions and should not be considered a statistical framework in and of itself. Similarly, the brief should not be considered a legal framework for defining various groups of children on the move. Rather, its goal is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the multiple, sometimes overlapping, categories of children on the move throughout their migration journeys and how these children are counted.

**Quality data and statistics are intimately tied to sound terminology.** Clear definitions help identify which groups of children are being counted, which groups are being protected under international or national laws and which groups are not being counted. When children are not counted, they are unlikely to be accounted for in policies and programmes. **Utilizing standardized definitions for all children on the move is essential to improving the quality and comparability of data and research on these children, to upholding their rights and to holding policy- and decision makers accountable.**

While terminology plays an important role in guaranteeing the rights and protections of every child, it is critical to remember that every child is a child, regardless of any group they may belong to. **Every child on the move has an important story to tell that reaches far beyond any given definition.**



*“Migrant rights are human rights. They must be respected without discrimination – and irrespective of whether their movement is forced, voluntary, or formally authorized. We must do everything possible to prevent the loss of life – as a humanitarian imperative and a moral and legal obligation.”*

– António Guterres,  
Secretary-General of the United Nations

# Definitions:

## Categories and usage

Migration and displacement terms are often defined differently by various actors, institutions and laws to serve specific purposes. Understanding these distinctions can help clarify the purpose of individual terms and how they may be applied across various contexts.

There are **three key types of definitions** related to migration and displacement:

- 1. Statistical definitions:** These are utilized to collect data on a particular migrant or displaced population. The international statistical community has provided guidelines with statistical definitions related to some key groups of migrant and displaced populations, in order to enhance the international comparability of data on these groups.
- 2. International legal definitions:** These include internationally agreed upon definitions stemming from customary law, treaties, conventions and protocols, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, which grants legal rights and protections to particular groups. While some groups defined by international law, such as



refugees, are protected by legally binding protections, other groups, such as internally displaced persons, may fall under the protection of guiding principles in international law that are not legally binding. This can lead to differences between countries in the ways in which migrant and displaced populations are defined, counted and protected.

- 3. National legal or administrative definitions:** These definitions are used to classify particular groups of migrant or displaced persons within a given country and determine their legal status and access to rights. For some groups, such as international migrants, legal definitions between countries and regions may vary widely.

Migration and displacement definitions and terminology may be adopted and recast for advocacy and communication purposes. For instance, the media and general public may utilize migration and displacement terms to describe mobility patterns and not adhere to strict definitions. Given the multitude of definitions and terminology used, this brief aims to promote a common understanding of key migration terms and discuss how they apply to children, in particular.

To show how migration statistics are compiled and clarify the groups that fall under IDAC's definition of children on the move, this brief focuses on statistical and international legal definitions of migration and displacement, when available. When statistical or legal definitions are unavailable, advocacy definitions or descriptive definitions put forth by UN agencies are presented.

For statistical definitions, the brief primarily draws from the Expert Group on Migration Statistics and the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics (EGRIS), while for legal or descriptive definitions, the brief refers to United Nations bodies, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).



# Who Are Children on the Move?

## A conceptual framework and key terms

Children on the move represent a highly diverse population. They live in a wide variety of circumstances that will shape their risks, deprivations, needs and opportunities. Many of these children are marginalized and highly vulnerable.

This section takes a close look at the many groups of children that comprise this term. It begins with a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) that illustrates the major categories of children on the move and key groups that fall under each category, followed by a description of each group.

The framework in Figure 1 should *not* be considered a statistical framework for counting discrete categories of children on the move. **It is important to note that children may fall into multiple categories and switch between groups**, as depicted in the sample scenarios presented in this section (see pp. 19–20, pp. 25–26 and pp. 35–36). For instance, a child internally displaced by conflict and violence may also travel as an unaccompanied minor. The child may eventually cross a border and seek asylum in a neighbouring country, thus becoming an asylum-seeker. In this regard, efforts to estimate the total number of children on the move



must ensure not to count children who fall under more than one category multiple times.

The category “Other groups of children on the move” includes children who do not fit squarely under the major categories but also need to be counted. Groups noted in purple represent children on the move who are in highly vulnerable situations and whose precarious circumstances may demand more targeted intervention.

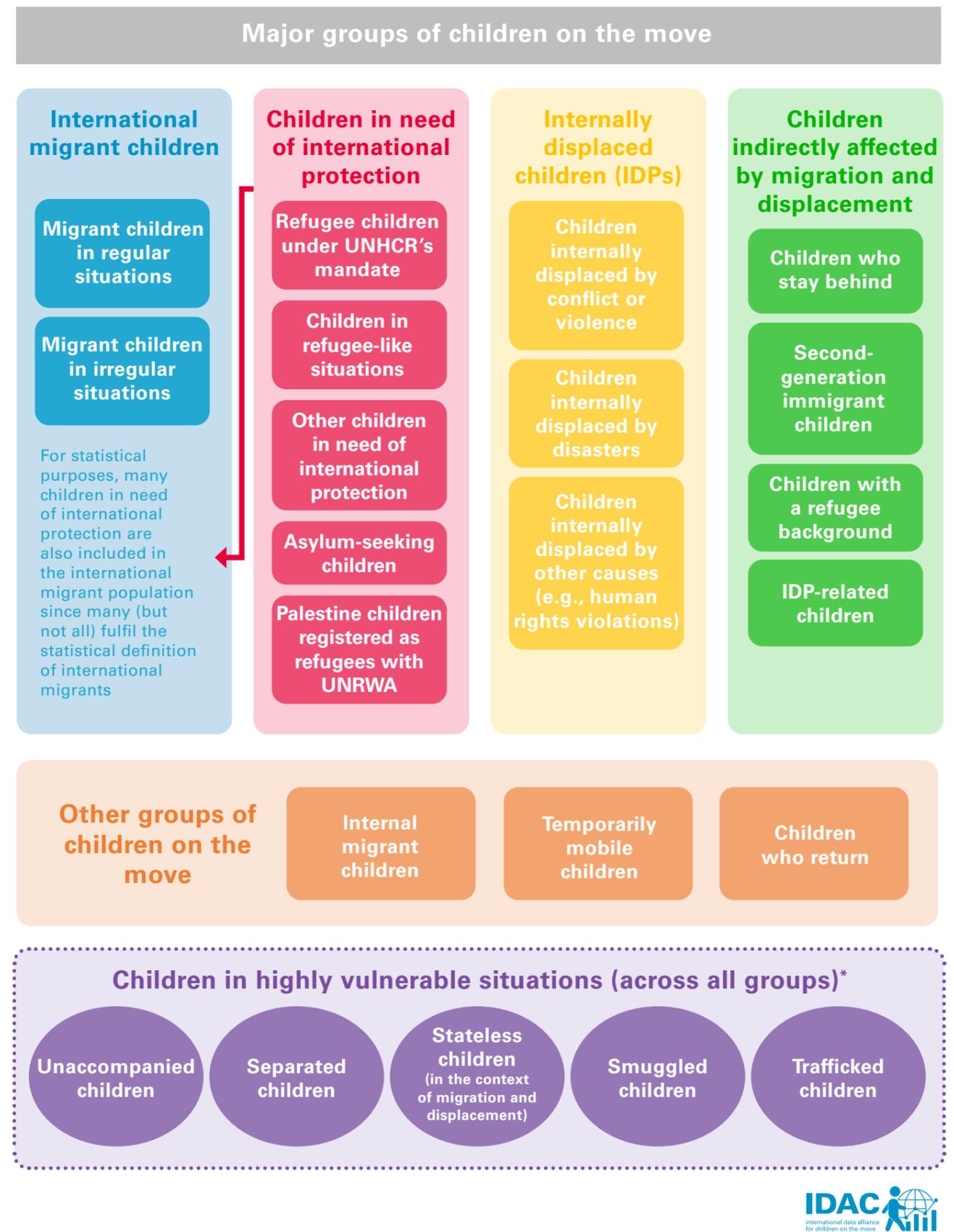
While efforts have been made to be as comprehensive as possible, IDAC’s conceptual framework is not meant to serve as an exhaustive representation of all groups or subgroups of children on the move.

### CHILDREN IN NEED OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN STATISTICAL AND LEGAL DEFINITIONS

Children in need of international protection have a special status in international law and are entitled to their own set of legal rights and protections. For legal, advocacy and protection purposes, it is important that these children are defined and counted as their own group, distinct from international migrants children, as shown in Figure 1. However, many children in need of international protection implicitly meet the statistical definition of international migrant, as many establish residency outside of their country of birth (see pp. 10–11).

Children in need of international protection are thus generally accounted for in official migration statistics, with the exception of those who do not cross international borders, such as children born in exile to refugee parents or Palestine refugees who reside in Palestine. Since the statistical category of international migrants includes many refugees and asylum-seekers, it is important that these data can be systematically disaggregated to provide accurate information about the number of children in need of international protection, as well as other groups of migrant children.

**FIGURE 1** CHILDREN ON THE MOVE: AN IDAC CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



\*In addition to the situations explicitly mentioned here, it is important to remember that any child on the move may find themselves in situations of high vulnerability for a variety of reasons.



**Child**

A child is every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (Article 1, Convention on the Rights of the Child)<sup>1</sup>

**Children on the move**

A compound concept that has gained traction on the operational level in the international community, the term describes children who have been directly or indirectly affected by migration and displacement, either internationally across borders or within the same country. When referring to **children on the move**, IDAC includes child migrants; children in need of international protection, such as refugees and asylum-seekers; internally displaced children; children indirectly affected by migration and displacement, such as children who stay behind while parents or caregivers migrate; stateless children\* and child victims of cross-border trafficking



**MYCP: EVERY CHILD ON THE MOVE HAS RIGHTS**

The [Migration Youth and Children Platform](#) (MYCP) is a self-organized space for children and youth to engage in migration and displacement policy processes. MYCP believes that all groups of children on the move are equally important and in need of support. Whether a child is a refugee, migrant, internally displaced or falls into multiple categories, they deserve protection and care. MYCP recognizes the need to take a child's unique circumstances into account and that every child has the right to a safe and secure future.

Migration statistics too often lack focus on children's unique needs and circumstances. As

a result, policy responses fail to acknowledge their specific challenges. Using standardized definitions is crucial to ensure that all groups of children on the move are recognized and accounted for in data collection systems.

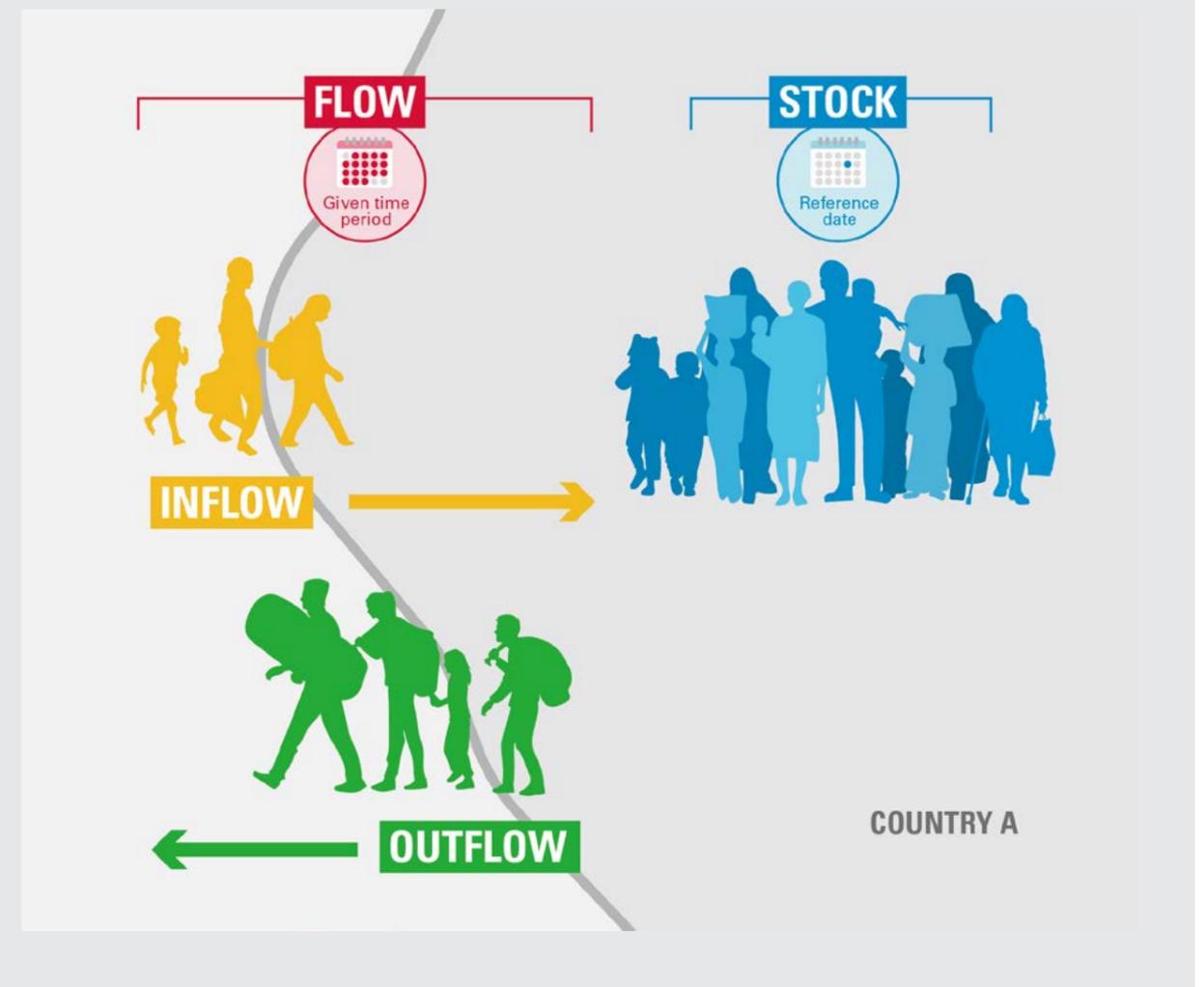
Better data on children on the move mean, as a young person from Nigeria said at a MYCP consultation, 'having information on the existence of each of the children, the history or details of their movement, and their particular needs and vulnerabilities'. Defining and counting all groups of children on the move helps to make sure that no one is left behind.

**FIGURE 2** COUNTING CHILDREN ON THE MOVE: STOCKS VS. FLOWS

Two key measures used to collect data on populations are stocks and flows. A **stock** refers to "a static measurement of the size of a population with a particular characteristic in a given country at a particular point in time (also called a reference date)."<sup>2</sup> A child may count as part of the international migrant stock if they meet the definition of international migrant on a given reference date, regardless of whether they have lived in the country for one year or many years, or if they plan to leave the country shortly after the reference date.

A **flow** refers to "a dynamic measure, counting the size of a population that acquired the specific characteristic within a particular time

period."<sup>3</sup> Flows are typically measured within one-month or one-year time periods. These measurements can be counted as **inflows**: the total number of persons entering a population of interest, including through birth, or **outflows**: the total number of persons exiting the population of interest, including through death. For instance, an inflow measurement may refer to the total number of Ukrainian refugee children who enter Poland during a one-month period. An outflow measurement may refer to the number of children who emigrate from Indonesia within a calendar year. A **net flow** refers to the difference between an inflow or an outflow for a given population within a specified time period.<sup>4</sup>



\*IDAC's definition of children on the move only includes children who are stateless in the context of migration and displacement.

## A.

# International migrant children

## GLOBAL ESTIMATE:



In 2020, there were an estimated  
**35.5 million**  
 international child migrants, including  
 children in need of international  
 protection, worldwide\*

\*Source: Estimates derived from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 'International Migrant Stock 2020'.



## INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT CHILDREN

### International migrant

*A person who has changed his or her country of residence and established new residence in the country within a given year. International migrant can be either 'immigrant' or 'emigrant' and include those with national or foreign citizenships or stateless persons<sup>5</sup>*

In the above statistical definition, 'immigrant' refers to persons who enter a country and become part of a resident population, while 'emigrant' refers to residents who leave their country to become a resident of another country.<sup>6</sup> A migrant thus may be referred to as an emigrant from the perspective of their sending country and an immigrant from the perspective of the country they move to.

The above definition makes no reference to the reason for changing country of residence and therefore many refugees and other persons in need of international protection are implicitly included.\*

When referring to international migrants, IDAC uses the definition set forth by the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, which represents an adapted version of the definition originally articulated in UN DESA's 1998 Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration.<sup>7</sup> While this definition is generally accepted by statistical experts, the conceptual framework is not a legal document and there is no universal, internationally agreed upon definition for international migrant. When describing migrant populations, there may be significant differences between statistical definitions, legal definitions or definitions used by international organizations. This is in part due to the complexities of monitoring and classifying mobile populations.

While the statistical definition of international migrants appears relatively straightforward, in practice this information can be difficult to gather, and countries have taken different approaches to collecting data on international migrants. For instance, the minimum threshold an individual must stay or intend to stay in a country to be considered a **usual resident** varies from country to country. Although the majority of

countries use the 12-month criterion, some countries, such as Georgia, India and Spain, define a long-term migrant as someone who stays six months or longer, while other countries specify different durations of time.<sup>8</sup> As a result, some migrants may not be counted as a resident in either their country of origin or their country of destination (and therefore not counted in international migrant stock estimates), while others are counted as a resident in both their country of origin and their country of destination. This is because they may not meet the residency criteria in either country, or they may meet the criteria in both countries.<sup>9</sup> Other issues, such as measuring residency based on an individual's reported intention to stay or on actual time stayed, further complicate international migration statistics.<sup>10</sup>

Because of the complexity of capturing this information, two additional concepts that countries use to count international migrants are **country of birth** and **country of citizenship** (see also Example 1, p. 11).

- **Country of birth** can help distinguish persons born outside of the country where they reside – **foreign-born** populations – from persons born in the country they reside – **native-born** populations. The total foreign-born population within a country, information that is typically collected in censuses and household surveys, is often used as a proxy for the total number of international migrants in that country.<sup>11</sup> However, this metric does not take into account the duration of an individual's stay in a country (which can range from recent arrival to nearly the entirety of one's life) and fails to make the distinction between international temporary mobility and international migration. It also disregards the fact that they may be a citizen of the country (either by heritage or by naturalization).<sup>12</sup>
- **Country of citizenship** is another key feature of international migration, as citizenship is a crucial factor in determining an individual's access to rights in a country and the extent to which they can move freely across international borders. Like foreign-born populations, the total number of **foreign citizens** within a country is often used as a proxy for international migrants. This measure leaves out some groups of international migrants, such as those who have newly acquired citizenship in a destination country. In addition, because countries determine citizenship differently (*jus sanguinis* vs. *jus solis*), this can lead to differences in terms of which children are counted in international migrant stock estimates.<sup>13</sup>

\*UNHCR promotes a distinction between international migrants and refugees for all purposes outside of statistical analysis to ensure the respect of fundamental safeguards enshrined in the international protection regime.

**Example 1:** A child born to foreign citizen parents in France – a country that determines a child’s nationality based on the parents’ citizenship (*jus sanguinis*) – would be counted as an international migrant when using the proxy of country of citizenship, while a child born to immigrant parents in the United States – a country that determines a child’s nationality based on where they are born (*jus solis*) – would not be counted as an international migrant when using this metric.<sup>14</sup>

The United Nations Population Division (UNPD) regularly compiles and publishes data on migrant stocks based on data reported from individual countries. Current UNPD global migration estimates are derived in part from a combination of data reported on foreign-born populations from some countries and on foreign citizen populations from other countries, with a preference for data on foreign-born populations.<sup>15</sup> However, recent [UN statistical guidelines](#) have reiterated that neither country of birth nor country of citizenship alone are ideal metrics for measuring migrant populations. These guidelines recommend that States collect information on both country of birth and country of citizenship and outline a framework for how these metrics can be combined to estimate international migration trends more accurately.<sup>16</sup>

Another important aspect of collecting data on and classifying international migrants is related to their reason for stay. Children and their families may choose to cross borders for a variety of reasons, including the pursuit of education or economic opportunities, reunification with family members or due to the deepening impacts of climate change. A child or family’s reason for migrating can have an impact on

their visa status, legal rights and duration of stay. For example, refugees and asylum-seekers, who are forced to flee their country of origin (discussed in section B), have a special status in international law and are usually classified as a separate group from other international migrants in academic research, policymaking, advocacy and public discourse. For this reason, it is crucial for States to disaggregate international migration estimates by both age and migratory status to maintain accurate information about the number of children in need of international protection.

In addition to the statistical definition presented above, some organizations may use the term international migrant more broadly. For instance, the IOM definition of international migrant does not specify a time requirement: “Any person who is outside a State of which he or she is a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, his or her State of birth or habitual residence. The term includes migrants who intend to move permanently or temporarily, and those who move in a regular or documented manner as well as migrants in irregular situations.”<sup>17</sup>

Note that legal or administrative terms for **immigrant** can vary from country to country. In some cases, immigrant may refer only to foreign citizens but not to those who acquire citizenship in a host country, or refer only to foreigners who have the right to stay in the country indefinitely.<sup>18</sup> UN DESA urges States not to limit their focus to just foreign citizens or foreign settlers when compiling statistics on international migrants, but to include all populations that meet the statistical definition of international migrant presented at the beginning of this section. This may require States to include groups that are not recognized as immigrants administratively in that country, such as foreign workers, students, refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>19</sup>



## MIGRANT CHILDREN IN REGULAR SITUATIONS

### Migrant in a regular situation

*A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party*<sup>20</sup>

While the statistical definition of international migrant does not differentiate between migrants in regular situations and migrants in irregular situations, migrants in regular situations are more likely to be accounted for in migration data and statistics, as more administrative records are kept on this group.



## MIGRANT CHILDREN IN IRREGULAR SITUATIONS

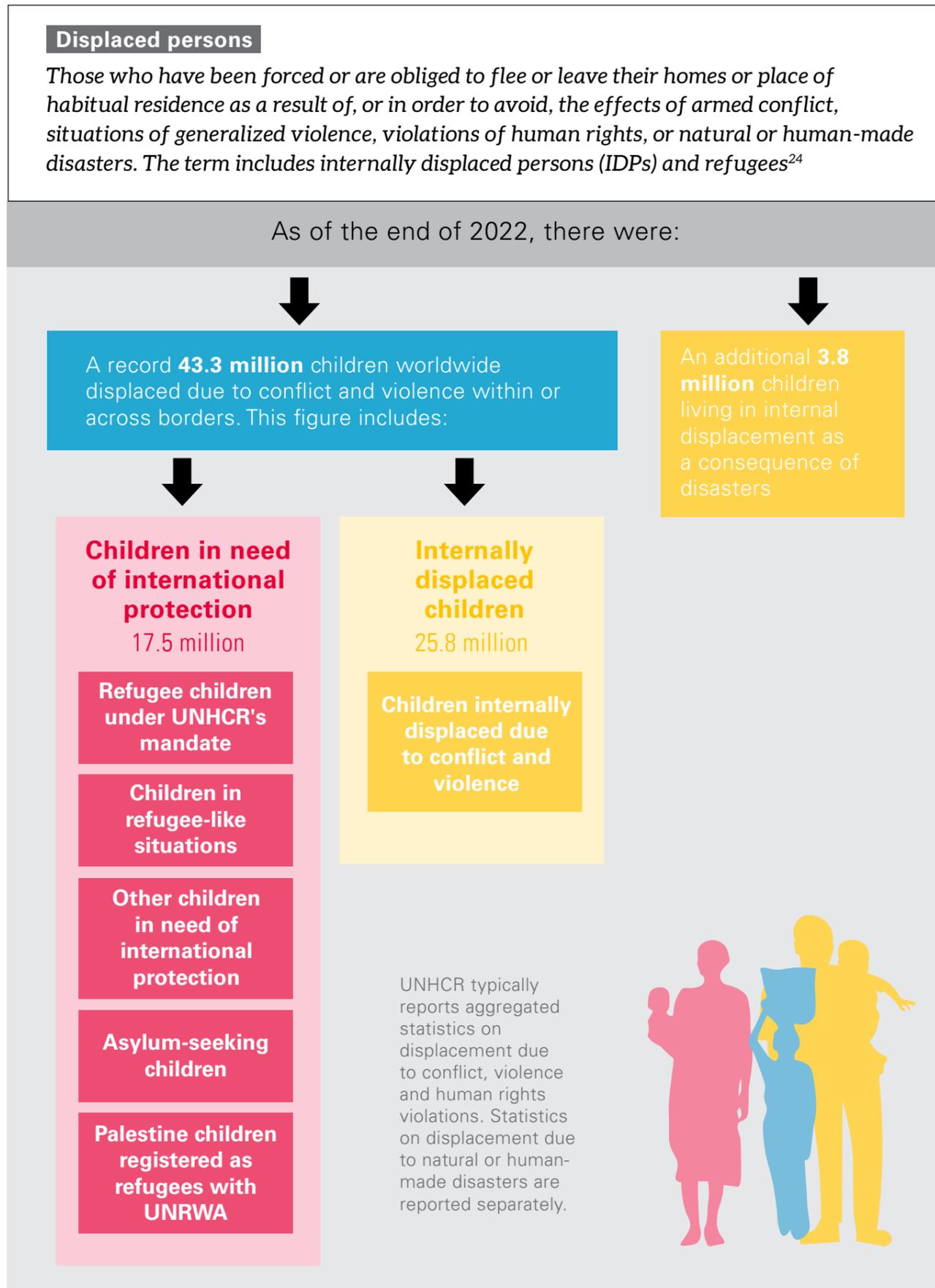
### Migrant in an irregular situation

*A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party*<sup>21</sup>

Although irregular migrants should be officially included in international migration statistics, in practice they are often not accounted for because they may not be enumerated in censuses or household surveys – either because their whereabouts are unknown or they are hesitant to participate due to fear of detection and deportation. Moreover, by definition, there are fewer administrative records kept on this group, as they are residing in a host country outside of legal channels.<sup>22</sup>

It is crucial to note that though children may travel through irregular pathways, this does not mean they are ineligible for international protection. For instance, irregular migrants may include asylum-seekers fleeing persecution, conflict or generalized violence who may have travelled through irregular channels from a country in which they were in danger. Migrant children in irregular situations may also include unaccompanied migrant children, refugees and victims of trafficking.<sup>23</sup>

**FIGURE 3** COUNTING DISPLACED CHILDREN



# B.

## Children in need of international protection



\* This figure includes:

**14.2 million**

refugee children under UNHCR's mandate, children in refugee-like situations and others in need of international protection

**1.5 million**

asylum-seeking children

**1.8 million**

Palestine children registered as refugees with UNRWA

GLOBAL ESTIMATE:



By the end of 2022, there were an estimated

**17.5 million\***  
child refugees and asylum-seekers in countries around the world\*\*

**14.2**  
million  
children\*

### REFUGEE CHILDREN UNDER UNHCR'S MANDATE

#### Refugee

Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion<sup>25</sup>

#### Prima facie refugee

A person recognized as a refugee, by a State or UNHCR, on the basis of objective criteria related to the circumstances in their country of origin or former habitual residence and of their flight, which justify a presumption that they meet the criteria of the applicable refugee definition. A person recognized as a prima facie refugee does not undergo individual refugee status determination procedures but enjoys the same status as a person who has been granted refugee status individually<sup>26</sup>

#### Non-refoulement

A core principle of international human rights and refugee law that prohibits States from returning individuals in any manner whatsoever (whether directly or indirectly) to territories where they may be at risk of persecution, torture, or other forms of serious or irreparable harm. The most

prominent expression of the principle of non-refoulement in international refugee law is Article 33(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The principle also is part of customary international law and is therefore binding on all States, whether or not they are parties to the 1951 Convention<sup>27</sup>

The 1951 Refugee Convention is an internationally legally binding document, granting individuals fleeing persecution special status and protections in international law. UNHCR serves as the guardian of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol and reports annual data and statistics on refugees.<sup>28</sup> UNHCR's core mandate is to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees and others who fall within their designated scope and work with governments to find durable solutions.<sup>29</sup> States or UNHCR can grant refugee status based on individualized evaluations or evaluations on a group level (prima facie). The principle of non-refoulement is key to the 1951 Refugee Convention but broader in scope than refugee law, as it is characterized by its "absolute nature without any exception."<sup>30</sup>

Some regions have expanded the definition of refugees to include all persons fleeing generalized violence. For instance, the Cartagena Declaration of 1984, adopted by several countries in the Latin America region, define refugees as: "Persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order."<sup>31</sup> This expanded definition does not contradict the 1951 Refugee Convention's definition of refugee, but rather is meant to broaden the criteria for groups that are eligible for refugee status.

In 2018, the Expert Group on Refugee Statistics (EGRIS)\*\* published the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS), which provide key guidance on how countries and international organizations can improve data collection on refugee and refugee-related populations.<sup>32</sup>

\*\*Source: Estimates derived from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2022*.

\* This figure includes refugee children under UNHCR's mandate, children in refugee-like situations and other children in need of international protection.

\*\*Now known as the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics (EGRIS) after the group's mandate was extended to include statelessness in 2021.

## CHILDREN IN REFUGEE-LIKE SITUATIONS

### People in refugee-like situations

A category which is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained<sup>33</sup>

UNHCR's official statistics on refugees include children in refugee-like situations who have not received official refugee status. This group may include, for instance, children of refugees and asylum-seekers born in a country of asylum who are not naturalized as citizens in that country and are therefore in need of international protection. UNHCR typically does not differentiate between refugee children and children in refugee-like situations in its reporting.<sup>34</sup>

**Example 2:** An Afghan child flees to Iran as a result of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan in 2021. The child is not formally granted refugee status, nor citizenship by the State. This child is thus considered a person in a refugee-like situation who is in need of international protection.<sup>35</sup> A child is born to refugee parents of Myanmar in the United States and granted United States citizenship at birth. She is not considered a child in a refugee-like situation because she is a United States citizen and not considered in need of international protection.<sup>36</sup>

Data on the number of children born to refugee parents are often missing, as these children may not be registered at birth or States may not properly record this data in national administrative systems.<sup>37</sup> To fill this data gap, UNHCR calculates the number of children born to refugees using relevant indicators, such as birth rates in country of origin and asylum.<sup>38</sup> Between 2018 and 2021, for instance, UNHCR estimated that 1.5 million children were born into a refugee life.<sup>39</sup>

## OTHER CHILDREN IN NEED OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

### Other people in need of international protection

People who are outside their country or territory of origin, typically because they have been forcibly displaced across international borders, who have not been reported under other categories (refugees, asylum-seekers, people in refugee-like situations) but who likely need international protection, including protection against forced return, as well as access to basic services on a temporary or longer-term basis<sup>40</sup>

**Example 3:** Since 2014, millions of Venezuelans have left their country for a range of reasons including violence, insecurity, political persecution, food and medicine shortages, lack of social services and severe economic hardship. Venezuelans reside in host countries under a range of legal statuses. Many have not been granted official refugee status, in part due to the complex reasons they have left and the distinct sociopolitical and economic nature of the crisis, in contrast to refugees uprooted for reasons explicitly outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>41</sup> However, UNHCR notes that according to the definition of refugee set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, "international protection considerations...are applicable to the majority of Venezuelans."<sup>42</sup> Many Venezuelan children abroad are thus counted as part of the "other people in need of international protection" category and included in UNHCR's global forced displacement estimates, which are used by IDAC.



1.5 million children  
ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN

### Asylum-seeker

A general term used to describe any person seeking international protection. In some countries, it may be used as a legal term to refer to a person who has applied for refugee status or another form of international protection but is still waiting to receive a final decision on the determination of their status. An asylum-seeker may also refer to a person who intends to apply for asylum but has not yet formally started the asylum application process<sup>43</sup>

The statistical definition of asylum-seeker used by UNHCR to report data distinguishes between **asylum-seekers**, defined as "persons who have filed an application for asylum in a country other than their own whose claims have not yet been determined", from **people with the intention of seeking asylum**, but who have not yet done so.<sup>44</sup> People with the intention of seeking asylum are not included in UNHCR's refugee and asylum statistics (reflected in the figure above) and data on this group are not regularly collected.<sup>45</sup> However, both groups are included in IDAC's term children on the move.

1.8 million children  
PALESTINE CHILDREN REGISTERED AS REFUGEES WITH UNRWA

### Palestine refugees

Persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict<sup>46</sup>

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a UN agency responsible for registering and providing support to Palestine refugees. UNRWA provides services to those living in areas of operation who meet this definition and who are registered with the agency and need assistance. Descendants of Palestine refugees are also eligible for registration as refugees and counted in this figure. UNRWA reports data on these refugees on a quarterly basis and they are included in UNHCR's statistics on people in need of international protection.

## SAMPLE SCENARIO 1. CONFLICT AND CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

### Armed conflict breaks out in the northwest region of Country A

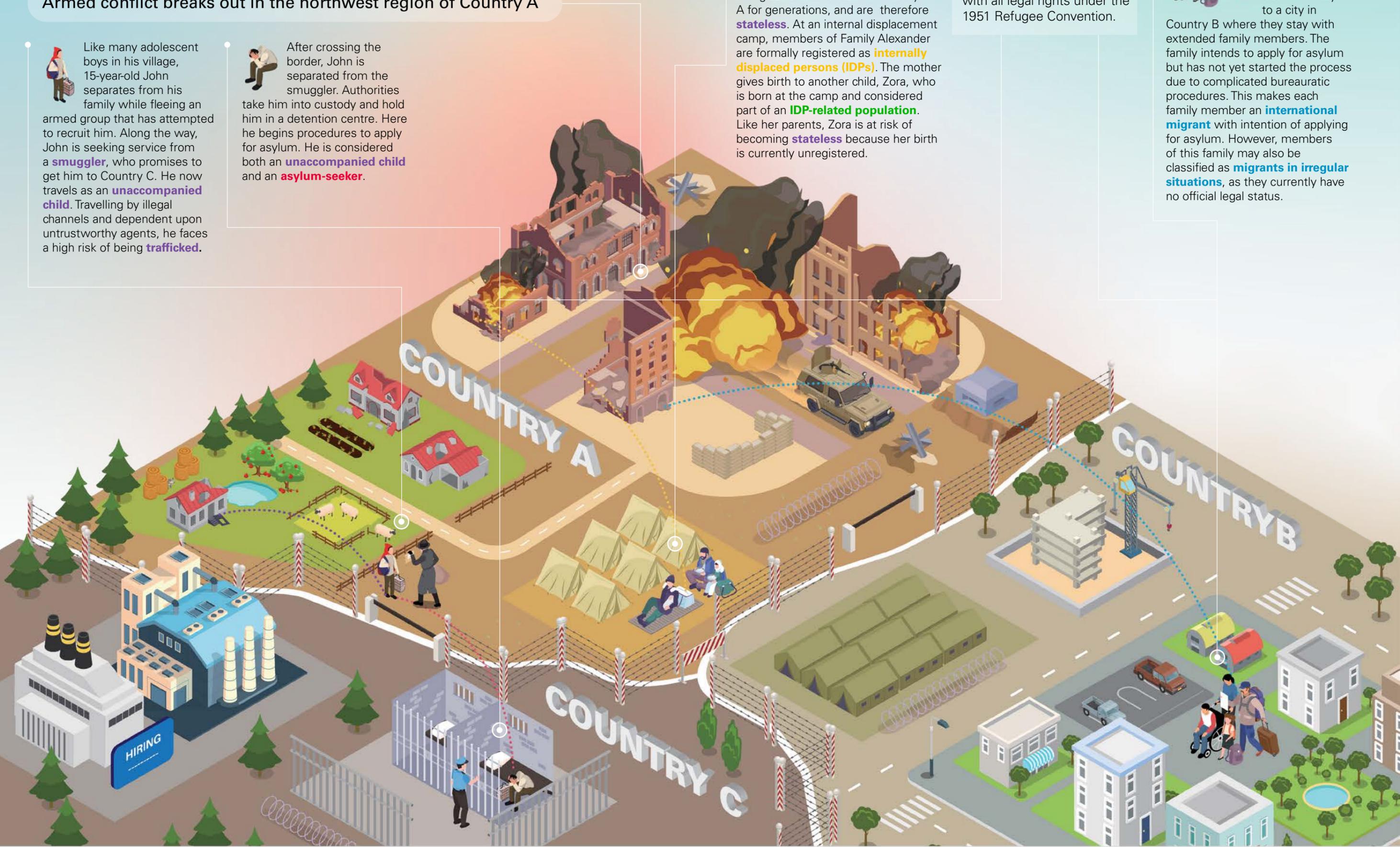
Like many adolescent boys in his village, 15-year-old John separates from his family while fleeing an armed group that has attempted to recruit him. Along the way, John is seeking service from a **smuggler**, who promises to get him to Country C. He now travels as an **unaccompanied child**. Travelling by illegal channels and dependent upon untrustworthy agents, he faces a high risk of being **trafficked**.

After crossing the border, John is separated from the smuggler. Authorities take him into custody and hold him in a detention centre. Here he begins procedures to apply for asylum. He is considered both an **unaccompanied child** and an **asylum-seeker**.

Family Alexander flees to another region of Country A. They belong to a minority group in Country A that has not been recognized as nationals of Country A for generations, and are therefore **stateless**. At an internal displacement camp, members of Family Alexander are formally registered as **internally displaced persons (IDPs)**. The mother gives birth to another child, Zora, who is born at the camp and considered part of an **IDP-related population**. Like her parents, Zora is at risk of becoming **stateless** because her birth is currently unregistered.

If the asylum applications of Family Campos and John are accepted, each of them are considered a **refugee** with all legal rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Family Campos from southeastern region of Country A travels for days to a city in Country B where they stay with extended family members. The family intends to apply for asylum but has not yet started the process due to complicated bureaucratic procedures. This makes each family member an **international migrant** with intention of applying for asylum. However, members of this family may also be classified as **migrants in irregular situations**, as they currently have no official legal status.



## C.

## Internally displaced children

### GLOBAL ESTIMATE:

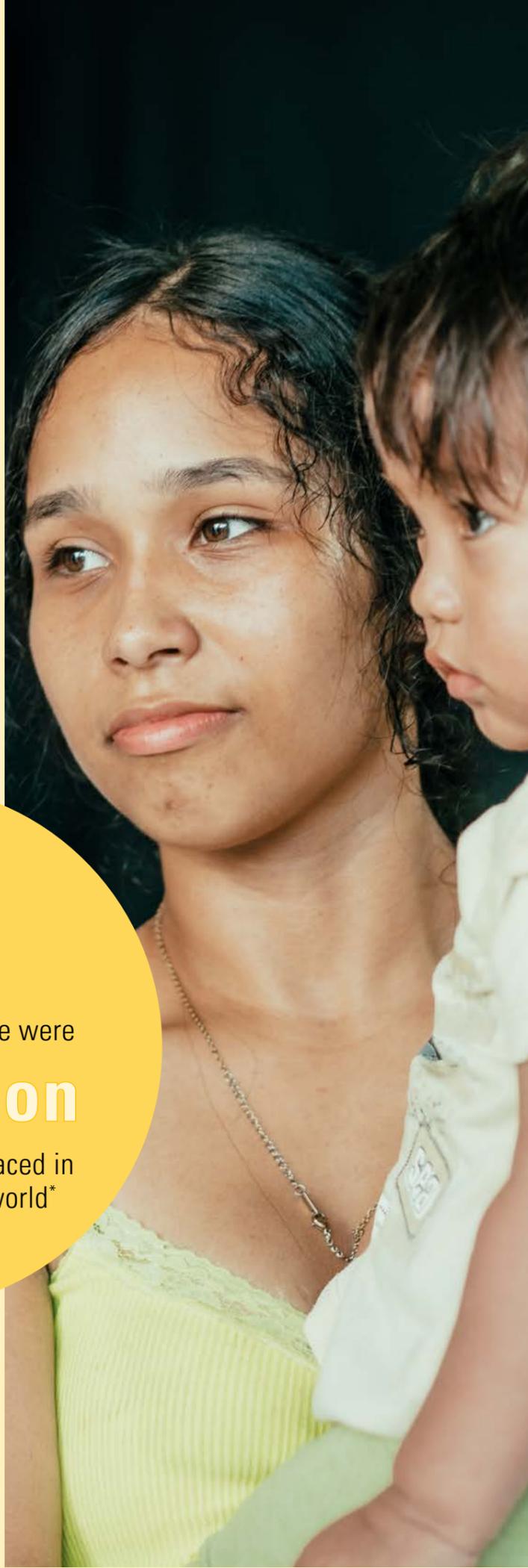


By the end of 2022, there were

# 29.7 million

children internally displaced in countries around the world\*

\*Source: Estimates derived from Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023*. This figure includes children displaced by conflicts and children displaced by disasters. The estimates for specific subgroups may not add up to the total due to rounding.



## INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN

### Internally displaced persons

*Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border<sup>47</sup>*

Established in 1998, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are unanimously recognized by States and Governments as a key international framework to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs). Two central, internationally agreed upon components of the definition put forth by the principles are: (1) internally displaced persons movement is coerced or involuntary, as opposed to economic or voluntary migration, and (2) internally displaced persons remain within State borders, unlike refugees.<sup>48</sup>

While internally displaced persons may benefit from humanitarian assistance in particular countries or circumstances, they do not benefit from the same special status and rights in international law that apply to refugees. The term internally displaced person is thus a descriptive term rather than an internationally binding legal definition.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, interpretations and applications of this definition vary from State to State. For instance, some States have national laws and policies that outline a narrow set of possible reasons for internal displacement, while others require a minimum time period of displacement for an individual to be considered an internally displaced person.<sup>50</sup> These differences illustrate the need to standardize terminologies and definitions of children on the move in order ensure that those in need of protection are counted no matter the setting or context.

In 2020, the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics\* (EGRIS) published the International Recommendations on Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (IRIS), which provide recommendations for how States should define internal displacement for the purpose of data collection and statistics. These recommendations point out that the definition of an internally displaced person put forth in the 1998 Guiding Principles does not outline an exhaustive list of all possible reasons for displacement, and other types of displacement that have previously been overlooked should be included in the total reported stock of this population (see p. 24).<sup>51</sup>

The framework also specifies that there should be no minimum time requirement for an individual to be considered internally displaced. However, formerly displaced persons are no longer considered to be internally displaced persons if they emigrate and establish a new country of residence, they die or they overcome key displacement-related vulnerabilities.<sup>52</sup>

**Example 4:** *A child who is internally displaced in Syria crosses the border to seek asylum in Lebanon. For the purposes of international statistics, this child would no longer be counted in the stock of internally displaced persons but would be considered a refugee or asylum-seeker.*

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is an international organization that compiles and analyses data on internally displaced persons and generates global estimates on displacement. IDMC's mandate is internationally recognized and endorsed by the United Nations;<sup>53</sup> the estimates on internal displacement discussed in this brief were produced by the organization. IDMC reports both the total stock of internally displaced persons at one point in time (annually as of 31 December) as well as the total number of new displacements within a year – both for conflict and violence and due to disasters. The stock of internally displaced persons is a measure of the number of persons internally displaced at the end of the year. The number of new displacements, on the other hand, measures the number of individual displacement events over a year. Note that the measurement unit here for the latter refers to events and not persons, since the same child can be displaced more than once over the course of one year.\*\*

\* Now known as the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics (EGRIS) after the group's mandate was extended to include statelessness in 2021.

\*\*See IDMC's video, '[Measuring Internal Displacement](#)', for more information on the distinction between measuring the stock of IDPs and total number of new internal displacements.



25.8  
million  
children

## CHILDREN INTERNALLY DISPLACED BY CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

### Displacement due to conflict

Internal displacement may occur as a result of either international or national armed conflict. It may be the result of the secondary impacts of armed conflict – such as general hardship and fear – or the direct effects of armed conflict, including attacks against civilians, destruction of property, sexual violence, recruitment into armed groups or forces, restricted access to essential services or the deliberate attempt to displace a population as a method of warfare<sup>54</sup>

### Displacement due to situations of generalized violence

Displacement due to disturbances that are below the threshold of an armed conflict. It can include widespread criminal, ethnic, political and intercommunal violence<sup>55</sup>

Internal displacement is typically differentiated by the causes that lead to displacement. Like refugee children displaced across borders, children fleeing armed conflict and violence may become displaced within their own borders. IRIS distinguishes those who flee armed conflict from those who flee generalized violence, as described above. Both of these groups are included in the statistics typically reported by IDMC and UNHCR on children displaced by conflict and violence and used by IDAC accordingly.<sup>56</sup>

3.8  
million  
children

## CHILDREN INTERNALLY DISPLACED BY DISASTERS

### Displacement due to sudden-onset disasters

A disaster triggered by a hazardous event that emerges quickly or unexpectedly. Sudden-onset disasters could be associated with, for example, earthquake, volcanic eruption, flash flood, chemical explosion or critical infrastructure failure. The resulting displacement is relatively more straightforward to identify in the face of acute threats or the resulting impacts of such hazards, including emergency evacuations to remove people from immediately dangerous areas<sup>57</sup>

### Displacement due to slow-onset disasters

A disaster that emerges gradually over time. Slow-onset disasters can be associated with, for example, drought, desertification or rises in sea level. Displacement is more complicated to identify in such contexts, as population movements exist over a continuum between voluntary and forced movements, which evolve over time as the situation changes<sup>58</sup>

According to IRIS, internal displacement may occur as a result of human-made or natural disasters. IRIS specifies that disasters are the result not only of direct hazards but an individual or community's ability to prevent or cope with those hazards. The current IDMC data reported on displacement due to disasters and included in the total count of internally displaced persons comprise geophysical (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and landslides) and weather-related disasters (storms, floods, wildfires,

droughts, landslides and extreme temperatures), but not disasters that are directly induced by humans, such as industrial accidents. However, it is key to note that human-induced climate change has contributed to an increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, putting more children at risk of displacement.

In 2022, although there were 3.8 million children living in displacement as a result of disasters, there were 12.2 million new displacements of children due to disasters.<sup>59</sup> This is because disaster-related internal displacement is typically underreported: Most data on internal displacement comes from contexts of conflict and violence rather than disasters and climate change. Some children may be displaced for a relatively short time period and no longer be displaced at the end of the year, and some children may undergo multiple displacements due to disasters within the same year. In addition, IDMC data include displacements due to natural disasters and also pre-emptive evacuations. In many of these cases, evacuated persons can return to their homes after a relatively short time.

## CHILDREN INTERNALLY DISPLACED BY OTHER CAUSES

In addition to these major categories of internal displacement, the IRIS framework highlights several other possible reasons for internal displacement that States should consider when defining and counting these populations, such as displacement due to human rights violations. Under the broad term human rights violations, reasons for internal displacement may include: forced disappearances, crimes against sexual liberty or integrity, displacement caused by land acquisition and forced internal resettlement, and forced evictions.<sup>60</sup> While some countries explicitly include some of these categories in their definitions of internal displacement, data on these groups are not currently systematically collected at a global scale.



## SAMPLE SCENARIO 2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

A large region of Country D has suffered from a prolonged period of drought. Crop yields have plummeted, livestock has been lost. Families have seen their primary sources of income disappear. Increasing frequency and intensity of droughts have been linked to climate change.



As food and crops diminish, eight-year-old Amara's parents

move to a city in Country D to find alternate sources of income. Amara stays behind with her grandparents, so her schooling won't be interrupted. She is considered a **child who stays behind**.



Amara's parents send home remittances every month to support the family.



Some members of Family Dawit move to a large city in Country D to look for other forms of work. The eldest child, Anna, 16 years of age, drops out of school to help her family earn money, working as a domestic helper in the city. Although not formally registered, members of this family are considered **internally displaced persons**.



After six months of trying to earn enough income to cover all expenses, Family Dawit is unable to pay rent and is evicted from their home, displacing them for a second time. The family now makes the tough decision to separate, as more economic opportunities are available in Country E, but the journey across the border is dangerous.



Anna and her uncle travel to a city in Country E in hopes of finding better work and education opportunities. They can only afford to live in slums, where services are limited. Anna is considered a **separated child**, as she no longer is travelling with her primary caregiver. Anna and her uncle have not been able to obtain any form of visa to stay in the country, such as a work visa, and they are not eligible for international protection, as climate-related displacement is not protected under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Anna is considered both an **international migrant** and a **migrant in an irregular situation**. Anna's uncle sometimes travels back to Country D for agricultural work, making him a **temporarily mobile migrant**.



After the eviction, the mother of Anna, along with her two younger children, Elsa and Mattias, move to another part of the country where they rely on NGO assistance and stay in camps with other displaced populations. They are now displaced for a second time.

As a **migrant in an irregular situation**, it is unlikely that Anna is accounted for international migration statistics. Data on children like Anna are too often incomplete.



## D.

# Children indirectly affected by migration and displacement

GLOBAL ESTIMATE:

  
**Unknown**  
 number of children globally



Children who are not migrants or displaced persons themselves may be affected by migration and displacement deeply, for instance, when one or both parents move away, or when a child's parents are migrants, refugees or internally displaced persons. It is important to also include children in these situations when considering the data and protection needs of children on the move.

  
**Unknown**  
**CHILDREN WHO STAY BEHIND**

### Children who stay behind

*Children who remain in their home countries or in their countries of habitual residence while their parent(s) or caregiver(s) migrate<sup>61</sup>*

Children may not accompany one or both parents or caregivers who migrate to another country and instead stay behind with family, friends or other members of the wider community. This practice is particularly common in countries with seasonal migration due to agriculture.<sup>62</sup>

While this group of children is often referred to as 'children left behind,' the term 'children who stay behind' is preferable because it avoids potentially stigmatizing parents who make the decision to migrate without their children. Parents may choose not to bring their children with them for a variety of reasons or concerns, such as dangerous migration journeys, challenges involved in obtaining visas for family members and the difficulties posed by irregular migration that are likely to be felt in host countries (e.g., lack of access to schools or health care).<sup>63</sup>

While children who stay behind may face difficulties and vulnerabilities, this is a group that is often absent from migration discussions. Data are not currently collected on this group on a global level even though this population – and their needs – may be sizeable. For instance, both parents of 61 million children in China – or one in five children – have migrated to urban areas.<sup>64</sup>

  
**Unknown**  
**SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANT CHILDREN**

### Second-generation immigrant children

*Children who are not immigrants themselves but are born to immigrant parents<sup>65</sup>*

This population is not typically included in official international migrant stock and flow estimates, but data on this group can be collected in censuses and household surveys. Moreover, depending on the laws in destination countries, these children may or may not have citizenship in their country of birth. They may share characteristics and experiences with first-generation migrant children, who may even include older siblings who migrated with their parents before they were born. This group of children is included in IDAC's definition of children on the move.





## IDP-RELATED CHILDREN

### IDP-related population

*This group comprises those who were born after the displacement occurred, to one or more parent(s) who are or were internally displaced. In practice, it may be difficult to identify children who are no longer living with their parents. The age of the child is immaterial in defining the population and the descendant may be aged over 18 years<sup>67</sup>*

The 1998 Guiding Principles do not specify whether children of internally displaced persons born after the displacement event are considered to be internally displaced themselves. Most countries either do not specify or do not include children in the definition of internally displaced persons, with some exceptions.<sup>68</sup> However, some advocates suggest that they should benefit from the same rights and protections as their parents, whether or not they are considered to be internally displaced. As suggested in the above definition, IRIS recommends that children of at least one internally displaced parent should not be included in the total IDP count, but rather be considered as part of the IDP-related population.

Children of internally displaced persons and who are under 18 years old are included in IDAC's definition of children on the move.



## CHILDREN WITH A REFUGEE BACKGROUND

### Children with a refugee background

*Groups of children related to refugees who are not currently in need of international protection*

This term may include former refugee children who have become naturalized as citizens in their host country; children and descendants of refugees who are not themselves in need of international protection, typically because they have citizenship in the host country (as described on p. 17); and children who have joined refugee families or former refugee families through a process of family unification.<sup>66</sup> While children in these situations are not counted in statistics reported on refugees and others in need of international protection, EGRIS includes this group in its statistical framework and recommends that they are counted (separately) in statistical production efforts. However, reporting on this group remains incomplete due to difficulties identifying them in most data sources. Children with refugee backgrounds are included in IDAC's definition of children on the move.



# E.

## Other groups of children on the move



This section highlights other important groups included in IDAC's definition of children on the move because their situations may also require protection and their specific needs must be visible to policy- and decision makers. Note that these are examples; this list is not meant to be exhaustive.



### INTERNAL MIGRANT CHILDREN

#### Internal migration

*The movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence<sup>69</sup>*

Internal migration is an expansive category that includes both temporary and permanent migration and voluntary and forced movement. In addition to internally displaced children (a distinct category in need of protection as discussed in section C), key categories of internal migration include rural-to-urban migration, urban-to-rural migration, urban-to-urban migration and rural-to-rural migration.

The category of rural-to-urban migration, describing populations that move from rural areas to establish residence in urban areas, has received increasing attention in migration policy and research discourse.<sup>70</sup> This is in part because rising levels of this type of movement have contributed to urbanization, or the occurrence of an increasing proportion of the population living in urban centres. A growing driver of rural-urban migration is related to climate change, as families move to urban centres to seek alternative livelihoods.<sup>71</sup>



### INTERNATIONAL TEMPORARILY MOBILE CHILDREN

#### International temporary mobility

*All international border crossings (events) except those related to changes in the resident population<sup>72</sup>*

#### Circular movement

*A subcategory of international temporary mobility which includes persons who are not residents of the country and travelled to the same country more than once during a particular year<sup>73</sup>*

While the definition of international migrant is focused on those who establish residency in destination countries, UN DESA recommends that countries also collect data on populations that are temporarily mobile (non-residents). Temporarily mobile populations include both families and children who temporarily stay in a country only once a year and those who engage in circular movement.

Examples of temporarily mobile populations include short-term contract workers, seasonal agricultural workers and students. While travel related to tourism and business are included in the category for consistency, in practice this type of movement is treated separately from other types of international temporary mobility. Depending on the populations measured, groups of temporarily mobile populations may be classified as "temporary non-resident workers" or "temporary non-resident students".<sup>74</sup> In some contexts, temporary child migration can be seen as a rite of passage for adolescent children pursuing work or education opportunities.<sup>75</sup> Although this group is not formally classified as international migrants for statistical purposes, IDAC includes children that fall into these categories in its definition of children on the move.



Unknown

## CHILDREN WHO RETURN

### Return

*In a general sense, the act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure. This could be within the territorial boundaries of a country, as in the case of returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and demobilized combatants; or between a country of destination or transit and a country of origin, as in the case of migrant workers, refugees or asylum-seekers<sup>76</sup>*

IOM notes that there are several subcategories of return, including two broad categories:

- **Voluntary return**, which may include the independent or assisted return to an individual's country of origin.<sup>77</sup>
- **Forced return**, defined as "the act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country

of origin, transit or to a third country that agrees to receive the person, generally carried out on the basis of an administrative or judicial act or decision."<sup>78</sup>

Another important category of children who return are repatriated or return refugees. UNHCR describes the process of **voluntary repatriation** as: "the free and informed return of refugees to their country of origin in safety and dignity. Voluntary repatriation may be organized (i.e., when it takes place under the auspices of the concerned States and/or UNHCR) or spontaneous (i.e., when refugees repatriate by their own means with little or no direct involvement from government authorities or UNHCR)."<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the term returnee-IDPs refers to internally displaced persons who return to their place of origin.

While some countries report data on assisted voluntary returns and refugee returnees, data are often scattered across different data sources and not always publicly available. Moreover, data regarding the reintegration experiences of returnees, particularly children, are extremely limited, due in part to lack of common definitions and indicators to measure reintegration.<sup>80</sup> This is an important area of concern when considering the many children that may be in this situation; data from Latin America, for example, show that approximately 24,189 women and children were returned from Mexico and the U.S. in the first half of 2018.<sup>81</sup> Some children returning from abroad may be considered international migrants if they meet the statistical definition outlined above.



### SAMPLE SCENARIO 3. PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES AND CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

The COVID-19 pandemic breaks out in December 2019 and spreads around the world



Pedro, an international migrant from Country G who works and attends school in country F, is fired from his job as a result of pandemic lockdowns. After his school is shut down, he makes the decision to use his remaining funds to return home.



Along the migration journey home, Pedro meets a group of adolescent migrants and refugees who are travelling for a range of reasons, including to find work in Country G, where lockdowns are less severe. Travelling together, this group is considered part of a **mixed movement**.



Two **unaccompanied children** in the group, Luca and Silas, are approached by a trafficker along the journey. The trafficker promises to smuggle them to Country G and offers them work, which they desperately need. They quickly find themselves in debt to the trafficker.



17-year-old Ali and 14-year-old Fatima are refugee children staying in a refugee camp along the border of Country G. Fatima is immunocompromised. But the refugee camp is overcrowded and has limited access to clean water and proper sanitation. To avoid contracting COVID-19 in the camps, the siblings continue onwards to the nearest urban area.



Alexandra, a **migrant in an irregular situation** in Country G, experiences COVID-19 symptoms, but her mother discourages her from going to the doctor or getting tested, as she fears the family could be detected and deported.



Luca and Silas are forced to work for the trafficker under slave-like conditions in Country G. The risk of **child trafficking** and child labour has reportedly increased due to the economic strain of measures to contain the pandemic.

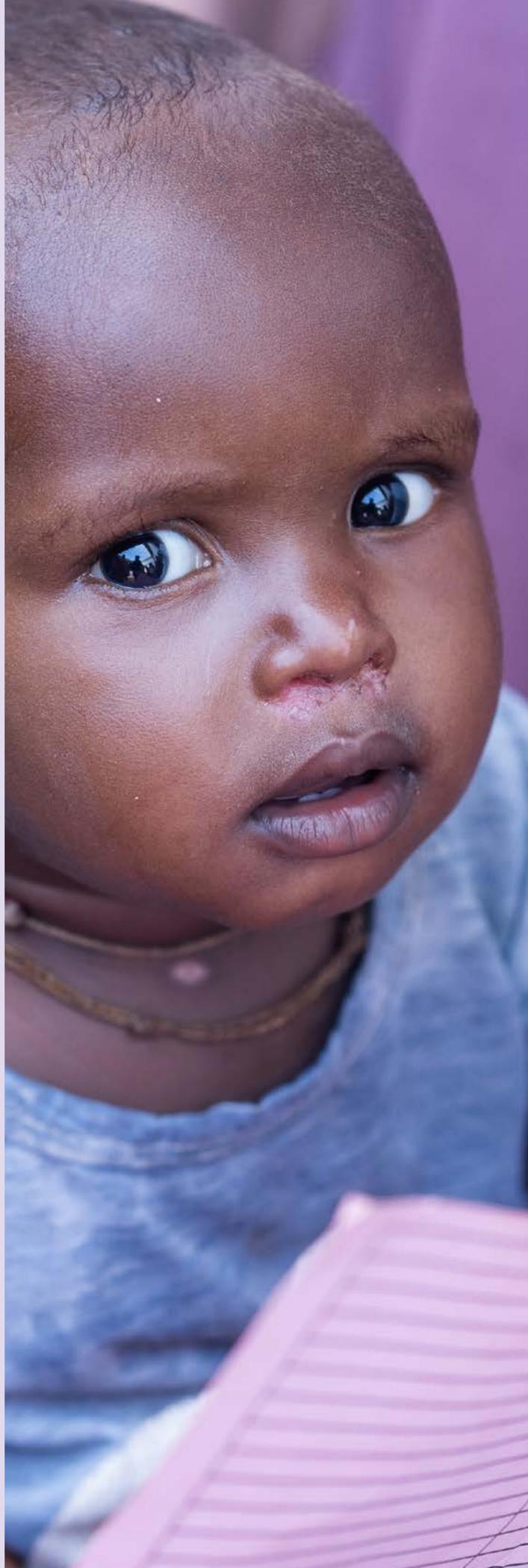


Now residing in Country G with his family, Pedro is considered a **voluntary return migrant**. He struggles to keep up with school online, as there is weak internet connectivity in his home.



# F.

## Children in highly vulnerable situations (across all groups)



### MIGRANTS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

#### Migrants in vulnerable situations

*Persons who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care<sup>82</sup>*

Throughout their migration or displacement, children may encounter dangerous situations or face vulnerability to violence, exploitation, abuse or other human rights violations. A range of factors may generate situations of vulnerability in the context of child migration and displacement. This section highlights some examples of specific situations that compound children's levels of risk along their journeys, but is by no means an exhaustive list – in fact, children in any group considered to be on the move may find themselves in highly vulnerable situations. It is also important to emphasize that migrant and displaced persons are not inherently vulnerable, nor do they lack agency, as described in human rights law.<sup>83</sup>



### TRAFFICKED AND SMUGGLED CHILDREN

#### Human trafficking

*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs<sup>85</sup>*

#### GLOBAL ESTIMATE:



In 2018, children made up **one third** of all detected victims of trafficking<sup>84</sup>

### Child trafficking

*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation<sup>86</sup>*

It is important to note that child trafficking is defined more broadly than human trafficking of adults. The main distinction is that for children the question of consent is irrelevant – all children subject to the exploitation described above are considered victims of trafficking.

### Human smuggling

*The procurement, in order to obtain – directly or indirectly – a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident<sup>87</sup>*

A key distinction between trafficking and smuggling is that trafficking may occur internally or internationally, whereas human smuggling always occurs across borders. Children travelling alone may rely on smugglers to cross international borders, which can be dangerous, as trafficking and smuggling networks are frequently connected.<sup>88</sup>

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) collects data on the total number of detected trafficking and smuggling victims globally. However, given the clandestine nature of human trafficking, the total reported numbers of trafficking cases are likely a gross underestimate of the true magnitude.



## UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

### Unaccompanied children

*Children, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so<sup>89</sup>*

### Separated children

*Children who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members<sup>90</sup>*

There are no globally reported numbers of unaccompanied children, sometimes called unaccompanied minors, or separated children. But some data show the number of children in these challenging situations is likely substantial: For instance, in 2022, some 51,700 unaccompanied or separated children lodged new asylum applications in Europe – a likely underestimate due to limited country reporting<sup>91</sup> – and over 152,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the US – Mexico border.<sup>92</sup> These vulnerable groups should be tracked and protected. The Committee on the Rights of the Child requires States to take special steps to protect unaccompanied and separated migrant children, such as prioritizing the identification and registration of this group; tracing family members; appointing a guardian, adviser or legal representative; and providing care and accommodation arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children.<sup>93</sup>



## STATELESS CHILDREN (IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT)

### Stateless person

*A person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law<sup>94</sup>*

UNHCR is responsible for collecting and compiling global statistics on stateless persons. Lack of birth registration within migration and displacement contexts can lead to a high risk of statelessness for migrant and displaced children and children of refugees.<sup>95</sup> A child born of immigrant parents in a foreign country is at risk of becoming stateless if that country does not allow citizenship to be granted by birth alone and their parents' country of origin does not allow them to pass on their nationality through family ties.<sup>96</sup>

UNHCR has reported the global number of stateless persons since 2020. However, fewer than half of countries currently report data on stateless persons and methods for collecting such data remain poor.<sup>97</sup> EGRISS has developed a global set of recommendations to help standardize definitions of statelessness and methodologies that countries can use to collect data on this group.<sup>98</sup>

### GLOBAL ESTIMATE:



Every 10 minutes, a child is born into statelessness somewhere in the world (UNHCR, 2015). In the 20 countries hosting the largest stateless populations,

**70,000**

stateless children are born every year

## MIXED MOVEMENTS

UNHCR defines **mixed movement**, also referred to as **mixed migration**, as:

*The cross-border movement of people, generally in an irregular manner, involving individuals and groups who travel alongside each other, using similar routes and means of transport or facilitators, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have different needs and profiles and may include refugees, asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children, stateless persons, and migrants (including migrants in irregular situations or migrants in vulnerable situations)*<sup>99</sup>

Mixed movement is a useful term to describe migration patterns, as it recognizes that the drivers of movement can be complex, diverse and strongly interlinked. One common mixed migration route includes travel along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) from countries in sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. Movement along this route includes refugees fleeing conflict and persecution in countries of origin and migrants looking for better social and economic opportunities in North Africa and Europe – a large proportion of whom are children.<sup>100</sup> In 2017, for instance, it was estimated that 15,779 unaccompanied children travelled this route to Italy from a range of countries.<sup>101</sup>

Many of the groups described in this brief may be included in mixed movements of migrants, also referred to as mixed migration flows. The Mixed Migration Centre is a leading source of data collection, research and analysis that focuses on this type of movement.<sup>102</sup>



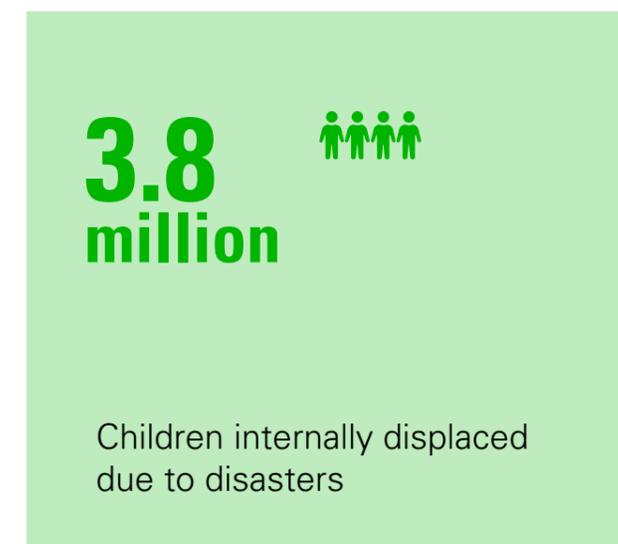
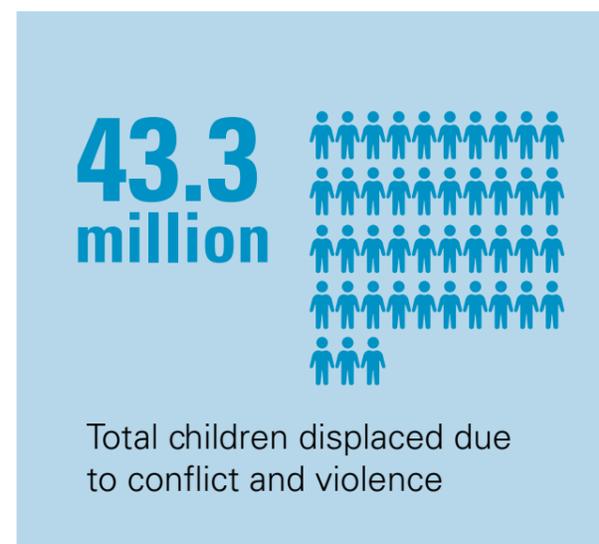
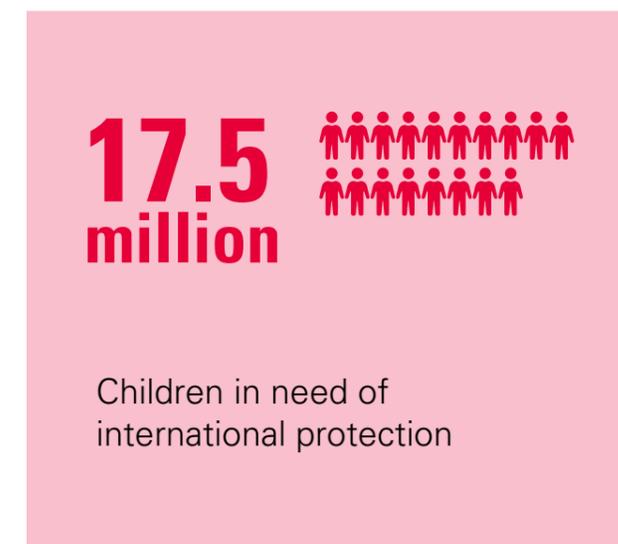
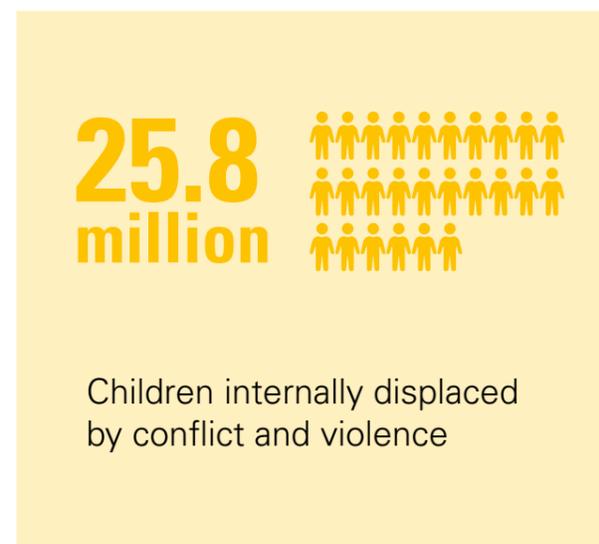
# Global data\* on children on the move

## Latest available estimates by different groups of children on the move

Major group of children on the move (year data available)	Subgroup	Available number
International migrant children** (2020)	Migrant children in regular situations	
	Migrant children in irregular situations	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35.5 million</b>
Children in need of international protection (2022)	Refugee children under UNHCR's mandate	14.2 million
	Children in refugee-like situations	
	Other children in need of international protection	
	Asylum-seeking children	1.5 million
	Palestine children registered as refugees with UNRWA	1.8 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.5 million</b>	
Internally displaced children (2022)	Children internally displaced by conflict and violence	25.8 million
	Children internally displaced by disasters	3.8 million
	Children internally displaced by other causes	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29.7 million</b>
Children indirectly affected by migration and displacement	Children who stay behind	
	Second-generation children of immigrants	
	IDP-related children	
Other groups of children on the move	Children with a refugee background	
	Internal migrant children	
	Children who return	
	Temporarily mobile children	
	Children with the intention of seeking asylum	
Children in highly vulnerable situations (across all groups)	Trafficked children	
	Smuggled children	
	Unaccompanied children	
	Separated children	
	Stateless children (in the context of migration and displacement)	

## COUNTING DISPLACED CHILDREN

### Displaced children



\* The figures cited in the table above are aggregate estimates collated by IDAC from available data generated by various agencies. The estimates for specific subgroups may not add up to the totals due to rounding. Because of the uncertainty around these data, the actual count of migrant and displaced children remains unknown.

\*\* This figure includes children in need of international protection who meet the statistical definition of international migrant.

\*\*\* Many subgroups of children on the move – especially those in vulnerable situations – are not counted. Due to the overlapping characteristics of certain subgroups of migrant and displaced children, the numbers attached to them also overlap.

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collaboration  
and innovation



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data visibility,  
availability,  
accessibility  
and usability

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CHILDREN ON THE MOVE**

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