WORKING WITH MIGRANT CHILDREN AT THE BORDERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, ICELAND, NORWAY, SWITZERLAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

A toolkit for front-line workers

IOM UN MIGRATION

Publisher:	International Organization for Migration Rue Montoyer 40 1000 Brussels Belgium Tel.: +32 2 287 70 00 Fax: +32 2 287 70 06 Email: ROBrussels@iom.int Website: www.iom.int
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MiRAC MIGRATION RESOURCE ALLOCATION COMMITTEE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Preparing a safe space for information provision in an emergency setting: In the Michalovce "hotspot", IOM installed a tent equipped with its Displacement Tracking Matrix and provides, among others, toys for children and information as regards the potential risks of trafficking to refugees and third-country nationals taking further transportation to neighbouring countries.

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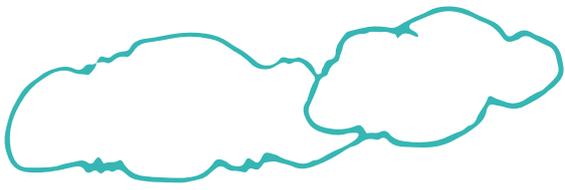
FOREWORD

Considering the different forms in which children migrate, their experiences and needs vary depending on multiple factors: whether or not they are accompanied by family members, or separated from them, and whether they have unique or specific needs based on their inherent characteristics, which include gender, age and disability (if any), just to name a few.

Moreover, their experiences and needs, including protection needs, are influenced by how they migrate through specific international borders (whether by land, sea or air), and the capacity of those involved, such as front-line workers, to address and support their unique needs. Front-line workers have a major role in contributing to the realization of the rights of migrant children and to the fulfilment of State obligations in this area.

To support the work of front-line workers in addressing the needs of migrant children at the borders of Europe, IOM undertook the development of *Working with Migrant Children at the Borders of the European Union, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom: A Toolkit for Front-line Workers*.

The Toolkit was developed after a consultation process that involved migrant children, national authorities working in child protection, border authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), international and regional organizations, IOM staff in field offices across the European Union, but also non-member States such as Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, and other relevant stakeholders. Moreover, a consultation workshop was organized by the IOM Regional Office for the European Economic Area, the European Union and NATO (IOM Regional Office Brussels) on 8 and 9 June 2022, involving national authorities, CSOs, and international and regional organizations, to identify good practices and recommendations to contribute to the development of the Toolkit.

CONTENTS

Part I

Recreational activities for migrant children hosted at a reception facility: Ukrainian refugees who have just crossed the border into Medyka, Poland are engaged in educational play activities as they wait to receive assistance at an IOM tent to get to their next destination.

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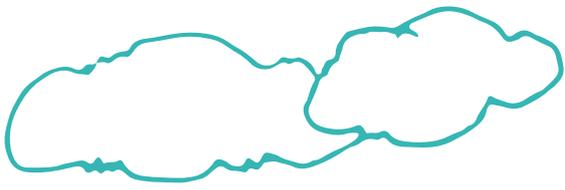
ACRONYMS

3Ps	provision, protection and participation (the "three Ps of children's rights")
BIA	best interests assessment
BID	best interests determination
CRC	United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
CSO	civil society organization
DOMV	Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EEA	European Economic Area
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FGD	focus group discussion
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee (of the United Nations)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual and Allies
NGO	non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the (United Nations) High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SOGIESC	sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics
UASC(s)	unaccompanied and separated child(ren)
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UMC(s)	unaccompanied migrant child(ren)
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Girls assisted by child protection teams at the Polish border: Lina, 8, and Sasha, 9, fled Ukraine with their family when bombs began raining down on their hometown, the closest destroying homes next to their school. They are travelling from Ukraine to Italy, where the family has a friend who has offered to host them for a few nights.

I

CONTEXT: SETTING THE SCENE

Welcome and thank you for using this Toolkit!

This Toolkit aims to equip front-line workers with foundational tools and resources to support the needs of migrant children crossing an international border into the European Union, or into Iceland, Norway, Switzerland or the United Kingdom. It presents various concepts, principles, resources and practices in the field of child protection in the context of migration and will be regularly updated with new information, resources and practices implemented by either IOM or counterparts.

This section aims to provide the reader with a reference framework for the context in which front-line workers operate.

- Chapter 1 opens the subject by clarifying the definitions of terms such as *front-line worker*, *unaccompanied child* and *separated child*.
- Chapter 2 presents the international context and what a front-line worker can do to promote the engagement of local actors.
- Chapter 3 explores the main principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and how front-line workers can fully endorse the principles in their work.
- Chapter 4 presents the "best interests of the child" principle and how front-line workers can apply it throughout the assessment process.

> *I would say "Thank you very much" to the people who assisted me at the border. You helped me when I needed it the most and when no one else was there to support me. I cannot pay you back for what you have done for me.*
>
> – A.H., a 15-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

1. SOME DEFINITIONS

1.1. ARE YOU A FRONT-LINE WORKER?

For the purpose of this Toolkit, a **front-line worker** is defined as a person who works at an international border where migrants arrive by sea, land or air. This Toolkit uses the term *front-line worker* for pedagogical purposes only, and the term is intended to refer to an individual involved in tasks directly or indirectly related to child protection in the context of migration. We will use the term to refer to different actors and stakeholders, such as:

- Border guards
- Police
- Social workers
- Case workers
- Volunteers
- Staff of civil society organizations (CSOs)
- Language interpreters working with migrant children at borders
- Health workers deployed at borders
- Military
- National guard
- Customs officers
- Rangers
- Other persons who interact with migrant children, performing tasks directly related to their protection

Front-line workers have a crucial role in the field of protection, particularly as many of them contribute to the realization of the rights of migrant children.

1.2. WHAT IS A BORDER?

The IOM *Glossary on Migration* provides the following technical definition of **border**:

> Politically defined boundaries separating territory or maritime zones between political entities and the areas where political entities exercise border governance measures on their territory or extraterritorially. Such areas include border crossing points (airports, land border crossing points, ports), immigration and transit zones, the "no-man's land" between crossing points of neighbouring countries, as well as embassies and consulates (insofar as visa issuance is concerned).[1]

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[1]   IOM, *Glossary on Migration*, International Migration Law, No. 34 (Geneva, 2019).

In this Toolkit, we will use this term in the context of the first interaction between migrant children and front-line workers as the children arrive in a country in the European Union (or Iceland, Norway, Switzerland or the United Kingdom) by sea, land or air. Aside from their arrival at an international border, the first contact that migrant children usually have with front-line workers occurs during their interception[2] or identification.

The content of this Toolkit, therefore, focuses on key recommendations, practices and resources to prepare front-line workers for this initial contact and/or even after, within the scope of supporting these children. However, it should be noted that the needs of children in the context of migration do not stop at or are limited to borders.

> **Examples: Entry points for migrants**
>
> Migrant children arrive in countries of the European Union, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland or the United Kingdom by crossing any of various borders, whether by sea, land or air. Entry points include the shores of the Canary Islands (Spain) or southern continental Europe (for children crossing the Mediterranean); international airports, especially in capital cities; and, in the case of European Union member States, border crossing points shared with neighbouring non-member States (e.g. Ukraine).

1.3. WHAT IS BORDER MANAGEMENT?

The IOM *Glossary on Migration* defines **border management** as:

> The administration of measures related to the authorized movement of persons (regular migration) and goods, while preventing unauthorized movement of persons (irregular migration) and goods, detecting those responsible for smuggling, trafficking and related crimes and identifying the victims of such crimes or any other person in need of immediate or longer-term assistance and/or (international) protection.

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[2] **Interception** is defined as "Any measure applied by a State, either at its land or sea borders or on the high seas, territorial waters or borders of another State, to (i) prevent embarkation of persons on an international journey; (ii) prevent further onward international travel by persons who have commenced their journey; or (iii) assert control of vessels where there are reasonable grounds to believe the vessel is transporting persons contrary to international or national maritime law. The person does not have the required documentation or valid permission to enter." (UNHCR Executive Committee, "Conclusion on protection safeguards in interception measures, No. 97 (LIV)". In: United Nations General Assembly Report of the fifty-fourth session, 10 October 2003 (A/AC.96/987).)

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1.4. WHO IS A CHILD?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years."[3] It is essential to know that children might migrate and arrive at borders with their parents, relatives and friends. They could also be travelling alone and/or with traffickers, smugglers or other individuals. As we will briefly discuss, migrant children arrive at borders through different means and methods and under different conditions.[4] Let us summarize two different concepts broadly accepted by the international community on how children migrate:

*Who are **separated children**?*

They "are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention [on the Rights of the Child], 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."[5]

*Who are **unaccompanied children**?*

They "are 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."[6]

Migrant children separated from both parents or other caregivers are generally referred to as **unaccompanied migrant children (UMCs)**.

For the purposes of this Toolkit, we interchange the terms *migrant children* and *children in the context of migration,* encompassing all children, whether separated, accompanied or unaccompanied. Specific distinctions and references are made accordingly.

It is important to be familiar with the above definitions and how they have been adapted to the national or regional context. For example, such definitions have been adapted in the relevant European Union directives[7] and policy framework. As the above definitions capture the realities of how children migrate, it is essential for front-line workers to understand the issues faced by children arriving at borders.

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3   United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/25 on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20 November 1989 (A/RES/44/25), art. 1. Available at www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.
4   For more information, see: UNCRC, "General Comment No. 6 on the Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin", 1 September 2005 (CRC/GC/2005/6). Available at www.refworld.org/docid/42dd174b4.html.
5   Ibid., para. 8.
6   Ibid., para. 7.
7   Council of the European Union, Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted, 20 December 2011, OJ-L.-337/9-337/26.

Reflection exercise

Question 1: As a front-line worker, what tasks are you fulfilling that contribute to the realization of the rights of children in the context of migration?

Question 2: What are the unique characteristics of the border area where you work (i.e. in terms of capacities, the geopolitical dimension, specific challenges, etc.) that have an impact on how the needs of migrant children are addressed?

Write down your thoughts in the box below.

1.5. MIGRANT CHILDREN'S ARRIVAL

We invite you to do the following exercise.

Reflection exercise

Imagine that you are a child at a border control post in a new country after a long sea, air or land journey. How would you answer the following questions?

- Why are you at this border?
- What were you expecting to see at this border?
- How do you feel? Are you scared? Excited?
- Who are you with? Are you alone?
- What do you think will happen to you and your family and/or friends?
- What concerns would you have if you are travelling alone (instead of with a parent or guardian)?
- What do you need at this moment?
- What do you expect to see or experience once you cross the border?

Write down your answers to the above questions in the box below.

Now that you have completed the exercise, we shall proceed to read the real-life stories of Nazanine and Saleh.

This is the story of Nazanine:

Nazanine is 10 years old. She and her family belong to an ethnic minority group in their country.

Nazanine and her family arrived in Rome by plane in August 2021 after they managed to escape their country when, for political reasons, they became at risk of being persecuted by the new government.

Nazanine's grandparents stayed behind in their home country throughout all this time.

This is the story of Saleh:

Saleh is a 12-year-old boy who arrived in Germany through an unauthorized route with his mother and two younger sisters.

Saleh does not speak German or English. His father died as they were escaping conflict back in their home country. His mother was unable to complete school and has never been employed.

Nazanine and Saleh are just two of many migrant children arriving in Europe every day.

The stories, journeys and needs of migrant children are quite diverse and unique – as unique as their dreams and aspirations in life. Each story and journey is shaped by different factors (at the individual, household/family, community and structural levels); thus, we must recognize that each child has his or her own needs. In this Toolkit, we will focus our attention on the particular challenges that migrant children may face at borders, while keeping in mind that children are resilient. We must work towards fostering their resilience, keeping in mind that the migration experience itself has the potential to contribute towards building that resilience.

Generally, migrant children experience different feelings once they come to a new country. These feelings may include fear and stress.

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> **Note** 📝
>
> Feelings migrant children might experience in a new country include:
>
> ✳ Fear of the unknown.
>
> ✳ Fear for the future of family and friends who are still in their home country.
>
> ✳ Fear of being rejected in the new country, on account of their inherent characteristics (ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and disability, if any, among others).
>
> ✳ Fear that they or their family and friends might be sent to detention (i.e. if travelling irregularly).
>
> ✳ If travelling with traffickers and/or smugglers, fear of these people and the violence, exploitation and abuse they would likely endure at their hands.
>
> ✳ Panic or stress about not knowing what the future will be like.
>
> ✳ For some, physical and/or mental pain.

Let us also hear from migrant children about their fears and concerns as they arrive at a border:[8]

"I was mostly concerned about the weather conditions while trying to travel and about the fact that there was no security. No lifejackets, lights or rescue team."

– M., a 17-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

"My [biggest] concern was the detention centre – how long were we going to stay there? I am really afraid of darkness and being isolated."

– A., a 16-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

"I was afraid of the sea – of the darkness – because we crossed the border at night."

– J., a 14-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

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[8] Within the framework of the project, "Contributing to address the needs of migrant children at borders in Europe", IOM conducted various consultations with migrant children in 2022, in order to collect their views, opinions and feedback on the support they had received at borders. The consultation sessions were organized by IOM child protection experts and followed an FGD format.

"My biggest concern was the smugglers. Smugglers do not follow any rules, [and would not care] if you get caught by the police. The smugglers hit me and my brother."

— K., a 15-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

"During the journey, and after all the harsh conditions we had been through, we were very anxious of not being accepted at the border."

— K.A., a 17-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

Reflection exercise

Question 1:   Why do you think it is important for someone in your line of work to reflect on the challenges faced by children in the context of migration?

Question 2:   What stories have you heard or come across that could provide a better overview of the specific needs of migrant children in the border area where you work?

Write down your thoughts in the box below.

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Migrant child found temporary refuge in Poland: Lina, age 8, fled Ukraine with her family when bombs began raining down on her hometown, the closest destroying homes next to her school.

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Good practices 👍

➜ Keep yourself abreast of reports and other available resources to understand the challenges faced by migrant children at the borders of your country.

➜ Share available information with relevant counterparts at the local, regional and national levels to contribute to the dialogue about children in the context of migration and to the decision-making and cooperation in addressing their needs.

1.6.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- A **front-line worker** is a person that works at a border where migrants arrive by sea, land or air. The Toolkit uses the term for pedagogical purposes.

- A **border** is a physical space where a first interaction occurs between migrant children and front-line workers after the children arrive by sea, land or air.

- **Separated children** are not travelling with their parents or caregivers, but other family members might be accompanying them.

- **Unaccompanied children** are not being cared for by an adult who should be doing so by law or custom.

- The needs of migrant children arriving at borders are different and unique – as unique as their dreams and aspirations.

- Migrant children arriving in a new country might experience different feelings, including fear and stress.

Additional resources

For an extensive list of migration-relevant terms and concepts, refer to the IOM Glossary on Migration.

For more information on the contexts in which children migrate and what their needs and vulnerabilities are:

- IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), which gathers and analyses data to disseminate critical multilayered information on the mobility, vulnerabilities and needs of displaced and mobile populations, enabling decision makers and responders to provide these populations with better, context-specific assistance.

- Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) website, which offers different resources and data on the situation of migrant children.

- Effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration (Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe).

- *Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children* (Inter-Agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children).

- *Guardianship Systems for Unaccompanied and Separated Children in the European Union: Developments Since 2014* (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)).

- *EASO Guidance on Reception Conditions for Unaccompanied Children: Operational Standards and Indicators* (European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)).

- Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) Global Data Hub on Human Trafficking, with data contributed by organizations from around the world.

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A family departing from their country of origin: Ukrainian refugees and third-country nationals arrive at the Keleti train station in Budapest, Hungary. Train stations have become a hub for humanitarian agencies and private citizens to set up a range of services that include transportation assistance, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, food distribution, clothing, medical check-ups and more.

2. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. A ROAD MAP TO THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Your country has ratified and/or signed different international human rights instruments to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of children, including migrant children. Other instruments of international law, for example, the Convention to Prevent, Supress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (also known as the "Palermo Protocol on Trafficking"), the Geneva Conventions on Humanitarian Law, and regional instruments such as the Istanbul Convention against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (in the European context), are a core part of the body of relevant instruments guiding States towards the realization of children's rights. Such instruments are usually transposed at the national level, either through policies or laws.

In this Toolkit, we will focus our attention on core international human rights instruments, which should guide the work of various stakeholders involved in child protection. Any front-line worker should therefore be familiar with relevant core principles in legislation (both regional and national) concerning the respect, fulfilment and protection of migrant children's rights.

"I had a fear of getting lost during the walk, of drowning in the sea…fear of thieves, fear of getting arrested or deported."

– A., a 16-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

Points to ponder...

- ◉ Are you aware of which instruments of international human rights law have been ratified by your country?
- ◉ What is the core national legislation in your country that guides the protection of the rights of children, including migrant children?
- ◉ Are you aware of any recent discussions to amend laws or policies in your country to improve the protection of migrant children?

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Useful resources

- For information on the status of the ratification of relevant international human rights instruments and additional protocols, as well as their respective monitoring bodies, visit this page on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) website.

- The *Handbook on European Law Relating to Asylum, Borders and Immigration* (FRA, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights) provides an overview of European legal standards relevant to asylum, borders and immigration, and explains applicable Council of Europe and European Union measures.

2.1.1. What are human rights?

Human rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions and omissions that interfere with fundamental freedoms, entitlements and human dignity.[9]

Human rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of sex, race, colour, language, religion or creed, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, nationality, age, economic position, property, marital status, and birth or other status. They are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the form of treaties, general legal principles, legal customs and other sources of international law. They are applicable both in times of peace and armed conflict and entail an obligation for States to respect, protect and fulfil them. At the universal level, these rights are contained in the International Bill of Rights, comprising the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (adopted on 10 December 1948 through United Nations General Assembly resolution 217(A)), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted on 16 December 1966), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted on 16 December 1966). Other treaties have been developed from this core.[10]

It is important for a front-line worker to be familiar with the definition of human rights. Moreover, fundamental to the concept and realization of human rights are three core human rights principles:

- The **principle of universality** (UDHR, art. 1), according to which all people everywhere are "born free and equal in dignity and rights" and, therefore, are rights holders.

- The **principle of inalienability**, according to which rights are inherent to every human being and can never be taken away.

- The **principle of indivisibility and interdependence**, according to which there is no hierarchy among rights and that the enjoyment of one right is dependent on that of another.

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[9] IOM, *Glossary on Migration* (see footnote 1).
[10] Ibid.

Three international legal instruments are highlighted here:

- **Charter of the United Nations** (1945). The United Nations Charter is the founding document of the United Nations. It was signed on 26 June 1945, in San Francisco, after the United Nations Conference on International Organization and came into force on 24 October 1945. Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, the organization's mission and work have been guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter, which has been amended three times (in 1963, 1965 and 1973).[11]

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (1948). The UDHR is a milestone document in the history of human rights. It is the first instrument to set out for fundamental human rights to be universally protected and has been translated into over 500 languages. The UDHR is widely recognized as having inspired and paved the way for the adoption of more than 70 human rights treaties (all containing references to the UDHR in their preambles), applied permanently at the global and regional levels.[12]

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989).[13] The UNCRC is a legally binding international agreement that sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities.

Figure 1 presents a historical "road map" summarizing the adoption of the UNCRC.

Figure 1. Historical road map to the international legal framework

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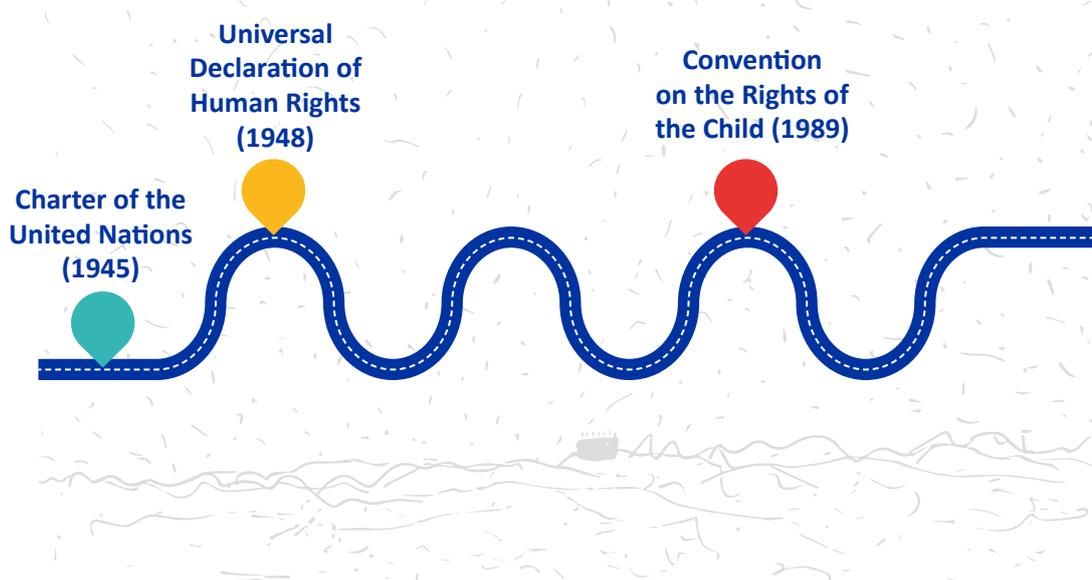
[11] For more information about and the full text of the United Nations Charter, visit: United Nations, United Nations Charter section, available at www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter.

[12] For more information about and the full text of the UDHR, visit: United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights section, available at www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

[13] For more information and resources related to and the full text of the UNCRC, see: UNICEF, Convention on the Rights of the Child section, available at www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention#learn. (A child-friendly slide presentation of the Convention is available at www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-rights/united-nations-convention-of-the-rights-of-the-child.)

In the context of human rights and the protection of migrant children, it is important to understand two important concepts discussed in the next subsections.[14]

2.1.2. Who is a rights holder?

A **rights holder** is an individual or group entitled to rights under international law:

- Every individual is a rights holder and is entitled to a myriad of specific rights without discrimination. Rights holders include migrant children, regardless of their migration status; ethnicity; religion; sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); disability (if any); and other inherent characteristics.

- Certain groups of individuals are also entitled to collective rights (e.g. the right to self-determination and the right to development).

2.1.3. Who is a duty bearer?

A **duty bearer** is an actor that has obligations under international law:

- Duty bearers include both State and non-State actors (e.g. international organizations) with obligations towards rights holders. These actors are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of rights holders (specifically migrant children, in the case of our discussion).

- States are primary duty bearers under international law and cannot abrogate their responsibilities to rights holders.

It is important to draw your attention, as a front-line worker, to the above two concepts, as they provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders (i.e. State and non-State actors) in relation to their obligation to uphold migrant children's rights. States are primary duty bearers and State-led agencies have a key role in this regard, particularly those operating at borders (land, sea and air).

Moreover, it is important to understand as well that States have the sovereign power to exercise control over their own borders and devise their own immigration policies. However, they also have obligations under national, regional and international law to respect and protect the human rights of children when enacting and implementing national asylum and migration legislation and policy.

We need to recognize such obligations are often not easy to fulfil. Therefore, good collaboration and cooperation is needed between States (and within the States, relevant national authorities), as well as between State and non-State actors, to identify synergies and remedies for the challenges and opportunities faced by migrant children. The next box presents some good practices and examples of collaboration and cooperation among key stakeholders involved in migration, child protection and border management.

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[14] For more information on the rights-based approach to migration programming, see: IOM, *Rights-based Approach to Programming* (Geneva, 2015). Available at https://publications.iom.int/books/rights-based-approach-programming.

Good practices: Child protection 👍

➜ In early 2020 – and following an unprecedented influx of migrants arriving at land and sea borders – more than 5,000 UMCs needed child protection services in Greece, as most of them were living in precarious conditions. The establishment of the **Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM)**[15] is considered one of the most successful institutional mechanisms set up by the Government of Greece in the past few years for the protection of children, including by supporting better structures for hosting UMCs in the islands and transferring migrant children to safe accommodation in the mainland. For the success of pertinent activities, the SSPUAM coordinates with NGOs, the Public Prosecutor for Minors, the Hellenic Police, the Greek Asylum Service, implementing partners and emergency accommodation facilities.

➜ The establishment of the **National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM)**,[16] rolled out as an alternative care tool that provides protection, assistance and emergency accommodation for UMCs in precarious living conditions, paved the way for the enforcement of the operational abolition of protective custody in practice. The NERM concept took form through the coordinated actions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, in collaboration with IOM and the NGOs ARSIS, METAdrasi and the Network for Children's Rights, with co-funding from the European Union.

➜ For good practices in multi-agency cooperation to respond to migrant children's vulnerability, reference should be made to the *INTERACT Handbook*. This practical guidance tool aims to identify gaps in cooperation between agencies, including across borders, that may lead to migrant children being trafficked and going missing, and to develop targeted guidelines for preventing and responding to the trafficking and disappearance of migrant children.

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15   The website of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum is available at https://migration.gov.gr/en/grammateies/eidiki-grammateia-prostasias-asynodeyton-anilikon.

16   For more information on the NERM, see: UNHCR, "National Emergency Response Mechanism for Unaccompanied Minors in Precarious Living Conditions (2021 January–December 2021)", slide presentation for UNHCR Greece (n.d.). Available at https://reliefweb.int/report/greece/national-emergency-response-mechanism-unaccompanied-minors-precarious-living.

2.1.4. The European framework for children's rights

The European framework for children's rights has a large impact on many aspects of your work as a front-line worker. It is therefore essential for you to be familiar with this framework.

Regardless of where you operate, developing a basic understanding of the European strategies, policies and standards will help you improve your practices to better protect migrant children's rights. To this end, let us look at some important elements from the European framework on children's rights, focusing on the European Union and the Council of Europe.

European Union

The Treaty on European Union establishes the objective for the European Union to promote the protection of the rights of the child (Article 3.3). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union further guarantees the protection of children's rights by European Union countries and institutions as they implement European Union law: Article 24, on the rights of the child, and Article 32, on the prohibition of child labour, specifically cover children's rights.

It is important to know that the European Commission is guided by principles set out in the UNCRC, which has been ratified by all European Union countries. In 2021, the European Union adopted a new comprehensive policy framework to ensure the protection of the rights of all children and secure access to basic services for vulnerable children, including children in migration. As part of this framework, a new European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child was issued, which serves as the main policy guidance for European Union institutions and member States in planning their actions and structuring programmes that aim to promote and protect children's rights.[17]

In parallel, the European Union also adopted the European Child Guarantee, which translates the European Union's political commitments into a set of concrete objectives for member States to protect children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. On the basis of this instrument, the European country where you work should guarantee free and affective access for children in need to key services, including early childhood care, education, healthy nutrition, health care and adequate housing. When identifying children in need and designing national measures, European Union member States should take into account the specific needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those experiencing homelessness or those who have disabilities, as well as those in precarious family situations or alternative care, and those of a migrant and/or minority racial or ethnic background.

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[17] For more information about the work of the European Commission on children's rights, see: European Commission, Rights of the Child section. Available at https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child_en.

Council of Europe

As a front-line worker, it is also relevant for you to understand the legal and policy framework established by the Council of Europe as it relates to your work in the field of migration management.

The first point to be aware is that all Council of Europe member States are party to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This international treaty aims to protect human rights and political freedoms in Europe, and its provisions are applicable to all individuals, including children. The ECHR guarantees specific rights for children, including the rights to education; life, including family life; respect for their religious and philosophical convictions; the freedom of speech; and the prohibition of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment.[18]

The work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees of the the Council of Europe can also support your work as a front-line worker as the Office aims to develop concrete resources to further protect migrant children's rights. Eliminating all forms of violence against children; promoting child-friendly justice and social services; guaranteeing the rights of children in vulnerable situations; and promoting children's participation in decisions affecting them are among the key objectives of the Council of Europe's activities in the area of children's rights. In that sense, it is worth noting that the Council also adopted in 2022 a Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022–2027), which aims to advance respect for and promote the rights of the child across Europe.

Finally, it is important to be familiar with the work and jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, an international court that interprets the ECHR. Any person who feels that their rights have been violated under the Convention by a State party can file a case with the court. Judgments finding violations are binding on the States concerned, which are obliged to execute them. Through its jurisprudence, the Court has developed a large body of case law[19] dealing with children's rights.

In case you would like more in-depth information, we would encourage you to read the *Handbook on European Law Relating to the Rights of the Child* (2022 edition), jointly prepared by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe (specifically, the Children's Rights Division, the European Social Charter Department and the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights). The handbook is designed for non-specialist legal professionals, judges, public prosecutors, child protection authorities, and other practitioners and organizations responsible for ensuring the legal protection of the rights of the child. It explains key jurisprudence, summarizing major rulings of both the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights.

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[18] For more information about the work of the Council of Europe and children's rights mainstreaming, see: Council of Europe, Children's Rights Mainstreaming section. Available at www.coe.int/en/web/children/children-s-rights-mainstreaming. The website of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration and Refugees is available at www.coe.int/en/web/special-representative-secretary-general-migration-refugees/home.

[19] For an extensive selection of decisions, information on communicated cases, advisory opinions, press releases, legal summaries and reports, among others, the Human Rights Documentation (HUDOC) database is available at www.echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=caselaw&c=.

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➔ To enhance your knowledge of the international and legal framework on the protection of the rights of the child, you may want to take specific training (which may be classroom-based, or online and self-paced). A few examples of self-paced online training resources are:

- HELP Online Platform (Council of Europe)
- IOM e-Campus
- Caring for Children Moving Alone Massive Online Open Course (MOOC)

➔ Moreover, you may consult different CSOs, international organizations and academic institutions that have developed classroom training resources and can deliver them to you and your colleagues. This could also be a good opportunity to build synergies with national, regional and local stakeholders with legal expertise that can contribute to your work.

2.1.5. Other developments

In addition to the international legal framework on the protection of the rights of all children, including migrant children, we draw your attention to other international developments, led by States, recognizing the need to ensure that migrant children's rights are protected.

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

The Global Compact for Migration was adopted on 10 December 2018 by majority of United Nations Member States at an intergovernmental conference in Marrakesh, Morocco, followed shortly by formal endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2018.

- By implementing the Global Compact, States ensure respect for the protection and fulfilment of the human rights of all migrants, including migrant children, regardless of migration status, across all stages of migration.
- States reaffirm their commitment to eliminating all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance, against migrants and their families.
- The Global Compact ensures gender equality: Girls and boys are respected at all stages of migration; their specific needs are properly understood and addressed; and they are empowered as agents of change.

The Global Compact represents a breakthrough for children and States alike. The commitments across the Global Compact's objectives provide governments with a practical tool to meet their existing child rights obligations and to protect, include and empower all children, regardless of status, in countries of origin, transit, destination and return.

- Adopting a child-sensitive approach, it promotes existing international legal obligations enshrined in the UNCRC and upholds the principle of the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all situations concerning international migrant children, including unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs).

- Additionally, it ensures that migrant children are promptly identified at places of first arrival in countries of transit and destination, and are swiftly referred to child protection authorities and other relevant services.

- Family unity is protected, and that anyone legitimately claiming to be a child is treated as such, unless otherwise determined through a multidisciplinary, independent and child-sensitive age assessment.

- The Global Compact also provides inclusive and equitable quality education to migrant children and youth, as well as facilitating access to lifelong learning opportunities.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which constitute an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership.

- Universal in scope, the SDGs put the world's most vulnerable and marginalized people, including children, at the top of the agenda.

- The inclusion of a specific target (SDG 16.2) in the 2030 Agenda to end all forms of violence against children (i.e. abuse, exploitation, trafficking and torture) gives renewed impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation.

- Several other SDG targets address specific forms of violence and harm towards children, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (Target 5.3) and the eradication of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers (Target 8.7).

- SDG Target 1.2 aims to reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions.

Additional information: **The integrated border management approach**

The European Union adopts an integrated border management (IBM) approach to make sure that there is national and international coordination and cooperation among all relevant authorities and agencies involved in border security and encourages member States to develop and adopt national IBM strategies. This approach establishes effective, efficient and coordinated border management along external European Union borders to ensure a high level of internal security, while at the same time acting in full respect of fundamental rights and in a manner that safeguards the free movement of persons within European Union territory.[20]

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[20] For more information about integrated border management in the European Union, see: European Union, European Integrated Border Management section. Available at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/european-integrated-border-management_en.

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Arrivals of migrants at a sea border point: The Italian Coast Guard rescues migrants and refugees bound for Italy.

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2.2. ENGAGING WITH DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

Before we proceed with the discussion of this topic, here is a brief reflection exercise.

Reflection exercise

Which national and local actors are involved in your work as a front-line worker? How do they work together? Are there any specific mechanisms of collaboration already defined (i.e. referral mechanisms)?

Write down your answers in the box below.

A multi-stakeholder approach is required to coordinate efforts in the realization of the rights of migrant children. As described in Chapter 1, migrant children may have experienced different challenges linked to the way they have migrated and in account of individual, family/household, community and structural factors. At the national level, different stakeholders will be involved in the protection of their rights. At borders, this is particularly relevant because there are different levels of engagement at the local, regional and national levels in some cases.

As a front-line worker, you may often find yourself working in these different levels of engagement, thus it is important to recognize the importance of working with different stakeholders to find relevant solutions to address the needs of migrant children. Needs are often greater than the options and resources available at border points; thus, it is important to find solutions to such issues, building on each stakeholder's area of competency, expertise and role.

The level of engagement among stakeholders may be defined by law or specific policies and could be also pre-defined by various coordination mechanisms, such as referral systems – for example, referral systems for child protection, including those for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and trafficking in persons, among others.

Moreover, if such systems do not exist, engagement can include less "formal" or structured mechanisms, with the goal of building a positive "community" of stakeholders engaged in finding solutions together for the protection of children identified at borders. Provided that such engagement considers the fundamental rights of migrant children, this could result in greater impact on the protection of the rights of children in the context of migration. Table 1 highlights some suggestions and examples of the various degrees to which you can actively engage with local actors in border areas, which may be useful to consider in your work as a front-line worker. We have provided a few concrete examples based on the experience of IOM.

Table 1. A frontliner's engagement with local actors in border areas

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
The front-line worker informs local authorities and other local actors of his or her actions to avoid negative reactions, raise awareness of key issues and identify potential synergies.	The front-line worker consults with local authorities and other local actors and later provides feedback on how such consultation has (or has not) influenced any decisions made and actions taken.	The frontliner works directly with local actors across various tasks and activities to ensure their concerns and priorities are considered and addressed.	The front-line worker partners with local actors to carry out some activities and tasks, ensuring their participation in all areas of planning and implementation of their work together.	The front-line worker partners with local actors and ensures their participation, coordinating all actions and empowering them through capacity-building and technical assistance.
Example: IOM may host a meeting with a border community to present forthcoming activities to support the realization of migrant children's rights.	*Example: IOM organizes a consultation workshop on the development of a toolkit on the protection of children in the context of migration.*	*Example: IOM supports the creation of a steering committee or working group involving relevant actors to help steer and oversee IOM activities in a border area.*	*Example: IOM involves local actors in all stages of the project cycle and reaches an agreement (and even signing a service agreement) with them for them to carry out service provision tasks in the field of child protection.*	*Example: IOM activities are focused on supporting capacity development and institutional strengthening and potentially funding local actors' activities and projects.*

Reflection exercise ✒

What are you (or your organization) doing to reinforce collaboration with other actors at a local level?

Write down your answers in the table below.

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower

At times, such engagement may be challenging or difficult, especially between the national and local levels, due to different factors (e.g. lack of trust among stakeholders, unsuccessful previous engagements, and the need to define roles and develop competencies). Defining a strategy and assessing the level of engagement among front-line workers may bring about solutions to overcome such challenges. In addition, even if there are levels of engagements defined by law (e.g. the need for referral systems), collaboration and information-sharing may not always occur in practice. Thus, it is important to take time to assess and strategize how information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment should be established at borders, and what active steps you can take towards engaging with your different counterparts. In the end, such engagement could bring more positive results in your respective areas of work and in the realization of the rights of migrant children.

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→ **Portugal** has a National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which includes a "Protocol for the definition of procedures aimed at the prevention, detection and protection of children (presumed) victims of trafficking in human beings." This specific NRM was developed by a multidisciplinary group (governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations) and validated by all organizations in the National Network for the Assistance and Protection to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as the Minister of Home Affairs. It addresses the specificities of child trafficking (i.e. the crime itself, as well as victim identification, assistance and support at all stages), which in recent years has especially been seen in cases detected at the country's international airports, and creates procedures for the prevention, detection, identification, support and protection of (presumed) victims of child trafficking.

→ In **Estonia**, the competent authority on child protection is the Social Insurance Board, which collaborates with local governments and is coordinated mainly by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Its Child Protection Department is responsible for counselling and mentoring services, child-friendly helplines[21] and alternative care prototypes (e.g. foster care and guardianship). As regards child protection services, the Barnahus[22] ("Children's House") model is a child-friendly and multidisciplinary service that supports children who have been or are suspected of having been sexually abused.

2.3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

• Human rights should guide the work of the various institutions involved in child protection. Any front-line worker should therefore be aware of relevant legislation (both internal and national) concerning the respect, fulfilment and protection of the rights of the child.

• Migration needs to be understood and managed at the national, international and local levels, where migratory corridors connect specific territories and shape new dynamics. It is essential to coordinate with the stakeholders involved in the process. You might decide how to involve the various actors depending on your needs and priorities, and you will need to choose how to relate to them: simply informing, consulting, involving, cooperating or empowering them.

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[21] The Child Helpline International (116-111) website is available at www.lasteabi.ee.
[22] For more information about Barnahus ("Children's House"), see: Estonia Social Insurance Board, Children's House webpage. Available at www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-and-child-protection/childrens-house.

Additional resources

- Joint General Comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and Joint General Comment No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return

- OHCHR Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance, on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations

- Briefing paper and key recommendations concerning measures at European Union borders for unaccompanied children

- Briefing paper and key recommendations on making proposed European Union measures concerning migrant children at the European Union external border more child-centered and child-sensitive

The two briefing papers serve to inform better practices and advocacy for legislative and policy reform. Considering the recent European Union Migration and Asylum Pact and its accompanying proposals for mandatory European Union border procedures, the papers closely review emerging issues for children at European Union borders, identifies challenges that need to be considered more closely and shares detailed recommendations on screening and border measures. Screening procedures at borders should serve primarily as part of a "triage stage", under an enhanced case management approach, to identify and refer persons in vulnerable situations away from borders. The vulnerability screening procedure must be explicitly shaped and guided by the best interests principle, in particular by ensuring the situation of each child, whether unaccompanied or travelling with family members or adults, is assessed in order to make an appropriate referral away from the border. Specific safeguards for children must be in place throughout the screening process.

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3. THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

3.1. RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Front-line workers have a key role to support, directly or indirectly, the realization of the rights of children in the context of migration. An essential step towards such realization is understanding how the specific rights set for in the various international legal instruments transpose into practice.

As established in the UDHR, everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms without distinction as to ethnicity, colour, sex (including sex characteristics, gender (which translates well into gender identity and expression), language, religion, political or another opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or another status.

In addition, according to the UDHR, children are entitled to special care and assistance. Children should grow up to the full and harmonious development potential of their personality in a family environment with an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

> *"Be humans towards children, some have passed through difficult things."*
>
> – Y.Y., a 17-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

In addition to the UDHR, children's rights are presented in the UNCRC.[23] Figure 2 summarizes the primary rights outlined in the Convention, expressed from the perspective of migrant children.

Figure 2. Children's rights

As a child that enjoys my rights fully...

- I will not be discriminated.
- My family unity will be guaranteed.
- I will be free to actively participate in the case management process.
- My best interests should be protected.
- I will express my views if I want to.
- I will receive all the important and necessary information.
- My life and full development should be protected.
- I will not be sent back to my country of origin if I would be exposed to danger or persecution.
- I will enjoy my privacy.
- I will receive support for my evolving capacities.

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[23] The full text of the UNCRC is available at www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

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Moreover, as a front-line worker, it is important to remember that States that have signed the UNCRC are bound to respect, protect and fulfil the rights enshrined in the Convention. Thus, various stakeholders, including front-line workers, have a direct role (and, in some cases, specific responsibilities and duties) in ensuring such implementation and accountability.

Reflection exercise

Question 1: Do you feel your work influences, directly or indirectly, the realization of the rights enshrined in the UNCRC? How so?

Question 2: Are there any rights you find more challenging to fulfil than others in your work? Why?

Question 3: What may be some of the bottlenecks (internal or external) in the realization of such rights?

Write down your answers to the questions in the box below.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, the UNCRC is the core international human rights instrument on the protection of children, including migrant children. The Convention enshrines four core principles:

- The child's best interests
- Non-discrimination
- The right to survival and development
- The views of the child

The above principles also apply to migrant children and are so fundamental that they can be thought of as underlying the entire UNCRC.[24] We will come back later in the Toolkit with more concrete examples and practices on how to apply these principles.

3.1.1. The 3Ps of children's rights protection

Children's rights under the UNCRC can be grouped broadly into three significant areas called "the 3Ps": Provision, Protection and Participation[25] (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The 3Ps
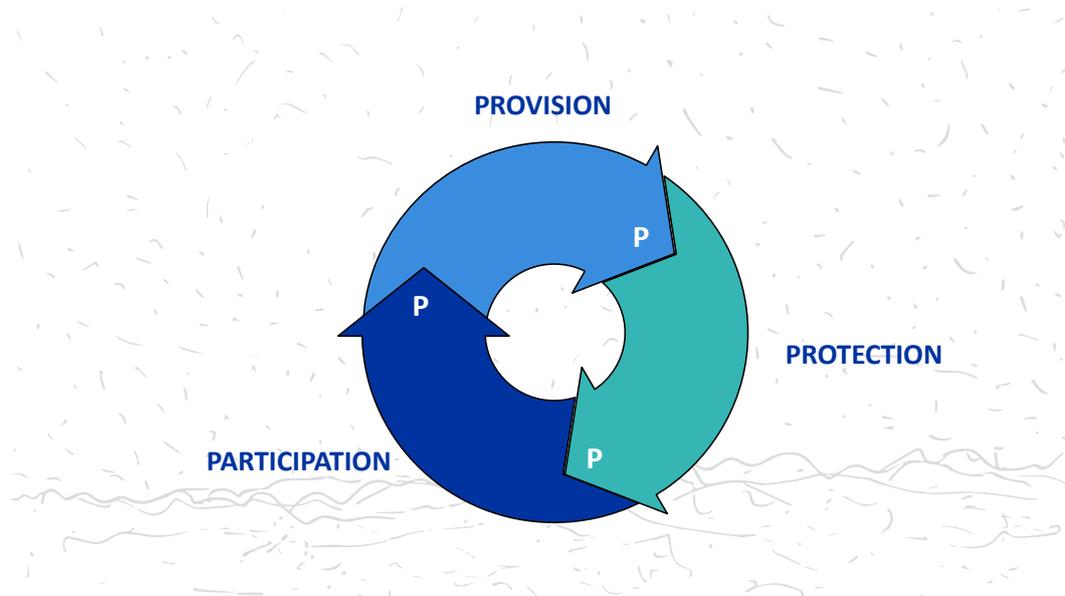
Provision refers to the rights of the child to grow and develop. It includes rights to adequate housing, food and education, and their rights to play, leisure time and access to recreation.

Protection means shielding children from violence, exploitation and/or abuse, requiring intervention where and when either could occur. For example, migrant children abused at home can be removed from their families under specific procedures set by law and through competent professionals in the field.

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24   For more detailed information on the human rights of migrant children, see: IOM, *Human Rights of Migrant Children*, International Migration Law, No. 15 (Geneva, 2015). Available at https://publications.iom.int/books/international-migration-law-ndeg15-human-rights-migrant-children.
25   United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 12 on The right of the child to be heard", 1 July 2009 (CRC/C/GC/12), footnote 4, p. 6. Available at www.refworld.org/docid/4ae562c52.html.

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Participation refers to the right of children to take part in decisions that involve or affect them, and this also includes the right to an opinion.

Prevention is sometimes used as the fourth "P" and refers to actions that should be proactively taken to avoid harm, violence, abuse or exploitation against children.

Below are some examples of concrete actions related to the 3Ps.

Examples: 3Ps-based actions

Provision	Protection	Participation
We need to: • Guarantee children and their family's privacy, including of their emails and their home. • Protect children from any violence or abuse, negligent treatment, and verbal or physical mistreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. • Guarantee mentally or physically disabled migrant children with conditions that ensure their dignity, promote their autonomy and facilitate their participation in the community. • Help children recover and integrate into an environment that promotes their health, self-respect and dignity. • Guarantee children's access to health care, social insurance and education.	Migrant children: • Cannot be discriminated. • Need to be in a position where they can preserve their identity, and we need to respect their religion or creed. • Have the right to life and survival. • Cannot be separated from their parents if they do not want it, except when competent authorities, after a judicial review, determine that such separation is necessary for the child's best interests. • Can never be subject to torture or any other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. • Cannot be arrested. (Detention or imprisonment is possible only as a last resort.) • Their best interests are always a priority.	Migrant children: • Should be free to express their opinions and receive more information if they ask for it. • Migrant children should be able to gather information relevant to their case with other actors if they wish to, in line with General Comment No. 12 (2009) (see footnote 24).

Note: The role of front-line workers is to protect, respect and fulfil children's rights.

Reflection exercise

Question 1: Can you think of concrete examples in your work as a front-line worker of how the 3Ps are implemented at border areas?

Provision:

Protection:

Participation:

Question 2: Do you think there is space to improve access to the 3Ps? If so, in which areas?

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As we have discussed the provision of rights under the UNCRC, let us now briefly discuss the four core principles:

- **Non-discrimination**. The obligation to provide equality of opportunities among children is expressed in article 2 of the UNCRC: "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 parents or legal guardian, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, poverty, disability, birth or other status."

- **The right to survival and development**. This right is formulated in article 6.2 of the UNCRC, which states that "States parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child."

- **The views of the child**. In order to know what is actually in the interest of the child, it is logical to actively listen to them. The principle is formulated in article 12.1, which states that "States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the rights to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

- **The child's best interests** (covered in Chapter 4).

Such principles also apply to migrant children and are so fundamental that they can be thought of as underlying the entire UNCRC.[26] We will come back later in the Toolkit to more concrete examples and practices on how to apply these principles.

Here are some promising practices that ensure the rights of children in the context of migration to provide a concrete overview of how front-line workers can contribute to their realization.

Good practices 👍

Preventing discrimination

➔ Ensure proactively that all migrant children and their families have a safe space for prayer and that the food distributed respects the diets of everyone.

➔ Enable a safe space free of discrimination and stigma against children of diverse SOGIESC.

Ensuring the participation of migrant children

➔ Invite migrant children to express their opinions concerning their safety.

➔ Identify potential obstacles that may prevent children from participating in consultations, for example, by assessing whether the support of interpreters or cultural mediators is needed to overcome language or cross-cultural communication barriers.

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[26] For more detailed information on the human rights of migrant children, see: IOM, *Human Rights of Migrant Children* (see footnote 24).

Observing the principle of non-refoulement[27]

➜ Ensure actions are taken to enforce the principle of non-refoulment, that is, ensuring children are not returned to a country where they could be subjected to torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, punishment and other irreparable harm.

Ensuring the privacy of migrant children

➜ Interview migrant children in a protected environment where no one else, apart from relevant stakeholders involved (i.e. the interviewer, legal guardian/parents and interpreters) are present. Create a relationship of trust with migrant children and ensure their participation.

➜ Ensure all relevant data and information (i.e. files and records) on migrant children are duly stored and protected.

Protecting the right to survival and development

➜ Consider that many migrant children, especially those unaccompanied or separated, may have travelled long distances or faced hardships when they are first identified at borders. As such, attend to their most fundamental needs to access health, food, water and rest, and ensure their overall well-being before conducting a long interview or screening process.

➜ Front-line workers can support the identification and referral to relevant authorities of cases of children who may be subjected to crimes, such as trafficking and SGBV. Early identification, referral and enabling support systems could help address children's right to survival and development. In addition to having a better understanding of such crimes and others that affect migrant children more often, you could also familiarize yourself with the relevant support and referral mechanisms that exist at border areas and at the national level.

Being child-friendly and gender-sensitive

➜ Assess which interventions may have an "adult-centric" focus and how to adapt them to the context of children based on their evolving capacities.[28] A good practice is to involve, to the extent feasible, children by asking them to provide feedback to the development of information and communication materials on how to access their rights. For example, distribute flyers with drawings and in plain language to explain relevant procedures and interventions.

➜ Child-friendly does not mean you need to use "childish" language. Consider that for some migrant children, the experience of migration itself has enabled them to acquire a certain level of maturity and personal "growth", for which they expect to be treated accordingly.

➜ Enable an appropriate waiting area where the children are safe and there is no risk of abuse. In general, create a safe space for children (see Chapter 7 on safe spaces).

➜ Enable access to training for you and your colleagues on cross-cultural awareness, gender mainstreaming and the kind of traumas linked to SGBV, trafficking in persons and other crimes that affect children, especially in the context of migration.

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[27] For more information on the principle of non-refoulement and its core principles, see: OHCHR, "The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law", brief (n.d.). Available at www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/technical-note-principle-non-refoulement-under-international-human.

[28] The "evolving capacities" of the child is one of the key concepts in the UNCRC. It is linked to the article 12 requirement that a child's views should be given "due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child".

IOM staff at a disembarkation point in Tunisia, 19 March 2015: A boat of 84 migrants departing from Zwara capsized and was rescued by the Tunisian Coast Guard. It was reported that one Nigerian migrant died, while 13 others were transferred to the hospital in Zarzis upon their arrival. IOM met the migrants at the Port of Zarzis to provide humanitarian assistance (food and non-food items), in coordination with the Tunisian Red Crescent and local authorities.

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Reflection exercise

Can you think of some other ideas on how to protect the rights of migrant children?

Write down your thoughts in the box below.

3.2. HARMFUL PRACTICES

Often, despite all the efforts to respect children's rights, as described previously, harmful practices can still exist at the first interception and contact with migrant children at borders. For example, pushbacks of migrants, including migrant children, happen in some border areas (thus contravening the principle of non-refoulement, among other international human rights principles). Another example is when excessive and intrusive screening results in "re-victimizing" when interviewing a migrant child, which could lead to, for example, re-traumatization and the violation of the child's integrity, to mention a few. This may happen sometimes even with the best intentions of front-line workers in supporting migrant children.

> ### Reflection exercise ✎
>
> Can you think of some harmful practices that are committed by front-line workers against migrant children at borders?
>
> Write down your answers in the box below.

As a starting point to avoiding harmful practices, in addition to being able to identify the relevant core international human rights principles and having an understanding of how children migrate, it is essential for front-line workers to prevent, suppress and act upon avoiding such harmful practices.

Several harmful practices at borders were identified during a multi-stakeholder workshop organized by IOM in June 2022 to aid the design of this Toolkit, which we would like to share with you to help you avoid them.

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Examples: Harmful practices from children's perspective

What the child experienced	What went wrong in this situation	Key advocacy messages for front-line workers
I am being treated like a criminal as I entered the country irregularly and have been detained in an administrative centre.	Placing a child in administrative detention on account of his or her irregular migratory status.	Children should not be placed in administrative detention.[29]
I was interviewed simultaneously with others, and I could not tell the truth about myself. I was scared of the others.	Interviewing children simultaneously; thus, privacy is not guaranteed.	Privacy is paramount during interviews. Children should feel respected and safe, and confidentiality should be ensured.
Even if we are from the same country, the interpreter is from [name of ethnic group], and I do not understand his accent nor I trust him. I was not comfortable.	Disregarding the dynamics between people from different countries and/or, if from the same country, disregarding other cross-cultural dimensions.	When selecting interpreters, it is essential to consider cross-cultural dimensions, for example, by ensuring that the translator is neutral and accepted by a child. Children might not trust translators because of their country of origin, ethnicity or gender, among other factors. Thus, it might be necessary to consult a cultural mediator.
The person that interviewed me did not trust me when I told them my age. I felt they also did not trust that I was honest about my story.	Being quick to mistrust the information provided by a child during the interview.	Practice active listening, and do not jump to quick conclusions. Even if you have doubts about the information being shared, it is essential to not show mistrust when children are telling their stories. Some migrant children may have to re-live traumatic prior experiences when being interviewed; thus, whenever they put their trust you, offer your trust in exchange.

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29   Detention cannot be justified based solely on his or her migration or residency status, or the fact that he or she is unaccompanied or separated. Furthermore, children should never be criminalized or subjected to punitive measures because of their parents' migration status. Alternatives to detention should be explored, preferably through family-based alternative care options or other suitable alternative care arrangements determined by the competent child-care authorities. (UNHCR, *Guidelines on the Applicable Criteria and Standards Relating to the Detention of Asylum-Seekers and Alternatives to Detention* (Geneva, 2012), paras. 54–57. Available at www.refworld.org/docid/503489533b8.html.)

What the child experienced	What went wrong in this situation	Key advocacy messages for front-line workers
I am terrified here. No one seems to understand me, and they are always so strict and cold with me.	Creating and maintaining an unsafe and unfriendly environment for the child.	The environment needs to be a space where children feel safe. Moreover, keep in mind that migrant children may come from different cross-cultural backgrounds, where, for example, they would be less "used" to direct communication styles ("telling it how it is"), which may be perceived as "too confrontational". For some, this is the first time they are interacting with a person of a different cultural background than theirs. Thus, be mindful of your own communication style and the overall cross-cultural dimension.
I do not understand what they are asking me; the words are too complicated.	Using language that is not child-friendly.	It is essential always to use child-friendly language, accompanied by additional information displayed in child-friendly visuals, if possible. As a rule, use plain and simple language; avoid acronyms and complex legal terms; and be mindful of your words.
I have been travelling with my aunt. She has been good to me and takes care of me. I can no longer see her. She has been sent to another centre.	Separating children from their caregivers.	Keeping children and their trusted caregiver together is essential, is children's right and supports the right to life and development. Moreover, family unity is a fundamental right of children.
I heard that there had been some violence in the centre.	Neglecting the importance of ensuring a safe space.	Again, the importance of safe spaces should never be neglected. Violence in reception centres should be prevented and contained. It is essential to ensure that the children see you condemn and stop it if it occurs.

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What the child experienced	What went wrong in this situation	Key advocacy messages for front-line workers
My older cousin is here, and I am scared he will "touch" me and make me feel uncomfortable, as he has done so before. I mentioned it during the interviews, but no one is keeping him away from me.	Neglecting SGBV and sexual harassment and failure to separate children from the perpetrator of harassment.	Disclosing episodes of SGBV is usually quite traumatic; thus, if migrant children already disclose any information with you, you need to take action to support them. Whereas you do not need to be an expert in the field, you are still responsible for ensuring they are referred to the relevant protection services. It is therefore essential to ensure close collaboration with referral mechanisms for child protection, SGBV and trafficking. Moreover, as a front-line worker, you need to ensure a clear policy to ensure children's safety is respected.
My guardian has many children to attend to, and he does not even remember my name.	Assigning too many children to a guardian.	Guardians need to be in a position where they are able to adequately manage every case they receive.
They keep giving me non-halal food. I cannot eat it. *The immigration officer was upset as I was not looking into her eyes.*	Ignoring the importance of cross-cultural issues.	Respect for intercultural issues is fundamental for children to feel safe. This concerns how migrant children may interpret the way front-line workers talk (e.g. direct versus indirect type of communication), what they wear and what their body language is like (how they use their hands or whether they expect children to establish eye contact (in some cultures, children may be taught this is disrespectful towards adults)).
The interviewer hugged me. I felt so uncomfortable.	Disregarding the importance of respecting personal space and respecting children's own bodies.	Keeping personal space is essential to show respect. Moreover, respecting children's body and integrity is essential.

What the child experienced	What went wrong in this situation	Key advocacy messages for front-line workers
The other refugees are against me because I am here with my boyfriend. We ran away because our relationship was not accepted in our country. Now, it is just worse here.	Neglecting the importance of the challenges that LGBTQIA+ children may face.	A clear policy needs to be in place and respected. It is essential to be aware that LGBTQIA+ children might often be victims of violence and harassment by adults and other children.

3.3. AVOIDING HARMFUL PRACTICES

Knowledge and awareness are the best way to avoid harmful practices and respect children's rights. As front-line workers, you and your colleagues need to know what is essential in your work, as you are performing a very critical and sensitive job and you have a responsibility to children. Several resources are available to enable front-line workers to grow their awareness and capacity to avoid harmful practices. This Toolkit provides you with some resources to become more aware of some of these harmful practices and how to take action to avoid and/or eliminate them. It is important to continue your learning journey on how to prevent and suppress harmful practices against migrant children.

We shall also discuss a few practices that, depending on the context and the lack of specific safeguards and principles, may lead to harmful practices.

Age assessment is a process where by authorities establish the age of a person to determine whether the individual is a child. National authorities are usually engaged in the process of establishing the age of a child (including a child) if there are serious doubts about it. It is important that in a migration or asylum context, core human rights principles are upheld in the treatment of all children undergoing such procedures. Failure to do so can result in serious negative consequences and may be harmful for the child concerned. States are obliged to ensure that age assessments are implemented in accordance with best interests of the child principle, procedures and guidelines that respect the rights, integrity and dignity of the (alleged) child, outlined below:

- General Comment No. 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children (CRC)
- *Age Assessment for Children in Migration: A Human Rights-based Approach* (Council of Europe)
- *EASO Practical Guide on Age Assessment* (EUAA)
- *Age Assessment and Fingerprinting of Children in Asylum Procedures* (FRA)
- Age assessment: a technical note (UNICEF)

Detention has a profound and negative impact on child health and well-being and can have long-lasting negative impacts on children's cognitive development. Placement in detention is known to exacerbate psychological distress, and children held in detention are at risk of depression and anxiety, as well as violence and abuse. States are encouraged to ensure alternatives to detention for children and families that are safe and dignified to protect the rights and well-being of refugee and migrant children. Community-based programmes, case management and other human rights-based alternatives have proven highly effective, and all governments should work to replace immigration detention as an option for children and families with appropriate reception and care arrangements.

For more in-depth information, here are two advocacy tools which can provide you with a better understanding of the issues, including how States can stop the detention of migrant children:

- Child immigration detention in the European Union (Initiative for Children in Migration)
- *Advocating for Alternatives to Migration Detention* (IOM)

Good practices: Child-sensitive approaches 👍

→ Different accountability mechanisms have the potential to contribute to the identification of harmful practices against migrant children, with the goal of helping you take action to inform, prevent, address and eliminate any such practices. At the international, regional or national level, you may find different resources that can support this process, for example:

- Reports by relevant national bodies/institutions, such as the Office of the Ombudsperson
- Reports by national audit entities
- Reports by CSOs and international organizations
- Reports by migrant children themselves (through mechanisms of accountability for affected populations)

→ UNICEF developed a Pocket Guide for Border Patrol Agents, which outlines the elements of and offers tips on child-sensitive communication suited for the needs of border officers. A child-sensitive approach allows agents to carry out their work and communicate in a way that supports children's safety and well-being while minimizing harm. For related information, you may refer to the UNICEF report, Building Bridges for Every Child.

→ OHCHR has developed a Trainer's Guide (published jointly with the Office of Counter-Terrorism) that draws on and complements the *Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders*. Accompanied by slide presentations and course materials, this capacity-building tool seeks to support States and particularly border officials in adopting a human rights-based and gender-responsive approach to border governance.

3.4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Children's rights could be grouped broadly into three areas – the 3Ps: Provision, Protection and Participation.
- The role of the front-line workers is to contribute, directly or indirectly to protect, respect and fulfil children's rights.
- The four core principles underpinning the UNCRC are child's best interests, non-discrimination, right to survival and development and the views of the child.
- A front-line worker is supposed to act when facing the non-respect of children's rights.
- Several harmful practices can be prevented if front-line workers can engage in a learning process to receive guidance and support.

Operational escorts from IOM Bern, Switzerland and IOM Poland support orphans from Ukraine.

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4. THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

> *"When we arrived, I was very dizzy and I wanted to sleep. People there brought us food and clothes, registered us, put us in a bus and took our mobile phones. We lived in the bus for 2–3 days and then they transferred us to detention."*
>
> – J.M., a 15-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

The UNCRC states that:

> In all actions concerning migrant children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the child's best interests shall be a primary consideration.[30]

Front-line workers operate in various settings, including diverse geographical, political, legal, economic and cultural contexts. While there are similarities in protection risks for children across different borders, the impact on children and their experience of the risks may vary depending on the context. Irrespective of such contextual fluctuations, **front-line workers must ensure that the support they provide to children is based on each child's best interests**.

The term **best interests** broadly describes the well-being of migrant children. Their best interests should always be a priority when working with them. Respecting these children's best interests is an obligation of States, courts of law and administrative authorities, including those operating at borders.

In line with the UNCRC, authorities must assess and determine best interests – to ensure that children can fully enjoy their rights – and choose durable solutions.[31] A durable solution is a solution that, in the long term, ensures that children enjoy their rights and will not be at risk of persecution or serious harm.

In order to keep the best interests of the child (BIC) as a primary consideration, a holistic and child-centred process must be implemented on an ongoing basis. As the first persons to be in contact with migrant child, front-line workers are in a good position to initiate or participate in the BIC process. In doing so, they must take into account the child's circumstances and needs in all actions and decisions they might take that might have an impact on the child, whether for the short, medium or long term. In migrant child cases, front-line workers should involve all relevant actors and not deprive the child of opportunities to be heard.

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[30] Article 3 of the UNCRC.
[31] IOM, *IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse* (Geneva, 2019). Available at https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-handbook-migrants-vulnerable-violence-exploitation-and-abuse.
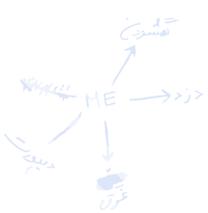
Due application and consideration of the best interests principle is required before any action or decision is taken to support a migrant child at a border. Depending on the scope and impact of the action to be taken by front-line workers, two different protection processes for assessing or determining decisions that are in the best interests of the child can envisaged:

- A **best interests assessment (BIA)** is a default child protection assessment aimed at supporting child protection actors in any decision or action taken on behalf of a child. Other national agencies may refer to this process as a "social welfare assessment" or "child protection assessment". Overall, a BIA should be seen as an essential element of case management and general child protection work.

- The **best interests determination (BID)** is a formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine a child's best interests based on the BIA. It is implemented for individual children who need targeted, structured, systematic, sustained and coordinated support. Thus, a BID procedure is always required in a situation where a decision is likely to have far-reaching implications for the child.

Figure 4. The best interests of the child

Below are the general steps to consider when assessing the best interest of the child in the context of our discussion.

1 Identifying a migrant child at a border
2 Best interests assessment (BIA)
3 Case management (includes referrals)
6 Case closure
5 Case follow-up
4 Identifying durable solutions

A best interests determination can be initiated at any step of the best interests procedure.

4.1. THE BEST INTERESTS ASSESSMENT

As mentioned, the BIA is part of the overall best interests process. It is an assessment tool for protecting individual children identified to be at risk and generally describes the child's situation and gives recommendations for protection and care. Ideally, it should be carried out as soon as possible after a child has been identified as being at risk at a border.

Conducting an initial BIA is a fundamental first step to engaging the best interests process and may lead to a BID, depending on whether the child requires a durable or sustainable solution.

In many States, BIAs are most appropriately carried out by competent child protection services. To reach the most informed conclusion, a BIA should involve expert professionals from other disciplines, as relevant, and needs to be documented in order to facilitate monitoring and follow-up on the child. Although a BIA does not require any particular formality, those involved in the process should have the necessary training, skills and expertise.

BIAs may be needed to, among other things, make decisions such as:

- Placing a child in accommodation and decide on immediate care arrangements appropriate to meet the child's individual needs.
- Determining whether tracing the child's family would be in the child's best interests and would not put the child or family at risk, in the case of UASCs.
- Providing a child with health, educational or recreational services.
- Applying or not apply for international or other forms of protection.
- Deciding whether a formal BID is needed.
- Collecting information needed for a BID.

Any later formal BID is likely to benefit from BIAs that are adequately documented and included in the BID dossier.

4.2. BEST INTERESTS DETERMINATION

BID is a tool for child protection and is specifically conducted for purposes of finding a lasting solution. It describes the formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child. It should facilitate adequate child participation without discrimination, involve decision makers with relevant areas of expertise and balance all relevant factors in order to access the best option."[32]

There is no single way to reach a BID. However, several potential ways exist to strengthen existing systems and procedures.

The BID addresses critical questions, including:

- Where is it in the child's best interests to live?
- With whom is it in the child's best interests to live?
- Who is best placed to have parental and legal responsibility for the child in the future?
- How does the child feel about the options identified and proposed?
- What resources will have to be deployed, and what services will be provided to sustain the solution recommended in the BID?

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[32] UNHCR, *UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child* (Geneva, 2008). Available at www.unhcr.org/protection/children/4566b16b2/unhcr-guidelines-determining-best-interests-child.html.

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Additionally, it is essential that the BID:

- Is holistic, looks at all the circumstances and ensures that a picture of the child's general circumstances is established, including what is known and what is not known, as well as what is required to explore "options" and identify possible outcomes.

- Be multidisciplinary like the BIA.

- Ensures child participation through child-friendly procedures and proper information and support from both the child's guardian and legal representative or adviser.

- Demonstrates and documents that the child's best interests have been a primary consideration.

- Is carried out promptly.

- Considers short-, medium- and long-term options.

Usually, States have formal appropriate procedures already established for considering the child's best interests. Front-line workers should be familiar with their country's child protection system and utilize appropriate procedures for the determination of the child's best interests, depending on whether they are accessible to and appropriate for migrant children identified at borders.

Ana's story

Below is the experience of Ana, a front-line worker working for a child protection unit in Germany.

Context: *Hi! my name is Ana. Recently we received an unaccompanied girl from Afghanistan. She had travelled alone to Germany, and her family is still in Kabul.*

Best interests assessment (BIA): *During the best interests assessment, we evaluated if it was in the child's best interests to integrate into Germany. We have interviewed her, and we have consulted other stakeholders.*

Best interests determination (BID): *During the best interests determination, we concluded she would be at risk of violence or persecution if she had to return to her country.*

Solution: *We have been able to guarantee her international protection as a solution. She will be integrated into a German family and have access to education. We also proposed family reunification to allow her mother to join her here in Germany, where they could live together again.*

In this example, Ana briefly tells us how her team assessed a girl's best interests, how they determined it and what solutions they proposed. During the **assessment of the best interests of the child**, we should, as Ana did, assess, together with all the relevant stakeholders, the best option for the child's well-being. We should also consider and weigh the views and opinions of the child.

In addition, the child's best interests can be respected if the child **actively participates in the process** and if there is no discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, race or gender.

4.2.1. Key considerations in applying the best interests principle for unaccompanied children

Here are some key considerations related to applying the best interests principle for unaccompanied children.

- When vulnerable migrant children travel with a parent or caregiver, a trusted and reliable family member or a responsible adult, we may assume they are cared for and protected by their parent or caregiver. However, this does not relieve the State of the obligation to undertake a BIA when considering solutions for the child.

- UASCs have the same substantive rights as all other children. The State is therefore responsible for providing such children with appropriate protection and assistance, an adequate standard of living, access to health services and recreational activities, and the same educational opportunities as all other children in its territory.

- Where UASCs need a solution, States will generally meet this substantive right by referring them to existing child protection and welfare systems.

- In situations where the local and national child protection system is weak or unable to assume care of UASCs for whatever reason, others – such as CSOs or NGOs – may step in.

- Some UASCs may have been neglected by their families, in which case it may not be in their best interest to be returned to their families' care.

4.2.2. A multidisciplinary process

BIA or BID decision-making processes can be complex: Various circumstances and the rights of the child need to be balanced appropriately by front-line workers. Any best interests process undertaken must give due consideration to the child's specific circumstances and individual needs, including vulnerabilities and risks the child is exposed to: protection needs, the family situation, the child's level of integration, and health, education and socioeconomic conditions.

During this process, it is equally essential to reflect on the child's SOGIESC, nationality, age, ability, race, ethnicity, religion, language, and social status or any other status.

This is why the assessment of the child's best interests at borders should be a "multidisciplinary exercise"[33] involving relevant actors undertaken by specialists and experts who have the relevant skills, competencies and the appropriate training to work with children.

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[33]   Recommendations for the use of a multidisciplinary team can also be found in: CRC, "General Comment No. 14 on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration" of 29 May 2013 (CRC /C/GC/14), art. 3, para. 1.

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BIC as a multidisciplinary process

It is considered good practice to ensure that any recommendation or assessment made regarding the child's best interests is further reviewed and approved, using the "four-eye principle", whereby at least two officers look at the case.

Source: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *Practical Guide on the Best Interests of the Child in Asylum Procedures* (Luxembourg, 2019). Available at https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/new-easo-practical-guide-best-interests-child-asylum-procedures.

Good practices: Best interests procedures 👍

➔ *2021 UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child*[34]

It is recommended for front-line workers at borders to develop nationally contextualized SOPs to ensure streamlined and efficient best interests processes. SOPs consist of a set of written instructions developed and agreed upon by actors providing direct and indirect child protection case management services in a specific geographic area. SOPs should define roles, responsibilities and relationships between different people and organizations involved in the best interests process and describe how to handle different types of child protection cases, reflecting the relevant existing national legislation, procedures, referral pathways and available services where they are accessible to and appropriate for migrant children.

➔ **EASO best interests checklist**

The *Practical Guide on the Best Interests of the Child in Asylum Procedures* by EASO features a non-exhaustive and non-hierarchical template checklist of elements and related safeguards that front-line workers should consider when assessing or determining the best interests of the child in international protection procedures.

➔ **BIP Toolbox: A toolkit by UNHCR**

The UNHCR developed a Best Interests Procedure (BIP) Toolbox, which provides users with a wide range of tools and additional guidance necessary for implementing best interests procedures for individual children. It includes relevant forms (i.e. BIA and BID forms), field examples in the form of case studies, the BIP Standard Operating Procedures Toolkit and training packages.

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[34]   UNHCR, *2021 UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child* (Geneva, 2021), p. 99.

4.3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- The term *best interests* broadly describes the well-being of migrant children.

- Everyday front-line workers encounter situations where decisions that affect children need to be guided by the best interests principle.

- The purpose of assessing and determining migrant children's best interests is to find sustainable or durable solutions and to ensure that they can fully enjoy their rights.

- A durable solution is a solution that, in the long term, ensures that the child will enjoy the rights and will not be at risk of persecution or serious harm.

- The assessment of a child's best interests should be a "multidisciplinary exercise"[35] involving relevant actors and undertaken by specialists and experts who have been evaluated and have received the appropriate training to work with children.

Additional resources

To have a better overview on the background to the context on how to ensure the application of and respect for the best interests of the child at borders, you can access the following resources:

- General Comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, which seeks to strengthen the understanding and application of the right of children to have their best interests assessed and taken as a primary consideration.

- *Guidance to Respect Children's Rights in Return Policies and Practices: Focus on the EU Legal Framework*, which provides guidance for State authorities on the design and implementation of return procedures that are child rights-compliant. In particular, it sets out concrete measures necessary to ensure respect for the best interests of the child.

- For more information on guardianship in the context of migration, you can access the following resources:

  - Effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration (Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe)

  - *Guardianship Systems for Unaccompanied and Separated Children in the European Union: Developments Since 2014* (FRA)

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[35] Recommendations for the use of a multidisciplinary team can also be found in: CRC, "General Comment No. 14" (see footnote 30), art. 3, para. 1.

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Migration health assessment upon arrival: IOM staff carry out medical assistance and fit-to-travel checks for Azeri third-country nationals (TCNs) in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. The group of TCNs has recently arrived from Ukraine, and IOM organized onward bus transportation to Azerbaijan for them.

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PART

II

TO ACT

In this part, we will focus on how front-line workers can act in the context of the identification of migrant children arriving by land, sea or air.

- Chapter 5 will focus on the concept of vulnerability and, more specifically, what vulnerability means in the context of migrant children, the different causes of the vulnerabilities, the different types of vulnerabilities and what you can do once you have assessed them.
- Chapter 6 will explain what case management is, who is involved, and the main steps of the case management process.
- Chapter 7 will focus on an essential aspect of the work of a front-line worker: the creation of safe spaces.

"Many people with disabilities or pregnant women crossed the border with us. I was concerned if they would take care of them as well."

– Y.Y., a 16-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

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5. VULNERABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRANT CHILDREN AND INTERNATIONAL BORDERS

International migration typically involves a country of origin, one or more countries of transit and a destination country. In such a context, as we have seen, children may be exposed to different risk factors.

Recognizing risk factors leading to a migrant child becoming vulnerable is the first step to being able to support them appropriately. As it has been briefly mentioned in previous chapters, children in the context of migration, particularly international migration, may face different vulnerabilities.

As a front-line worker, you may encounter children in the context of migration who may have become vulnerable. You will need to be able to have a general understanding of how such vulnerabilities may arise and how to address them, based on your specific areas of work, competencies and/or interaction with children.

5.1. WHAT DOES VULNERABILITY MEAN IN THE MIGRATION CONTEXT?

Whereas there is not an internationally accepted definition on the topic, IOM defines **vulnerability** as the limited capability to avoid, resist, cope or recover from violence, exploitation and abuse.[36]

Figure 5. Vulnerabilities of migrant children

Limited capacity to
AVOID,
RESIST,
COPE WITH and
RECOVER FROM...

Exploitation

Abuse

Violence

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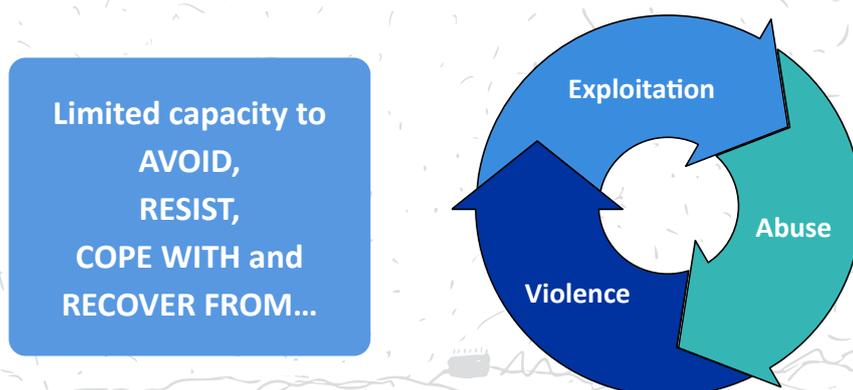
36   IOM, *IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants* (see footnote 30).

Vulnerabilities can include:[37]

- Poverty
- Xenophobia[38]
- War, conflicts and violence
- Discrimination
- Gender inequality[39] and SGBV[40]
- Violation of human rights
- Separation from one's family
- Trafficking[41]
- History or prior experience of having gone missing

5.2.   WHERE AND HOW VULNERABILITIES ARE OBSERVED

The vulnerabilities of a child in the context of migration might originate at different levels.[42] IOM developed the **determinants of migrant vulnerability (DOMV) model**,[43] which can help better identify vulnerabilities to address them and foster resilience. The model reflects the IOM approach to vulnerabilities rooted in the fact that the human right of all persons, including migrants, should be supported and promoted and that all vulnerable migrants, regardless of category or status, should be afforded the protection and assistance services that they require.

The model encompasses not only vulnerability but also resilience. It considers risk factors (which contribute to vulnerability) and protective factors (which improve capabilities to avoid, cope with or recover from harm) and how they interact.

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[37]   See: United Nations, "Principles and practical guidance on the protection of the human rights of migrants in vulnerable situations", report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/34/31), para. 13.

[38]   Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of anything perceived as foreign or strange. It is an expression of perceived conflict between an in-group and an out-group.

[39]   Gender inequality is discrimination based on sex or gender, causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another. Gender equality is a fundamental human right that is violated through gender-based discrimination.

[40]   Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. SGBV is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. It is estimated that one in three women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime. During displacement and times of crisis, the threat of SGBV significantly increases for women and girls.

[41]   Trafficking is defined as "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". (United Nations General Assembly resolution 55/25 on the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted on 15 November 2000 (A/RES/55/25).)

[42]   IOM, *IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants* (see footnote 30).

[43]   For more information, see: Ibid., part 1.

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Figure 6. Determinants of migrant vulnerability model

Migrant children might be affected at different levels...
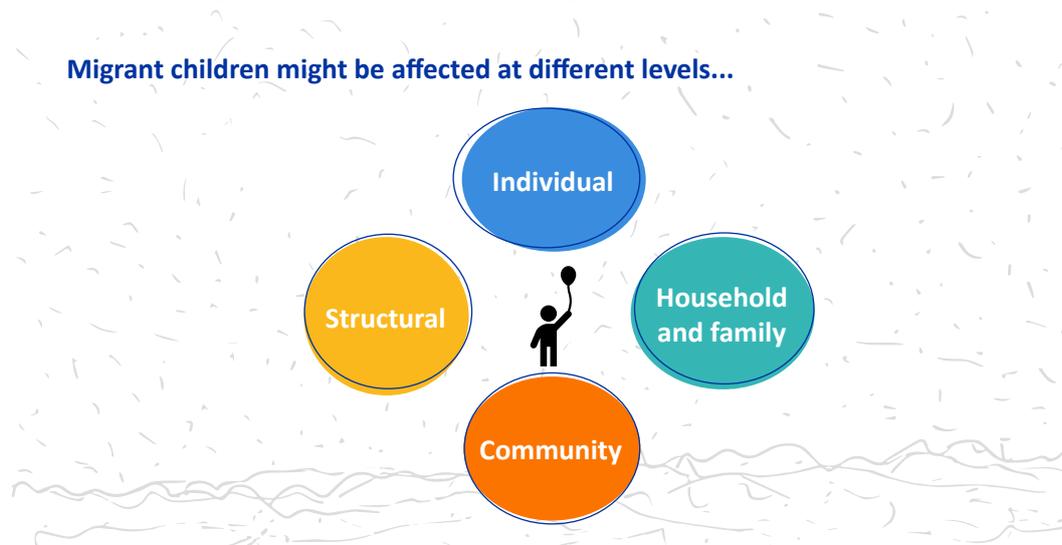
The **individual level** corresponds to the child's sense of identity and inherent characteristics. The child's self-view or sense of self might be linked to gender expression and identity, sexual orientation, religious and ethnic identity, personal history and mental and emotional health. A child's socioeconomic status could also make a difference.

The **family/household level** might be related to the family/household size and structure, the status of the family/household, the employment status of the family members, their education and the family/household dynamics, just to mention a few examples.

IOM defines as the **community level** those factors that influence children's vulnerability, such as the possibility to access education, health care and social services. This level corresponds to access to resources, food and income-generating opportunities, the natural environment and social norms and behaviours.

Finally, there is what IOM defines as the **structural level** and how this influences migrant vulnerability. This level might concern the overall political system, which plays a significant role in shaping the opportunities for political participation and organizing, as well as the enforcement of rights, including for vulnerable populations.

- An analysis of this level includes an assessment of whether the core elements of a democratic regime are present, namely: regular, free and fair elections; separation of powers of the executive, judiciary and legislative branches; and a free civil society.

- Another component of a country's overall political structure particularly relevant to vulnerable populations, including vulnerable migrants, is strong governance, as transparent and accountable institutional processes reduce the likelihood of violence, exploitation and abuse. There must be respect for the **rule of law**, which includes legal frameworks, the judicial system and law enforcement. Adequate legal frameworks and judicial systems provide protection and opportunities for redress to those experiencing violence, exploitation and abuse.

- Another factor consists of the formal and practical aspects of **respect for human and other rights** in the country, as such respect tends to be a good indicator of how vulnerable migrants will tend to be to violence, exploitation and abuse.

- Moreover, the country's **migration management practices** have a direct bearing on how migrants are likely to be treated.

- Other factors include the social norms towards exploitation to assess attitudes within the society and the regional **distribution of human and economic capital**, which would help to understand migration patterns by focusing on a comparative consideration of the country's economic development relative to its neighbours.

In the DOMV model, the **overall vulnerability** of individual migrants and the households, families, communities and groups to which they belong to violence, exploitation and abuse before, during or after a migration process, or their capability to avoid, resist, cope with or recover from such violations, is the **result of the interaction of multiple risks and protective factors at different levels**.

- As Figure 6 shows, we must acknowledge that migrant children live in a "social environment". They interact with different stakeholders; thus, each level highlights how all levels influence and impact the life of the child.
- The presence of one or more risk factors does not necessarily result in migrant children being vulnerable, as protective factors may help mitigate some of the risk factors.
- It is the overall preponderance of risk factors, coupled with inadequate protective factors, that results in vulnerability.
- When protective factors are present in sufficient quantity to outweigh risk factors, migrants are better able to avoid, resist, cope with or recover from violence, exploitation and abuse – this can be referred to as **resilience**.
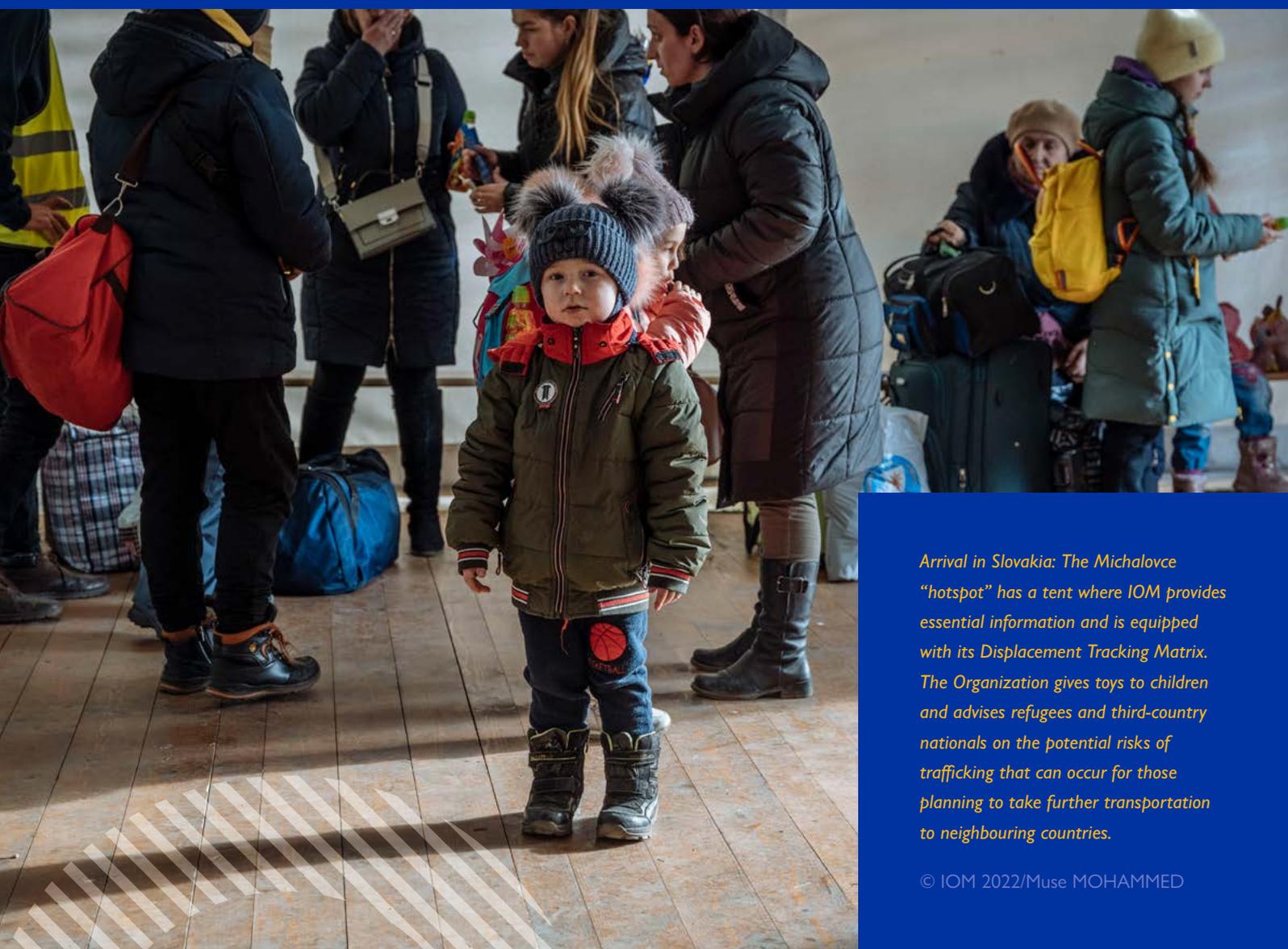
Arrival in Slovakia: The Michalovce "hotspot" has a tent where IOM provides essential information and is equipped with its Displacement Tracking Matrix. The Organization gives toys to children and advises refugees and third-country nationals on the potential risks of trafficking that can occur for those planning to take further transportation to neighbouring countries.

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5.3. VULNERABILITIES AT ORIGIN, TRANSIT AND DESTINATION

Several vulnerabilities may arise for migrant children due to factors, conditions or experiences at each stage of the migration process. For example, to cross an international border, migrant children may use irregular channels and could thus be exposed to smugglers, traffickers and SGBV, among others. The same vulnerabilities may also arise owing to circumstances associated with being in transit. This can include threats to physical safety due to difficult transit conditions, such as unsafe means of transportation, and threats of exploitation posed by human traffickers, migrant smugglers or unscrupulous officials. Once at their destination, migrants may face new vulnerabilities, such as language barriers, xenophobia and transphobia, to mention just a few. Overall, such vulnerabilities will need to be addressed immediately at borders, and as front-line workers you may play an important role in this.

5.4. VULNERABILITIES, RISKS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

5.4.1. Vulnerabilities and risks

The more migrant children are vulnerable, the more they will be exposed to the dangers of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Every vulnerability might lead to exposure to risks. Let us look at one example below, the case of Maya, that illustrates the risk of being sexually assaulted or harassed.

Maya is a 12-year-old girl transiting without her parents from one country to another.

Vulnerability   Maya is transiting without her parents.

Corresponding risk   Maya risks being exposed to sexual assault or harassment.

5.4.2. Risks and protective factors

In our work as front-line workers, vulnerability is also measured, taking into account factors that could help to prevent the risks; they are called *protective factors*. Maya's case helps to illustrate this principle:

How vulnerable is Maya?

Analysis of the RISKS, that is, to what extent Maya potentially risks suffering from abuse, violence and exploitation.

Analysis of the PROTECTIVE FACTORS: Factors that can help Maya prevent the risks or cope better with abuse, violence or exploitation.
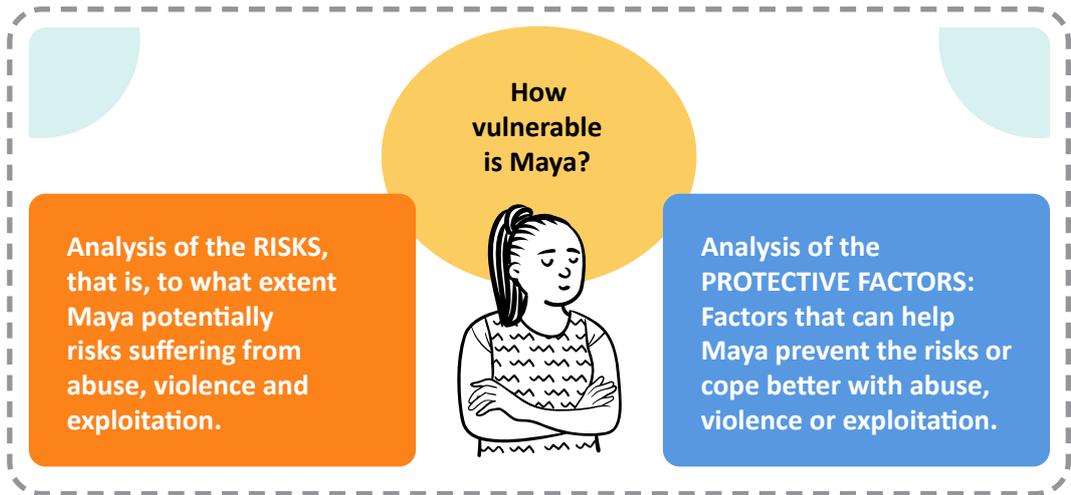
Protective factors help to prevent the risk of violence, abuse and exploitation, but also to cope better with a situation or to recover from it.

For example, the fact that Maya is travelling with the extended family (three older brothers and their wives and children) might prevent the risk of sexual assault or may help Maya better cope and recover from harm. If she is an unaccompanied child – that is, travelling without any family member or caregiver – she may be more exposed to risk factors and would have fewer protective factors.

Protective factors

The protective factors help MAYA to prevent the risks and cope better with a situation or recover from it.

I am travelling with my three beloved older brothers and their wives and children. I feel protected by them.

Front-line workers need to understand clearly if risk factors may lead to vulnerabilities and how to support and reinforce protective factors (to foster the child's resilience).

Note

As part of the protection principles indicated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we must do our best to identify, prevent, eliminate and mitigate the risks leading to vulnerabilities.

5.4.3. Sources of protective factors

Similar to risks, protective factors can originate at the individual, family/household, community or societal/structural level (refer back to section 5.2, and especially the DOMV model).

> ### Examples: Risk factors and protective factors at different levels 📝
>
> For some individual factors, whether they are risk factors or protective factors is context-specific.
> - **Being a member of a group**. Being a member of a particular racial group may be a protective factor in some contexts (if that group is dominant or privileged), but a risk factor in others (if that group is marginalized or oppressed). For example, if you are a migrant child in a reception centre and your ethnic group is the dominant one there, you are likely to be protected by your group. On the other hand, if you are the only one of your ethnic group, you may be at risk of being marginalized or oppressed.
> - **Other individual factors**. Other individual factors may be broadly considered to always be either just risk factors or just protective factors. For example, literacy is almost always a protective factor, while illiteracy is almost always a risk factor.
> - **Households and families**. These can constitute both risk and protective factors against violence, exploitation and abuse, depending on the context. For example, risk factors can include being in a family that is involved in the sexual exploitation of a child (whether a son or a daughter) for the purpose of trafficking. Protective factors at this level can also include the presence of a supportive environment within the home, equitable distribution of resources and opportunities between boys and girls (and/or persons of diverse SOGIESC), and sufficient earnings to meet both basic needs and the main aspirations of all family members.
> - **Communities**. All communities will have a combination of risk and protective factors. Community risk factors include practices such as forced marriage, exclusion of some members of the community from the full benefit of community resources, or the presence of natural hazards such as landslides or flooding. Protective community factors include a good education system accessible to all, sufficient access to quality health care, a functioning social welfare system, and adequate preparedness measures to mitigate risks from natural hazards.
> - **Structural and societal level**. At the structural level, risk factors include patterns of systemic marginalization and discrimination, conflict and instability, poor governance, the absence of accountability mechanisms and weak rule of law. Protective factors include peace and security, good governance, respect for human rights and equitable development.

All the factors mentioned need attention, either to ensure protection or foster resilience.

There is no fixed rule on a positive (protective) or negative (risk) factor. As a front-line worker, the DOMV model will give you the framework to frame your thinking as you assess, observe and program responses at the four different levels and provide assistance to migrant children. Once you have identified the specific risks or protective factors, you will be able to act in the appropriate manner, as we will discuss in Chapter 6.

> **Note** 📌
>
> Your responsibility as a front-line worker is to facilitate a careful assessment of the situation of the migrant child, detect potential risks and refer them when you first interact with them at borders.

Yuri's story below shows how a vulnerability is not identified during an assessment and what the consequences of it are.

Yuri's story

Yuri identifies as a non-binary teenager. During the first screening interview at a reception facility, the immigration officer did not ask about the child's gender identity. Now the officer decides to place Yuri in the boys' room, since that is the child's gender identity that the immigration officer considers to be, based on his own "assessment" and perception of the child's gender expression. This is why the migrant child was placed in a room with children of a *different* gender identity (in this case, boys). Shortly after, Yuri starts to experience harassment and bullying, including being made fun of, by the boys at the reception facility.

What went wrong in this situation?

During an interview, the front-line worker did not use the correct lens to understand Yuri's gender identity better. Yuri did not mention it because of the fear of stigma and the feeling of not being safe. Yuri's potential "vulnerability" to the community and household was not identified adequately.

This is just one example among many and provides a model that vulnerabilities often are not "visible". Thus, as front-line workers, we must try to understand the DOMV model to have the theorical knowledge and be able to translate it into practice in each unique situation where migrant children may need our support.

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5.5. PRACTICE: IDENTIFYING VULNERABILITY

Here are a couple of case studies for you to practice your capacity to identify risk factors and protective factors.

Marko's story

Marko is 14 years old. He is transiting irregularly (i.e. without a visa, documentation or permit) from his country of origin to different ones until he arrives in Poland. He is unaccompanied. When you interview him, you realize he has experienced intrafamily violence. He lived in a slum without rule of law or governance structures in place. He also did not have access to a school, social services or health care.

Could you identify which potential vulnerabilities are present in this case? What could be the protective factors and what could be the risk factors?

- Marko is 14 years old.
- He is transiting from one country to another alone.
- There is a history of violence in his family.
- He lived in a slum with no rule of law.

What are my risk factors? What are my protective factors?
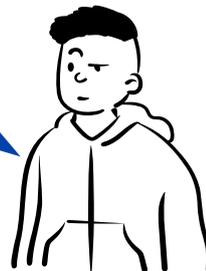
Practice 1. Assessing vulnerability (Marko's story)

What could the risk factors and the protective factors be in Marko's story? Write them down in the table below.

Risks	Protective factors

Sarah's story

Sarah, a one-year-old child, and her family crossed the Mediterranean by boat to reach Italy. Her father had to use all his savings and even accumulated debts with some family members to be able to pay a smuggler to bring them to Italy.

Sarah's family comes from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background, and there are many expectations about what the father could send back home once he arrives and finds work in Italy. At the reception centre, the father shows signs of a mental illness that has never been treated.

Sarah is one year old.

She is travelling with her family by sea.

The family is very poor and, the father has cumulated debts.

The father is mentally ill.

What are my risk factors? What are my protective factors?

Practice 2. Assessing vulnerability (Sarah's story)

What could the risk factors and the protective factors be in Sarah's story? Write them down in the table below.

Risks	Protective factors

Now here are some possible answers to the practice activities…

Practice 1 (Marko's story). Below are possible risk factors and protective factors in the case of Marko. (*Note*: There are assumptions that need to be checked at this stage.)

Risks	Protective factors
A separated or unaccompanied child like Marko might fall into the hands of an organized criminal network and be the target of other criminal acts.	At this stage, we do not know potential protective factors. We would need to assess protective factors at the beginning, such as if Marko:
There is a history of violence in the family. We could assume that Marko requires psychosocial support because of the experiences he may have faced as a result of such violence.	• Has existing relations such as friends, family members and other people with whom he has a sense of belonging, that can support him and make him feel safe.
Not having access to the right to education and health may expose Marko to further risks, including exclusion and poverty, and also impact his well-being.	• Can read and write. • Is motivated to go to school and, later on, start a job.
There is a need to assess if there are family members with him. His family has a history of violence, and he may not be safe around them.	

- -

Practice 2 (Sarah's story). Below are possible risk factors and protective factors in Sarah's story. A more accurate assessment would be possible by interviewing the father. (*Note*: There are assumptions that need to be checked at a later stage.)

Risks	Protective factors
An assumption could be that the father, being particularly vulnerable, might make decisions against Sarah's protection, well-being and best interests.	Also, here, we do not yet have elements to understand if there are protective factors. We might need to investigate if some other members of the family or community where Sarah and her father are from could support Sarah.
Sarah's father is highly indebted, and he might be vulnerable to falling into the hands of criminal networks.	
Criminal networks are interested in young migrant children/babies for trafficking.[44]	
Sarah is too young to express what she needs and if she feels safe around her father.	
Sarah's intellectual, emotional and physical development might be compromised.	

As we can learn from both stories, we would need to find out what a child's family background can tell us. Remember that there is no rule about a certain element always being a risk factor or a protective factor. We need to be able to ask the right questions to understand the context of a migrant child.

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[44] Trafficking is most commonly associated with sexual and labour exploitation, forced begging or illegal adoption. (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Children; Easy to target", in: *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020* (Austria, 2020). Available at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_Chapter3.pdf.)

> **Note** 📢
>
> It is essential to keep in mind to test your assumptions and check if they are correct. You can do this during the interview or with the support of an expert. You may have that might interfere with your understanding and analysis of vulnerabilities.

5.6. VULNERABLE GROUPS

Having briefly discussed how the DOMV model can be used to identify migrants' risks and protective factors and recognizing that vulnerabilities are context- and situation-specific, we can now focus our attention to several groups or categories of children who are usually in a vulnerable situation because of some intrinsic and inherent characteristics.

Children in such vulnerable groups may require special attention. It is helpful to understand these groups and the particular needs they may have for assistance and protection. For example, children from vulnerable groups may also be at greater risk of being trafficked, abused, sexually exploited or recruited by armed groups, with less agency to influence or control their situation compared to adults.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of vulnerable groups of migrant children:

Unaccompanied, orphaned or separated children	Children who are not with their parents or caretakers may be at greater risk of neglect, exploitation and abuse. This risk depends on their situation and whether they are separated, orphaned or unaccompanied.
Migrant children with disabilities	Children with disabilities may be excluded from access to services, various types of assistance, and effective and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Children with disabilities may experience physical barriers to buildings, transportation, toilets and playgrounds. They may further experience communication and attitudinal barriers to information.
Migrant children of various minorities such as an ethnic group, race or religion, including diverse SOGIESC	Children from various minorities may experience discrimination and obstacles to accessing social services and various types of assistance. Children of diverse SOGIESC may additionally risk being wrongly/inaccurately registered at border-crossing points and by front line officers in various migration, registration or asylum procedures.
Migrant children placed in detention	The placement of children in detention centres may result in detrimental effects on the health and well-being of children including by triggering trauma.
Migrant children survivors of SGBV	Migrant children who have survived SGBV may suffer devastating short- and long-term consequences to their physical and mental health if not addressed in a protection-sensitive manner by responsible stakeholders/personnel and service providers. Migrant children who are SGBV survivors may have experienced severe physical injuries, unwanted pregnancies or exposure to various sexually transmitted diseases, among others.
Migrant children survivors of trafficking	Migrant children victims of trafficking are at a heightened risk of exploitation, abuse and violence as a result of the trafficking experience. This vulnerability is also exacerbated if faced with limited access to safe migration pathways, services and justice, to mention just a few.

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5.7. FROM ASSESSING TO ADDRESSING VULNERABILITIES

Front-line workers at borders will have different tasks and will be involved at different levels of addressing the vulnerabilities of migrant children. The overview is meant to recognize that, at all different levels of a child's daily life (individual, family/household and community/structural levels), a multi-stakeholder approach is needed to ensure their needs are properly addressed. Overall, one stakeholder (whether a national institution, NGO or international organization), will not have the capacity to address all the needs of a migrant child.

We will move to briefly discuss how such needs are usually addressed and how, in your work as a front-line worker, you may have a key role or could engage accordingly.

Reflection exercise ✎

Once a migrant child's vulnerabilities, risks and the protective factors have been identified, what can front-line workers do to address the vulnerabilities?

Write down your thoughts in the box below.

Once a migrant child in a vulnerable situation has been identified, an assessment should be made to determine whether there is a need for support from a case manager (i.e. the case management system). This can be done by establishing criteria for entry into a case management system. For example, if children are travelling unaccompanied, a guardian needs to be immediately assigned to them.

> **Note** 📌
>
> A case management system is a model for assisting individuals with complex and multiple needs who may access services from various agencies and organizations. It has its roots in social work practice. It is also called care management, **case coordination, service coordination, client navigation or patient navigation.**[45]

The criteria for an individual to enter a case management system will vary depending on the country, organization or agency providing case management services, existing system-wide protocols or procedures and referral systems, the funding source, the programme parameters, and the availability of case managers to allocate to the vulnerable migrant.

5.8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- IOM defines vulnerability as the limited capability to avoid, resist, cope or recover from violence, exploitation and abuse.
- Transiting and reception at the borders and permanence at the destination can be particularly sensitive, as migrant children might increase their vulnerability.
- Vulnerability is measured by considering the risks of being exposed to violence, exploitation and abuse, as well as the factors that might help prevent the threat or cope better with it.
- Risk and protective factors might originate from "behind the doors", such as in the individual or family context, but also from the community or the society.
- When assessing a child's vulnerability, we must consider the risks and the protective factors. We should test our assumptions, especially when interviewing the children in a safe space.
- Vulnerabilities need to be addressed during the case management process.

Additional resources 📑

The *IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse* is intended to support case managers, service providers, communities, humanitarian and development actors, States and other actors working to provide protection and assistance to vulnerable migrants. The handbook refers the reader to these documents:

- IOM Guidance on Response Planning on how to determine the need for a response to migrants in situations of vulnerability, and on how to plan for, finance, monitor and evaluating such response

- IOM Guidance on Referral Mechanisms on how to develop and implement referral mechanisms for the protection and assistance of migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse

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45   IOM, *IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants* (see footnote 30).

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Information and counselling session with a migrant family: A staff member discusses multipurpose, cash-based IOM assistance with a beneficiary. At the start of the war, Kateryna and her family were awakened by the sound of shelling and uprooted from her family home in the northern Ukrainian city of Shostka, Sumy Region. She and her family were relocated to Uzhhorod, in western Ukraine.

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6. CASE MANAGEMENT

> *"When you do not know where you are and what will happen next, of course you are afraid and concerned. Nobody was telling me where to go or what to do. Nobody wanted to help me. If someone could have guided me on the steps I needed to take, the concerns would have disappeared."*
>
> – O., a 16-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

6.1. WHAT IS CASE MANAGEMENT?

In the context of this Toolkit, the term **case management** indicates a model of providing assistance to individuals with complex and multiple needs who may access different services at borders. Through a case management approach, migrant children arriving at borders may receive various services from various institutions, agencies and organizations.[46] As a front-line worker, you may be directly involved in a case management system (e.g. if you are part of a national child protection authority working in best interests determination). At other times, as a front-line worker you may need to refer a migrant child identified to a case manager. In such cases, the criteria for referring children to a case manager will vary depending on the agency providing case management services, the existing protocols or procedures and the availability of case managers to allocate to the migrant child.

6.2. WHO ARE CASE MANAGERS?

Case managers are usually civil servants of a national institution, for example, social workers. However, in some contexts they may be staff of an international organization (including United Nations agencies), NGOs or CSOs that undertake case management functions.[47] Case managers may provide services to migrant children directly at borders, or sometimes at the regional or national level.

6.3. THE CASE MANAGEMENT PROCESS AT BORDERS, STEP BY STEP

Countries have different systems for case management at their borders, so we will provide a general overview of the process, starting with the identification of a case of a vulnerable migrant child. The overall goal is to reflect how different case management systems exist and can further support to address the needs of migrant children at borders. The following is a quick overview of how referral systems can address the multiple needs of migrant children at borders.

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[46] IOM, *IOM Guidance on Referral Mechanisms for the Protection and Assistance of Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse and Victims of Trafficking* (Geneva, 2019). Available at https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-guidance-referral-mechanisms.
[47] IOM, *IOM Handbook on Assistance and Protection to Migrants* (see footnote 30).

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The case management process
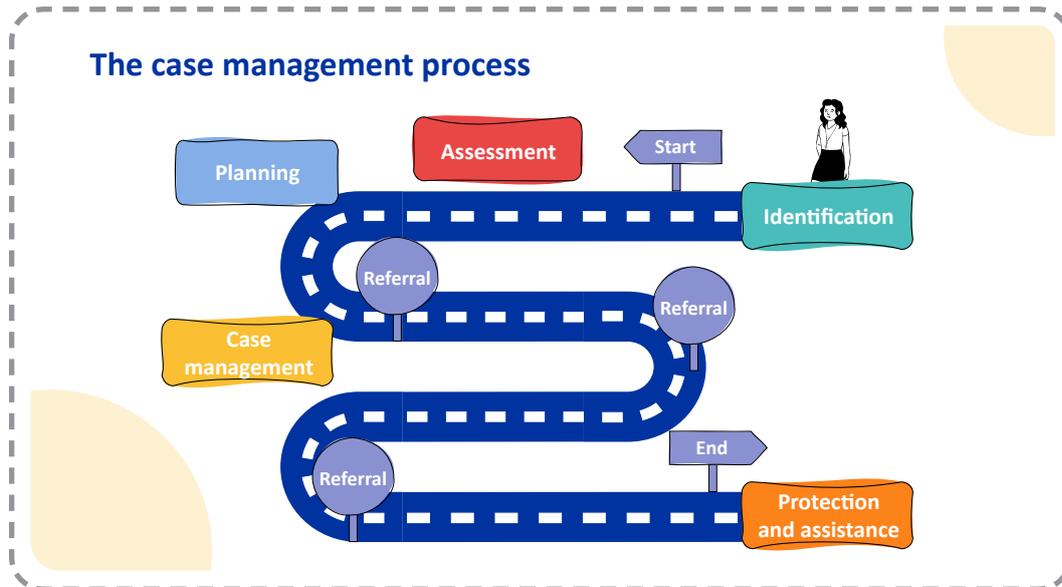
| Identification | The identification of a vulnerable migrant child is usually the first step. A wide array of stakeholders can identify vulnerable migrants: the Government, the community, CSOs and the private sector. Considering the way children may migrate through borders, we need to recognize that identification may happen depending on the context of where and how children are intercepted (meaning they may not often migrate using official border channels). |

| Assessment | Once case managers receive a referral, they need to conduct a more thorough screening to identify vulnerabilities and needs. At this stage, the objective is to have the full picture of concerns and support surrounding the child. |

| Planning | Once the needs of the child have been identified, case managers need to ask themselves, "What is the best goal and course of action to improve the child situation based on the assessment made?" Then, "Who will do this? How, where and when will it be done?" Draft an action plan answering these questions. |

| Case management | From a protection and assistance standpoint, the next step after identification is case management. Once case managers receive a referral, they need to conduct a more thorough screening to identify vulnerabilities and needs. Case managers should operate within the referral mechanism to refer migrant children to other services that their organization may not be able to provide. A referral directory is a valuable tool to this end. |

| Monitoring and review | The case manager should follow up and review the practical actions taken to check if the plan is adequately addressing all the issues identified. If not, the case manager should re-assess the needs of the child and review the case plan accordingly. |

Case closure: Protection and assistance

The ultimate aim of the referral mechanism is to provide protection and assistance services to vulnerable migrants, in this case, migrant children.

Most countries do not have a migrant-specific protection system, so other protection systems must be used to create a protective environment. In the case of migrant children, different systems provide such support, such as national child protection systems and systems designed for victims of trafficking and/or survivors of SGBV, to mention just a few. As a general practice, when there are multiple options, the protection system affording the highest level of protection should be used. Case managers are responsible for helping migrant children navigate these various protection systems and identify the design that gives them the highest level of security. Assistance for vulnerable migrant children should be offered alongside protection and can include the following services:

- Shelter and accommodation
- Water, sanitation and hygiene
- Food and nutrition
- Safety and security
- Health care (physical and psychological)
- Education and training
- Livelihood, employment and income generation
- Family tracing, assessment and reunification
- Access to justice

6.3.1. Referral mechanisms

As discussed earlier in this chapter, vulnerable migrants might have a wide array of needs that cut across sectors like mental health, education, employment and family tracing. You might agree that it is improbable that one single organization can offer all the services needed to support vulnerable migrants.

Therefore, during the case management process, a case manager might refer to other expertise provided by other organizations, such as public or private entities or the services offered by CSOs. This process is commonly called the referral mechanism or process. Moreover, as identified in section 2.2, collaborating with different stakeholders, has the potential to provide a holistic, tailored, comprehensive response to the needs of the children in the context of migration, and most of the time is actually required for an effective and impactful intervention towards the realization of migrant children's rights.

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> ## Note
>
> It is important to emphasize that a referral mechanism is not contained in a one-off document. Rather, it involves working together throughout the various steps of the assistance process. A referral mechanism nevertheless requires certain key documents to function appropriately, including a memorandum of understanding between all the stakeholders and standard operating procedures, ensuring the staff working have the relevant competencies and skills to interact with migrant children, and that there are mechanisms to ensure data protection and confidentiality of cases, among others.[48]

Case managers rarely provide all the assistance a vulnerable migrant may need. Their exact role and involvement depend on the organization, its mandate and resources, and the local or national context.[49] The specific roles and responsibilities of case managers for children in the context of migration will vary depending on the organization and the system they are working within but can be expected to conform to the activities described in the following Example box.

> ## Example: Case manager tasks
>
> The following are some of the tasks of case managers:
>
> - Refer the child without delay to appropriate child protection services and collect and register relevant information about the child.
> - Refer the child for the asylum procedure.
> - Map available services at borders.
> - Develop and implement assistance plans.
> - Coordinate with service providers and authorities.
> - Monitor service delivery.
> - Record-keeping.
> - Evaluate the case management and report any misconduct.
> - Advocate on behalf of vulnerable migrants.
> - Close the case upon programme exit, transition or completion.

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[48] IOM, *IOM Guidance on Referral Mechanisms for the Protection and Assistance of Migrants* (see footnote 45).
[49] Ibid.

A case involving a referral mechanism

Read the case below.

> **Olga, a 16-year-old girl, recently arrived in the country of her destination unaccompanied.**
>
> **She completed primary school in her home country and is eager to continue her education.**
>
> **She does not wish to return to her country of origin and wants to regularize her immigration status.**

During case management, Olga is referred to different organizations.

In the case of Olga, different organizations might be involved because she has different needs. If one organization, like an NGO or IOM, will be managing her case, they will need to assist her in launching an immigration procedure; thus, they will need to refer Olga to enable her to access other services that they could not themselves provide.

In Table 2, to better explain the case, we list down Olga's needs, the corresponding sector and examples of organizations which the case manager might prefer.

Table 2. The case of Olga: needs and actors

Olga's needs	Sector of support	Examples of actors involved in the referral
Olga needs to enjoy her right to protection. One organization should establish procedural safeguards, identify and assign a guardian and carry out a BIA.	Protection sector	• National child protection authorities • IOM (in support of State authorities)
Olga needs to enrol in a secondary school to continue her studies.	Education sector	Ministry of Education of the country of arrival
Olga needs to go through the process of the regularization of her status.	Migration sector	• Ministry of Interior • Migration Directorate
Olga might wish to receive some psychosocial support.	Mental health sector	CSOs

In the best scenario, the case manager will refer Olga to the other stakeholders as soon as her specific and unique needs are identified. Looking at the above organizations, you may see that in your work as a front-line worker, you may be involved in the referral directly (as case manager), or you will refer a migrant child to the corresponding case management authority.

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Good practices: Case management 👍

If not already available, create a directory with information on the different case management services available at border areas (or national contexts), to help the work of front-line workers at border crossing points.

➔ Within the scope of the TACT Project, IOM supported the identification, referral and assistance of children victims of trafficking by setting up a transnational referral mechanism focusing on the reintegration of victims returning to their countries of origin.

➔ The European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) launched the Special Needs and Vulnerability Assessment (SNVA) tool. The tool supports asylum professionals in assessing the needs of vulnerable people and identifying the appropriate follow-up actions to ensure they receive the assistance and protection they are entitled to. The Documentation section includes documents on the assessment of special needs and vulnerability.

➔ MERIMNA Project (Safeguarding children at Greek border points). Through this project, IOM Greece targeted migrants and refugees residing in reception and identification centres (RICs) and on the mainland, with particular focus on children and especially UMCs, aiming to address the immediate need to improve living conditions and protection gaps. IOM implemented targeted interventions to ensure that UMCs have access to proper safe transit accommodation in RICs, receive immediate assistance by specialized staff in line with their best interests, and were timely referred to more appropriate care arrangements in long-term or temporary accommodation.

➔ Primero Project. In Romania, a good practice being promoted at the local level is the use of an open-source software platform that features coherent, cost-effective and user-friendly information management tools for development, social welfare, humanitarian and child protection actors to manage protection-related data and facilitate case management, incident monitoring and family tracing and reunification, ensuring the respect of children's rights, especially for children fleeing the armed conflict in Ukraine. It uses sophisticated matching technology to pair tracing requests made by caregivers, with children registered as separated or unaccompanied. Matching criteria can be configured to meet context-specific needs. These features are backstopped by a complete case management module to ensure that children receive appropriate care.

6.3.2. The role of the guardian

In the vast majority of countries, being under 18, children are not considered legally "competent" to make their own decisions about the services offered or to appreciate the legal and practical consequences of processes in which they are asked to participate.

In the case of a migrant child travelling with parents or a recognized caregiver, the parent or caregiver will be considered competent to make decisions on behalf of the child (unless the relevant child protection authorities have agreed it is not in the child's best interests). In situations where children are separated or unaccompanied, it is necessary to establish guardianship.

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A guardian is someone who has the legal authority and duty to care for UASCs[50] and may be assigned either for all purposes or for a specific purpose. Guardians should be appointed for UASCs without undue delay as soon as they have been identified at borders. In doing so, guardians will be able to inform, assist, support and represent UASCs in all processes affecting them (age assessment processes, immigration procedures, registration, accommodation placement, etc.).

In border settings, migrant children are likely to be in contact with a very wide range of professionals, such as border and immigration officials, social workers, lawyers and the judiciary, health-care workers and interpreters, among others. Hence, children may have a limited understanding of the different roles that these people can play in their lives. Therefore, guardians can act as the link between children and existing specialist agencies and individuals providing support services at borders.

Guardians should act in the child's best interests and play a variety of roles throughout the case management process, for example:

- Supporting and advising the child based on a relationship of trust.
- Facilitating the child's participation in the case management process.
- Monitoring and coordinating the child's interaction with other professionals and any NGO advocates.
- Using their expertise to advise other professionals involved in the child's case.
- Ensuring that the child's health, educational, accommodation and support needs are met.
- Ensuring that the child obtains suitably trained and experienced legal representation.
- Making sure that the child has access to procedures to determine any need for international protection if the child wishes to apply for it.
- Obtaining any necessary expert advice on behalf of the child.
- Advising the child early on about the possibility of restoring family links through family tracing.
- Acting on the child's behalf in relation to status determination decisions and the BID.
- Assisting the child to appeal against or complain about any decisions that appear to be unlawful and/or unreasonable, in accordance with established rules and procedures.

Every guardian should have sufficient expertise in child care to ascertain whether the child's best interests are being safeguarded and their legal, social, health, psychological, material and educational needs are being appropriately met. As such, a guardian should have the necessary training and experience in child protection and child welfare and, ideally, specific knowledge of international human rights law relating to UASCs.[51]

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[50]   IOM, *Glossary on Migration* (see footnote 1).
[51]   UNICEF, "Part 6: Guidance for the protection, care and assistance of vulnerable migrant children". In: IOM *Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse* (Geneva, IOM, 2019). Available at https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-handbook-migrants-vulnerable-violence-exploitation-and-abuse.

➔ The European Guardianship Network (EGN) is a network of guardianship authorities and agencies, which include government bodies, international organizations and NGOs that aim to promote guardianship and improve guardianship services for UASCs in European Union member States by exchanging good practices, expertise and other relevant information. EGN develops resources to help guardians and guardianship organizations provide better services.

➔ The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights developed *Guardianship for Unaccompanied Children*, a manual designed to help institutions, organizations and individuals to train guardians of unaccompanied children or to deliver "train the trainers" courses. It aims at enhancing guardians' confidence to promote children's rights and best interests and to act independently and impartially in relation to different State officers, service providers and other community members.

➔ In the scope of the project Equalcity, IOM developed a training package for legal and volunteer guardians on responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against UMCs as part of the Unaccompanied Migrant Children Toolbox.

6.3.3. The case management of missing children

We have briefly introduced the different categories of migrant children and briefly discussed the risk factors leading to different vulnerabilities. We will draw specific attention to the needs and specificities of missing children in the context of migration, particularly from the perspective of their interaction with front-line workers. Preventing and responding to disappearances of children is remarkably complex.[52] However, front-line workers can contribute to avoid such disappearances.

Overall, there are different reasons why migrant children may go missing. We will mention two predominant reasons:

Absconding.[53] Migrant children in migration might disengage themselves from services provided for them. The chances of saving migrant children at risk who leave the border crossing point are very low.

Additional information: 🚩 **Reasons that migrant children have for disengaging**

Migrant children might feel, among others, that:

- The reception is inadequate to their needs.
- The perception and frustration procedures are "too slow" and complex.
- There is a strong possibility of being deported to their origin country.
- They might also not know their rights, thus creating various barriers in accessing the services available to them.

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[52] For more information on missing children during case management, see: Missing Children Europe and ECPAT UK, *INTERACT Handbook: Practical Guidance on Preventing and Responding to Trafficking and Disappearances of Children in Migration* (Brussels, 2019). Available at https://missingchildreneurope.eu/the-interact-handbook-is-now-available-in-5-languages.

[53] Action by which a person seeks to avoid administrative measures and/or legal proceedings by not remaining available to the relevant authorities or to the court." (European Migration Network (EMN), EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary, "Absconding". Available at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en.)

Being the victim of a crime. Some migrant children go missing because they are victims of crimes such as trafficking.

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Additional information: ⚑ **Factors in the disappearance of migrant children**

Particularly for unaccompanied children, numerous factors lead to their disappearance and/or access to seek protection from crimes:

- Inadequate and inappropriate reception
- Lack of family members
- Children's mistrust of authorities
- Criminal networks and trafficking

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Different factors might indicate that migrant children are **at risk of going missing**:

- They may have received "misleading information" about other countries that made them believe they will find better conditions of living or access to the asylum system, among others.

- Migrant children seem uninterested or unsatisfied with the accommodation, the information given or the activities proposed (including going to school).

- Migrant children seem concerned about money and ask when it would be possible to start working, as they do not seem interested in educational opportunities.

- There are police reports that migrant children have gone missing before.

- There are migrant children that arrived in a group, and some of them in the group have already gone missing.

- The children are approaching the age of 18.[54]

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Additional information: ⚑ **Basic task list to preventing migrant children from going missing**

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to prevent children from going missing.[55]

- Did you inform the migrant children about the services available to them?
- Did you explain to them in a child-friendly way the procedure, its length and what they can expect from it?
- Did you explain to migrant children their rights?
- Did you create a safe space of trust where they can express their needs and views?
- Did you explain the risks if they disengage from the relevant procedure?
- Are the migrant children informed about complaint procedures if they do not feel safe or would like to voice out any concerns?

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[54] Federica Toscano, Delphine Moralis, Jan Murk and Rebecca O'Donnell, *SUMMIT Report: Practical Guidance on Preventing and Responding to Unaccompanied Children Going Missing* (Brussels, Missing Children Europe, 2016). Available at https://missingchildreneurope.eu/summit-project.

[55] Ibid.

When a child goes missing, it is essential that you know the procedures that need to be triggered and demand that they be put in place. For example, the child's guardian should call the national hotline for missing children. The case managers will be able to suggest the steps to undertake, inform on national procedures, and provide support to both carer and police throughout the investigation and the follow-up.

Good practices: Case management 👍

You can read below several good practices identified by a panel during the consultation workshop organized for the design of this Toolkit. The good practices cover a range of topic related to case management, which go beyond assistance at borders.

Guardianship

➔ Share available information with relevant counterparts at the local, regional and national levels to contribute to the dialogue about children in the context of migration and to the decision-making and cooperation in addressing their needs.

Human resource development

➔ Promote training, on-the-job support and regular follow-up for border guards and child protection staff that oversee the care and screening of children while in border agency custody.

➔ Recruit staff who have the relevant competencies and skills to work with migrant children at borders. For example, ensuring staff have relevant cross-cultural competencies is essential.

➔ Develop specific and targeted training courses on human rights at international borders to build the capacity of learners to adopt a human rights-based approach in their work with migrant children and support the strengthening of human rights-based border governance measures.

Knowledge-sharing

➔ Create an open-source software platform that helps social services, humanitarian and development workers manage protection-related data, with tools that facilitate case management, incident monitoring, and family tracing and reunification.

Referrals

➔ Strengthen national referral mechanisms developed by a multidisciplinary group (comprising governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations) and validated by all organizations belonging to the thematic area.

➔ Include in the pre-deployment and operational briefings the information on official and appropriate referral services.

Awareness-raising of migrants

➔ Provide groups vulnerable to trafficking with information on services and procedures in their destination country.

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Alternative care

➜ Build a National Emergency Response Mechanism with helplines as an alternative care tool, which provide identification, protection, support and emergency accommodation for unaccompanied children in precarious living conditions.

SGBV support

➜ Deploy female officers to the border crossing points to identify, refer and assist persons who have suffered SGBV. Deploy multidisciplinary teams to guarantee cross-sectoral collaboration.

Safe spaces

➜ Set up safer spaces to facilitate access to urban services for migrant children. Safe spaces should provide first aid care upon arrival, interpretation services, family and medical assessment, vulnerability assessment, psychosocial support, legal support and legal representation, and an information desk with child-friendly material.

➜ Provide information, in a language and format that children can understand, and feedback mechanisms. Develop sensitive vocabulary, adolescent kits and exercise books to strengthen expression, innovation and motivation.

➜ Establish safe zones for children at borders, with dedicated areas for mothers and babies, and family spaces.

Advocacy

➜ Create local hubs in cooperation with municipalities where migrant children and youth can share their stories and concerns and report issues to local policymakers.

➜ Child protection officers (specialists from various national and regional institutions) are deployed at borders to provide immediate and tailored assistance to children.

6.4.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is essential to realize that:[56]

- The case managers/front-line workers cannot provide all of the assistance and services that vulnerable children need.

- The case management process helps holistically organize assistance and protection, but partnership with other actors is essential.

- Vulnerable migrant children are at the centre of attention because it is indeed the satisfaction of their needs that is at the centre of the case management process.

- A front-line worker, especially if a case manager, plays a crucial role in identifying needs, developing an action plan with appropriate services, referring to competent services and monitoring the case with service providers and the migrants themselves.

- A front-line worker pays special attention to the risk that migrant children might go missing during case management and provides support based on actions that can be taken.

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[56]   IOM, *Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants* (see footnote 30).

Additional resources

- Disappearing, departing, running away: A surfeit of children in Europe? (Terre des Hommes), a report focusing on the alarming phenomenon of foreign unaccompanied children disappearing from care institutions.

- Global Model Missing Child Framework (International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children), which aims to prevent children around the world from going missing or being abducted by providing resources for governments, law enforcement, NGOs and families on prevention, as well as appropriate actions to take in the event a child does go missing.

- *Missing Persons Project: Working Together to Address a Global Human Tragedy*, a publication about the Missing Persons Project (of the International Committee of the Red Cross), with its goal of improving efforts to stop people from disappearing, find those who have gone missing and support the people affected.

- The more eyes the better? A preliminary examination of the usefulness of child alert systems in the Netherlands, United Kingdom (UK), Czech Republic and Poland, a study that aims to examine officers' opinions and experiences of using child alert systems in cases from the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Czechia and Poland.

- The need for homogenous legal framework on missing unaccompanied migrant minors in EU, a summary of a paper that attempts to analyse the current legal situation of missing children and make recommendations for potential improvements to support the interests of the children rather than those of nation States.

- A collective awareness platform for missing children investigation and rescue, a paper that outlines the challenges missing children investigation and rescue currently faces, and proposes a solution that uses information and communications technology, advanced analytics and collective intelligence, to achieve more rapid and effective case resolution.

7. SAFE SPACES

I was worried about the place where we would be accommodated, if it would be safe or if we would be located in a place without access to key services."

— H., a 16-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

So far, we have provided a general overview of some fundamental principles and considerations when supporting migrant children at borders. In this section, we will briefly touch upon some key considerations to enable "safe spaces" and how front-line workers can have a role in their creation.

7.1. WHAT IS A SAFE SPACE?

Below we define **safe space** and then explore the concept further.

> ### Safe space: a definition
>
> A safe(r) space is any kind of space perceived by an individual as welcoming and accepting of their identity, and in which they can share information about themselves without fear of negative repercussions. It must foster a climate where social norms and prejudice are continually challenged in order to make space for those who do not fit these social norms. Such a climate makes people feel truly respected and physically, psychologically and emotionally secure enough to take risks, and to express and explore their views, identities, attitudes and behaviours.[57]

Safe spaces enable the realization of migrant children's rights, as they offer the potential to translate a number of principles of child protection (as covered in Chapter 2) into practice. Safe spaces are an excellent way to empower children in the context of migration to seek help and trust professionals. A safe space is not limited to a physical environment (i.e. an office space or reception centre). As we will discuss, it is much broader and, in the context of our discussion, includes relevant child protection safeguards that organizations must enable when they interact with migrant children.

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[57] This definition is taken from the IOM training toolbox developed in the framework of the project Equalcity. The toolbox, as well as information about the project, is available at https://belgium.iom.int/lgbtqi-toolbox.

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Several harmful practices may exist during the first contact between migrant children and front-line workers, as outlined in section 3.2.

How can we, as front-line workers, with the mandate, values and responsibilities on our shoulders, create a safe space for migrant children?

The answer is that it will depend if you are working at an air, land or sea border. This means that you will have to incorporate some of the principles below into your personal work practices and those of your organization or institution.

Overall, to better simplify and explain how to enable a safe space, we need to look at two broad pillars: (a) environment and (b) individuals.

The environment holistically considers the space wherein the migrant child interacts:

- **Policies**. Whether financial and human resources are adequate to address the needs of migrant children; the materials, tools and time needed to do the job are present; and processes and procedures are clearly defined and are aligned to the core principles of and safeguards to child protection.

- **Resources**. Whether relevant policies with safeguards for (migrant) children are enabled; standards of conduct are available and guide the work of staff; and (migrant) children participate and their views are considered in the development, review and adaptation of relevant policies and procedures.

- **Information**. Whether information is provided in a child-friendly manner at all stages of assistance; the information considers specific needs based on age, gender and disability, among others; feedback mechanisms allow to improve/enhance information delivery and access to services; and children views are considered and their participation ensured.

Individuals have the relevant knowledge/skills, motives and capacities to assist and interact with the migrant child:

- **Knowledge/skills**. Staff have the relevant knowledge and skills to address the needs of migrant children in their wide diversity; the development of training materials builds on evidence and takes into account children's views and participation; and employees are cross-trained to understand each other's roles and collaborate with partners.
- **Motives**. Motives of staff are aligned with the work and the work environment; and staff are recruited and selected to match the realities of the work situation.
- **Capacities**. Staff are free of emotional limitations at work that would interfere with their performance (thus avoiding the creation of harm upon migrant children); and staff have the capacity to learn and do what is needed to perform successfully.

The above summarizes the theorical framework we, as front-line workers, need to be mindful of when thinking of how to enable safe spaces.

Some additional suggestions for building spaces were shared in the workshop organized by IOM as part of the development of the Toolkit. The idea is to think from the perspective of a migrant child on how you, as a front-line worker, can enable a safe space.

Airports

- It is important to consider how staff (i.e. border guards) will address migrant children and interact with them, for example, during the screening of passports and other travel documents. A front-line worker must take the time to talk to them, engaging them in conversation in an empathetic manner and paying attention to potential signs of distress or discomfort of a minor who is travelling with an adult.
- Other airport workers and personnel could support in building safe spaces. For example, duty-free shop and airline staff, among others, could be trained on detecting possible victims of trafficking in human beings and SGBV, or children needing protection, and could support in alerting relevant authorities (i.e. police or border guards), whenever they see any potential harm or risk faced by a child.
- Bathrooms, billboards and other key areas could be used to place flyers or visual materials that could contribute to identifying potential victims of trafficking and/or include available hotlines.
- Flyers with child-friendly information and key protection messages could be handed out to family members, caregivers and children.
- Enabling spaces for child protection authorities, CSOs and others who can contribute through referral and identification of vulnerable cases. This may require developing specific standards and protocols of coordination to ensure coordination with law enforcement authorities.
- Depending on the context of each airport, different options could be considered. In any event, think of an airport not only as a physical space, but also as an enabling environment that makes (migrant) children feel welcome, heard, viewed and respected.

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Land border checkpoints

- When there are long queues or waiting lines for processing, enable spaces where children can play, draw, or whey they can be provided with supervised care, while their parents or caregivers are completing relevant immigration procedures.

- For border guards: When interviewing families or households, address each member, including children.

- Be mindful of your body language: A smile could always open the door to good interaction with children.

- Practice and operationalize the core values of your organization to reflect the commitments of your staff to support children in need.

- Enable housing options for different types of families and ensure housing conditions are suitable for migrant children with specific characteristics, such as children with disabilities and transgender children (to avoid/prevent any potential risks of harm, discrimination and harassment), among other considerations.

Arrivals by sea

- Depending on the conditions of the migration journey, the most important goal is to meet the basic needs of the child, especially if they are in distress. Water, blankets and rest are among the key needs many of them require, especially if they have been intercepted at sea.

- Ensure that cultural mediators are always available to assist front-line workers who may not speak the language of the migrant child or may not be fully knowledgeable of their cross-cultural dimensions.

- Ensure that first aid is always available.

- To the extent feasible, avoid using unform or military clothes during the interception or the first interaction. Migrant children who have arrived via sea in an irregular manner, may have been exposed to violence and abuse by law enforcement authorities (either in the country of origin or in transit). Thus, they may already lack trust in law enforcement authorities.

In any event, as a good practice, we would recommend that you work with your local counterparts (i.e. other front-line workers at the border) to establish a common perspective and agree on how you can enable safe spaces. There is an added value in such collaboration, as you could all bring resources together (particularly when they are limited) and contribute to building safe spaces together. Front-line workers can engage in group discussions to assess obstacles and bottlenecks to enabling safe spaces; organize group tasks, with specific actions; and support each other by enhancing each other's capacities. Enabling a safe space requires a certain level of strategy and innovation. Thus, this could be an interesting challenge.

Reflection exercise

How would you feel safe accessing public services? Perhaps the answer to this question is not different to how migrant children would like to feel safe. Their aspirations may not be different than those of adults. The difference is that, as a front-line worker, you have the opportunity to make an impact and have the influence to ensure that migrant children have access to safe spaces.

Imagine a safe space for migrant children. What does a safe space for migrant children look like? You may write down keywords or phrases or draw a picture in this box to illustrate it.

Remember that a safe space is not necessarily a physical space. It could also be just the general feeling of safety that you can give migrant children.

What are the main features of such an environment?

A safe space looks like this:

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Good practices: Creating safe spaces 👍

We have created a list of good practices to guide you in creating safe spaces.[58] Which ones do you think might be applicable in your context?

A safe space can be created under the following conditions:

→ There are established standards of conduct highlighting the expected values and behaviour of front-line workers involved in migrant child protection.

→ Policies and safeguards on child protection are enabled and implemented.

→ Staff practice empathy and are non-judging, without assumptions and stereotypes (about sex and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, religion, culture and migrant status (regular or irregular)).

→ Staff is dressed in appropriate clothing. For example, T-shirts with messaging that could be considered offensive should be avoided. Also, be mindful of the impact of wearing a police or military uniform (or one that looks like it) when interviewing a child, as the child may have experienced violence at the hands of police or military. In general, be aware of the spectrum of vulnerabilities that migrant children may have been exposed to.

→ Staff is trained on the legal framework for child protection (international and national levels).

→ In areas of long transit (i.e. airports and land border checkpoints), consider having places where children can play while their parents or guardians complete relevant migratory documents.

→ Meet the most immediate needs of children (i.e. water, food and warm clothing) when they have been intercepted after a long journey.

→ Provide rest and recovery options, particularly for children who have travelled long distances and who have endured challenges along the migration route.

→ Conduct a rapid screening process to determine a migrant child's most immediate needs, allowing time for rest and recuperation before proceeding with further screening or interviews.

→ There is available staff trained in psychological first aid (PFA) able to comfort distressed children, provide first aid care at arrival and refer cases that require immediate health assistance at borders.

→ There are appropriate measures to enable children to access culturally sensitive food, clothes and hygiene supplies.

→ There is an information desk with child-friendly personnel.

→ There are dedicated personnel (e.g. child protection focal points or experts), have the potential to support, advice, provide technical feedback to the tasks fulfilled by the respective entities.

→ Interpreters and cultural mediators who speak the language of the migrant children are available at border areas.

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[58] The list of good practices indicated here is the result of a multi-stakeholder workshop organized by IOM in June 2022 for the design of the present Toolkit.

→ Staff of diverse SOGIESC is assigned to interview migrant children (some children may feel more comfortable being interviewed by someone of the same gender, for example).

→ Staff are adequately trained and have the relevant competencies and skills in assessing vulnerabilities of migrant children.

→ Psychosocial support, legal support and legal representation are available for migrant children.

→ Gender-neutral toilets and toilets allow access for persons with disabilities.

→ Appropriate referral pathways to support different needs, particularly for those which will require specialized support, are established in advance.

→ Information on access to services is provided in a child- and culturally sensitive manner.

→ There are available support services for LGBTQIA+ children and children with disabilities, among others.

→ Recreational activities are appropriate for migrant children.

→ Information is displayed in different languages, for children who cannot read in the language of the destination country, and with visuals for children who cannot read at all.

→ There are appropriate measures to enable access for children with disabilities (i.e. access to premises for persons in wheelchairs; information available in audio recordings for those who are visually impaired, etc.).

→ There are mechanisms for vetting volunteers (e.g. licences and registrations), to be able to avoid unscrupulous persons, including traffickers and smugglers, who might take advantage of access to mechanisms supporting migrant children.

→ Reception centres are adapted to suit migrant children with specific needs, such as girls, victims of SGBV and those of diverse SOGIESC.

→ Child-sensitive and gender-neutral language is properly used by front-line workers.

→ Children are referred to based on their preferred pronouns (i.e. he/his/him, she/hers/her, or they/theirs/them, among others) or name.

→ Visuals, posters and materials with information reflect images and messages of inclusion and diversity (i.e. based on ethnicity, religion, sex and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and disability, among others).

→ Visuals and posters reinforce messages of "safe spaces", for example, by highlighting the values and core commitments of the organization.

→ Clear and thorough explanation of the services and responsibilities (particularly among other children).

→ Policies ensure accountability to affected populations (i.e. migrant children). This means, for example, that children have access to reporting mechanisms for violations to their rights (such as sexual exploitation and abuse) committed by front-line workers and are able to provide feedback on the services provided to them.[59]

→ Female front-line workers are recruited and there is gender balance and representation, particularly in key roles at borders (e.g. border guards).

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59   UNICEF, *Child-friendly Complaint Mechanisms*, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) Series: Tools to support child-friendly practices (Geneva, UNICEF, 2019). Available at www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/2019-02/NHRI_ComplaintMechanisms.pdf.

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Let us also hear what migrant children have said would be important to enable a safe space:[60]

"Educational activities are also important for children, to feel that they live in normality. It may not be the first need, but even in the first reception it would be helpful for [improving] children's mood."

– O.H., a 16-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

"An important issue was the use of facilities where we could use showers or the water closet. There were many facilities in very bad conditions. With no exception."

– Y., a 16-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

"I have a sister who is two years old. It was difficult to sit on a chair for so many hours. It is important to have a safe place for children to stay there and play."

– W., a 16-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

"I would like to recommend drawing a "line" between adults and children within first reception. Inside the camp we were put all together in the same place, and I would have preferred to be separated from adults. For example, give us a space to play and separate toilets for minors."

– W., a 17-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

"The medical services weren't sufficient. It is important to provide a safe and a proper place to rest for the people that arrive at the borders. They have done a very harsh travel route."

– A., 17-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

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[60] In the framework of the project, "Contributing to address the needs of migrant children at borders in Europe", IOM conducted different consultations with migrant children in 2022, in order to collect their views, opinions and feedback on the support they have received at borders. Consultation sessions with an FGD format were organized by IOM child protection experts.

The Equalcity project supports local authorities in fostering inclusion and protection of migrants who are at risk and SGBV survivors. The objective of the project is to build the capacity of local front-line services through the development of practical training tools and awareness-raising material on the issue of SGBV.

➜ Safe(r) spaces for LGBTQIA+ people with a migration background: How to set up safe(r) front-line services?

➜ SGBV against migrant women and girls: How to provide tailored services as a front-line worker?

➜ Working with unaccompanied migrant children: How to provide tailored services as a front-line worker?

The Equalcity toolboxes are available in various languages.

7.2. REFLECTION ON SAFE SPACES

Before we end this chapter, we invite you to one last reflection exercise:

Reflection exercise 🖋️

Are there other practices for enabling a safe space for migrant children that you would like to suggest?

Most organizations or institutions have developed standards of conduct for their staff. As a front-line worker, you likely have such standards of conduct, particularly when interacting with migrant children. Reflect on the key standards of conduct, competencies and skills required in your work as a front-line worker that helps enable a safe space for migrant children. Have you encountered obstacles to safe spaces? How much influence do you have to enable safe spaces?

Write down your thoughts in the box below.

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Safe relocation to a European Union country for a migrant teenager has been guaranteed. He, along with other migrants, receive clothes from volunteers at a transition camp along the Greek border.

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7.3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Setting up safe spaces is a mechanism for the realization of migrant children's rights by facilitating an environment where migration children can access services during the case management and referral, and make them feel seen, heard and respected. It is an excellent way to empower people to seek help and trust professionals.

- A safe space is also a protective factor and an obligation among front-line workers.

- Some essential elements in a safe space are trust, dignity, respect, empathy and care.

- It might be a good idea to discuss with your team what a safe space is and how to create it in the context in which you work, as conditions vary across organizations.

Additional resources

- Operational Guidance for Child-Friendly Spaces in Humanitarian Settings (IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support and World Vision)

- The Activity Catalogue for Child-Friendly Spaces in Humanitarian Settings (IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support and World Vision)

- Resources for Safe Spaces for Children in Humanitarian Settings: Overview (Save the Children International)

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A smiling child after the end of the day's on-site, non-formal education activities for migrants and refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos.

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PART

III
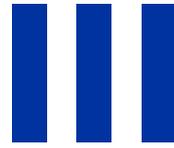
TO BE

This part presents more techniques to facilitate the work of front-line workers. Whereas there are a number of competencies and skills required to work with migrant children, we will focus our attention to a few priority resources identified during the consultation process that led to the development of this Toolkit, and which address what have been referred to as the most common challenges for front-line workers.

Chapter 8 will guide you through some simple techniques in interviewing migrant children at borders. In your role of front-line worker, you may be involved in screening procedures or interviews, or simply interact with migrant children, during which you will need to ask them questions to be able to support them. There is a common set of principles and practices you can follow, which would help you feel more comfortable and capable in supporting them.

In Chapter 9, we will address a particularly important issue: How you can deal with your own stress. It is recognized that front-line workers might experience stress and burnout. Maybe some of the suggestions proposed will be appropriate for you.

8. COMMUNICATING WITH MIGRANT CHILDREN AT BORDERS: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERVIEWING MIGRANT CHILDREN

> *"They were asking questions to the members of my family, one by one, about their health. In my opinion, good treatment shows in how you ask questions."*
>
> – A., a **16** year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

8.1.   THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

Part 2 showed that identifying risks and protective factors is particularly important when assessing the vulnerability of a migrant child. It was also briefly discussed how enabling good communication is essential in avoiding practices that might harm migrant children. More specifically, interviewing children adequately at borders has the potential to create trust, empathy and respect, which are essential elements of safe spaces and the realization of migrant children's rights overall.

A lot also depends on how you communicate with children during screening and interview procedures. This chapter offers some ideas on how to work on communication, based on interviews with migrant children. As a front-line worker, you may be involved in interviewing migrant children to assess their vulnerabilities and thus be able to refer them to relevant case management services and/or simply to assist them when you first interact with them. It is important to ensure relevant training and safeguards are established for those involved in communication with migrant children. **Matt's story** summarizes key recommendations for front-line workers. However, it is important for all agencies and institutions to put their respective child protection safeguards and policies in place.

Matt's story

Matt joined the organization where he works as a case manager because he genuinely wanted to make a change in the lives of migrant children. However, he is currently stressed and under a lot of pressure in his job as a front-line worker. A case manager for over 20 years, Matt screens migrant children's vulnerabilities and endorses their cases to relevant referral systems. As such, part of his job is dealing with various administrative tasks, including the coordination of border camps in the border area where he is working.

Because of financial limitations at his organization, Matt does not have adequate office space where he can conduct interviews to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Unfortunately, this leads to Matt interviewing migrants (including migrant children) in a space where everyone can hear interviewees answering questions during vulnerability screenings.

Matt has been asked to ensure all of his interviews with migrants last no longer than 10 minutes, to be able to cope with the workload. Matt tries to be empathetic with each migrant. However, he is conscious that if he spends "too much time" with one migrant, it will eat into the time allotted for others and, ultimately, he will not be able to meet his daily quota.

You have been invited to spend a working day with Matt, to shadow and provide him with feedback on his work. You sit in one of the interviews he is conducting, and you see how he interacts with a migrant child. Matt quickly asks the child questions, ticking appropriate boxes on the vulnerability screening questionnaire he needs to accomplish per interview. In addition, you see how he is frequently interrupted by his colleagues, asking him questions related to the border camps he has to coordinate. At some point, you see how the migrant child Matt is interviewing is no longer engaged in the interview. Matt tries to re-establish connection with the child, giving the child a hug and saying, "I am here to support you. I know exactly what you are feeling."

One of the questions in the questionnaire is to whether the child has been affected by trauma (childhood trauma refers to a scary, dangerous, violent or life-threatening event that happens to a person between birth and adulthood.[61])

He decides to ask directly, "Do you feel affected by trauma?"

Reflection exercise ✎

Question 1: What do you think went wrong during the interview?

Question 2: What suggestions do you have for Matt and his organization for changing procedures for interviewing migrant children?

Question 3: What (other) good practices can you recommend?

Write down your thoughts in the box below.

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61   United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), *Trauma-informed Case Management with Foreign National Migrant Children and Youth Survivors of Trafficking*, USCRI Trafficking Victim Assistance Programme Trafficking Toolkit Series (Washington, D.C., 2021).

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Certain stressors (e.g. time pressure, interruptions and too many tasks) complicate how Matt performs his job. Even if he has the best intentions, connecting with the migrant children he interviews is impossible. He is also prone to committing mistakes, despite his long professional experience, which he needs to reflect upon.

- First, he needs to review how he asks key, relevant questions, even if they are part of a standard questionnaire. Very few people would be able to answer "Yes" to the question, "Have you been affected by trauma?" Not only is the question too direct (particularly in some cultural contexts), but it also does not consider how someone who has experienced trauma may feel about a specific unpleasant experience episode. Asking such a question in a hurry would not guarantee an answer at all. One suggestion for Matt is to ask migrant children to cite experiences they found "challenging" or "difficult" in the past and start a conversation from there.

- In addition, privacy is not guaranteed during interviews. Migrant children being interviewed by Matt likely feel threatened by the presence of other people in the room.

- Lastly, making physical contact might be taken as a lack of respect for the child's body, agency and autonomy – and thus personal integrity. In certain cultures, physical contact is not acceptable and considered outright disrespectful.

The next section presents some techniques for conducting interviews that enable a sense of safety for migrant children. There are several more that you can find in the list of resources at the end of this Toolkit. In addition, you can ask your colleagues how they deal with similar situations and learn from their experiences. Whether it is your first day on the job or you have many years of experience, working with migrant children requires a unique set of skills and competencies you need to reflect on at all times.

8.2. KEY RULES FOR CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW WITH A MIGRANT CHILD

As a front-line worker, it is important to consider several elements when interviewing migrant children. Their psychosocial well-being, what their most immediate needs are (i.e. food or safety) and if they are being met, and how to enable a safe space for them are just a few.

Whenever you start an interview, it is also important to draw up clear messages and enable a safe space by sufficiently explaining rules, responsibilities and relevant expectations.

What does this mean in practice? Some suggestions are listed below.

- Introduce yourself and explain in a brief/simple manner what your role is *(I am here to support your request for…/I am here to support you on….)*

- Ensure the legal representative or guardian of the migrant child is present during the interview.

- Ask if the child has any preliminary questions or would like to express anything before continuing with the interview.

- Explain the rights and any responsibilities, as relevant, that the child has.

- Explain how the information provided by the child will be handled, based on applicable standards of conduct and policies on data protection.

- Share, read and explain any forms that need to be signed by the child and the child's legal representative(s) on the assistance or support being provided.

- Acknowledge and thank the child for volunteering information that may be difficult to share. Remember that every child (as with every adult) who does so is likely disclosing very personal information and is entrusting you with their life.

- Check whether the child feels safe, comfortable and/or if there are any constraints on the child's capacity to engage in the interview.

- Mindful of the evolving capacities of the child, explain available mechanisms for providing feedback and/or complaints on issues that the child would like to be addressed (e.g. sexual exploitation and abuse or harassment committed by personnel or staff of institutions).

- Be mindful of the cross-cultural dimensions, especially those that may impact your communication with the migrant child. Moreover, to the extent feasible, try to ensure that the child is interviewed by someone of the same gender and/or reflect on how gender dimensions may affect the interview process.

- Do not make false promises or create false expectations. It is best to provide information based on facts and concrete timelines (and specify what the child can realistically expect after the interview).

- At the end of the interview, ask whether the information provided was clear, whether the child has any questions and offer any additional avenues of communication, in case the child or a legal representative would like to come back to you with additional questions.

Here are a few more recommendations to guide the interview process, grouped according to the underlying general principle:

Additional information: General principles for the interview process	
General principle	**What it means in practice**
Age and maturity	• Do not assume that all migrant children have the same understanding of their rights and procedures relevant to their case. What may be "obvious" for you may not be so for migrant children. In addition, be mindful of the evolving capacities of the child when providing information. • Make sure you use child-friendly materials adapted to the child's age and level of maturity.[62]

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[62] The following handbook offers an extensive overview on how to convey appropriate messages to migrant children: Council of Europe, *How to Convey Child-friendly Information to Children in Migration: A Handbook for Frontline Professionals* (Strasbourg, 2018). Available at https://rm.coe.int/how-to-convey-child-friendly-information-to-migrant children-in-migration-a-ha/1680902f91.

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General principle	What it means in practice
Language and interpretation	• Information should be communicated in a language the child understands, using appropriate vocabulary and mindful of the cross-cultural dimensions. • Check that the child and the language interpreter (if any) understand each other. Also, as previously mentioned, consider "roadblocks" that may get in the way, such as accents, ethnic backgrounds (and conflicts within communities of the same migration background), gender dimensions and the child's understanding of the interpreter or of relevant legal terms, among others. • Explain who you are and what the interpreter's job is, as the migrant child might not understand the different roles. • Make sure the child understands that the interpreter should not judge them or tell other members of their community the details of your conversation. • Ensure that the interpreters are guided by relevant standards of conduct when interacting with migrant children and have a clear understanding of their role in interview procedures.
Gender and inherent characteristics	• Migrant children need to be informed about appropriate gender-based protection options (i.e. prevention against sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel of organizations involved in their protection) and available complaint and support mechanisms for whenever their rights have been violated on account of their gender and/or any other inherent characteristics. • Give the child a choice about the gender of the interviewer and the interpreter.
Cross-cultural dimensions	• As part of becoming more aware of the cross-cultural dimensions, familiarize yourself with the child's culture of origin to start building a relationship of trust.

The physical space or environment where the interview is taking place is important. Think of "power dynamics" or the impression it may have on a child if, for example, you are sitting behind a big desk, with the child on the other side. If the situation and context allow it, use small furniture (such as chairs and tables) like that normally used in a kindergarten if you are interviewing a small child. Consider a more casual context when interviewing an adolescent. Having dedicated interview rooms with a child-friendly atmosphere can certainly ease the process of communication with migrant children.

8.3. ACTIVE LISTENING DURING INTERVIEWS

As briefly discussed in the previous section, interviewing migrant children requires a number of skills and competencies that you can practice as a front-line worker. Active listening is an essential skill. We shall provide a quick overview of how can put it in practice.

> ### Active listening: a definition
>
> Active listening is "listening with all of your senses". It is a process of:
>
> - Listening without judgment or jumping into conclusions
> - Being present and avoiding interruptions so you can focus on the information you are sharing
> - Hearing the words being said (and, sometimes, from a cross-cultural perspective, "what is not being said") and understanding what the other person means by those words
> - "Reading" a person's body language and being mindful of your own body language and facial expressions
> - Giving encouraging verbal cues to allow a person to feel "heard" and supported
> - Clarifying, paraphrasing and rewording information that you would like to better understand ("*What I am hearing is [restate what the child said]. Is this an accurate understanding of what you said?*")
>
> As a front-line worker working with migrant children, active listening is a commitment to let these children know that all of your senses are "listening" to what they have to share. Just think of how you would like others to "listen" to you when you pour out your heart and tell them about a difficult situation and/or share exciting news.

Once you begin to practice the active listening skillset, you will notice the positive impact it can have on your work. (Additional tip: These skills can also work very well with your colleagues!)

Active listening in a few steps

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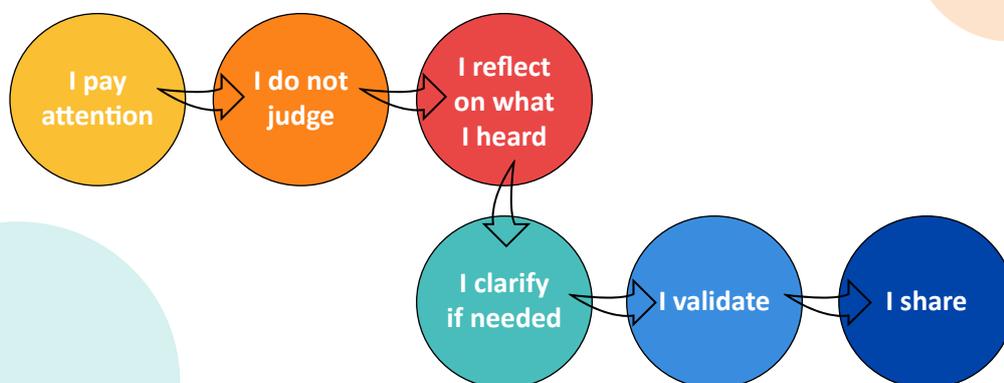
STEP 1 **Pay attention.**

One goal of active listening and being an effective listener is to set a relaxed tone that gives the migrant child an opportunity to think and speak.

- Allow "wait time" before responding. Silence can also be enormously powerful.
- Let interviewees finish their sentences Do not cut off. Start formulating responses after they have finished speaking.
- Pay attention to your body language and tone of voice.
- Be focused on the moment and operate from a place of respect as the listener.

STEP 2 **Do not judge or jump quickly into your assumptions.**

Active listening requires an open mind. It is like being a painter in front of a blank canvas. Let the child "draw" in your mind as you start listening. As a listener, be open to new ideas, perspectives and possibilities. Good listeners suspend judgment, withhold criticism and avoid interrupting. As a concrete suggestion, do not use words like *good/bad*, *correct/wrong*, *appropriate/inappropriate* or *acceptable/unacceptable*. Use neutral or open-ended questions in your interviews.

Moreover, considering the diversity of migrant children, and thus their vastly different and unique stories, do not be quick to jump into assumptions. Rather, listen carefully (sometimes this would require more time to speak to the child) to better understand the information the child is providing.

> **Example: Active listening in conversation** 📝
>
> **Migrant child**: *I left my country of origin because I felt different about whom I love.*
> **Front-line worker**: *If I am hearing you correctly, you are telling me that you are gay?*
> **Migrant child**: *No, I am not.*
>
> In this example, the interviewer (front-line worker) was quick to assume the child's sexual orientation, and there are different elements to the child's response to be mindful of. The child being "in love" with someone could mean any of several things, such as being attracted to someone from a different ethnic or religious group. However, it could be that the child is indeed trying to articulate and express their true sexual orientation (i.e. gay), but because they may have, for example, heard the term "gay" used in a derogatory manner in the past, their immediate reaction to the front-line worker's use of the term during the interview might reflect their understanding of the term in the same derogatory manner. These are just a couple of possibilities as regards the child's response and what the front-line worker quickly assumed.

So how should the front-line worker construct his response? In this scenario, the front-line worker could have asked a follow-up question such as, "Could you kindly explain to me further what you meant when you said you felt different, so I can better understand?"

With the reformulated question, not only is the front-line worker showing an appreciation or understanding of how often it is uneasy to answer such a question, but he is also allowing room for the child to clarify the response instead of making assumptions.

STEP 3 **Reflect on what you have just heard.**

As a listener, do not just assume that you understand immediately what the child says – or that they know you have heard them correctly. You can periodically paraphrase critical points. Reflection is an active listening technique that indicates that you and the child are "on the same page".

Example: Reflection as active listening

A child might tell you, "I do not want to stay alone with my father anymore." What the child could be saying is that they are scared of their father – or that they are missing their mother.

You could say something to help the child elaborate their feelings: "I hear that you do not want to stay alone with your father? What do you feel when you are alone with him?" Another way of putting it maybe, "I hear that you do not want to stay alone with your father. What makes you say that?"

Suppose words are a problem because some migrant children have difficulty accessing their emotions. In that case, and considering children's evolving capacities, you may want to consider alternatives means for them to communicate their feelings, such as asking them to draw pictures and then explain with words what those pictures mean. You can also involve (to the extent feasible) or consult with specialists (e.g. social workers and psychologists) on the best approaches to employ during difficult interviews with migrant children.

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STEP 4 | **Seek clarification if needed.**

Do not be shy to ask questions about an ambiguous or unclear issue. As the listener, if you have doubts or confusion about what the migrant child has said, say something like, "Let me see if I understood it clearly. Are you talking about [state what you understand the issue to be]?" Or you may say something like, "Could you please give me a minute. I would like to understand better what you are sharing."

Open-ended, clarifying and probing questions are crucial active listening tools that encourage the discussion to become deeper and more meaningful for you. In active listening, the emphasis is on asking rather than telling, as questions (especially open-ended ones) invite a thoughtful response and helps to maintain empathy.

> **Examples: Open-ended questions**
>
> • What do you think about…?
> • Tell me about…?
> • Will you further explain/describe …?

STEP 5 | **Validate and summarize.**

Restating critical points as the conversation proceeds signals to the child that you are trying to comprehend what they are saying. It also serves to summarize what you have understood without interrupting the child.

In the scenario from step 2, a brief restatement of the important points raised might sound like, "Let me summarize to check my understanding. You do not want to stay alone with your father because sometimes he makes you sad and scared. Do I get that right?"

STEP 6 | **Share.**

Active listening is first and foremost about understanding the child and being understood as the listener. As you gain a clearer understanding of the child's perspective, you can begin to introduce your ideas, feelings and suggestions.

In the same scenario from step 2, you could ask, "How do you feel about living in another place, with other migrant children and away from your father?"

As a front-line worker, continue asking, guiding and offering help. Remember that the child's best interests are a priority, and the child has the right to be heard.

The active listening approach has the advantage of creating a safe space for the child. When the child feels safe, it is more likely that they will eventually trust you.

Committing a mistake when asking a question during an interview with a migrant child can nevertheless be an opportunity to continue building trust with the child – that is, by saying, "I am sorry."

Some final words…

Let us not forget migrant children. You commitment and respect will certainly be appreciated, especially by children who were unable to experience these things from other adults and feel that those adults have not treated them well. Your level of authority will not be questioned – on the contrary, it shows how committed you are to supporting them.

Reflection exercise 🖋

Reflect on a situation in the past where it would have been good to practice active listening. How can you apply the lessons learned to the current context?

Write down your thoughts below.

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8.4. OTHER BASIC PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES

Effective communication, proper interviewing techniques, active listening, unconditional positive regard, and observing and attending to behaviour help a front-line worker to build rapport with a migrant child. A front-line worker should thus cultivate empathy, congruency, genuineness and concreteness, and unconditional positive regard. These concepts and their practical application are described below.[63]

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to "stand in another person's shoes," aiming to look at the world through that person's eyes. Observing the other person's point of view without filtering it through personal lenses allows one to avoid having a judgmental attitude and enables deeper understanding.

It is essential to underline that empathy is intended as the ability to feel "something similar" to what another person is feeling. It does not mean knowing exactly how or what that person is feeling. This is the important distinction. However, it is not enough to experience empathy; it is also essential to be able to express compassion.

> **Examples: Showing empathy** 📝
>
> - *"It must have been very tough to go through that experience."*
> - *"I can understand that you are feeling angry at what has happened to you."*
> - *"I see that you have difficulties talking about your experiences. Should we take a pause?"*
> - Simply sitting in silence while the person expresses their feelings or weeps.

The four elements of empathy

- I see the world through the eyes of the other person.
- I appreciate the other person as a human being.
- EMPATHY
- I understand the feelings of the other person.
- I show understanding.

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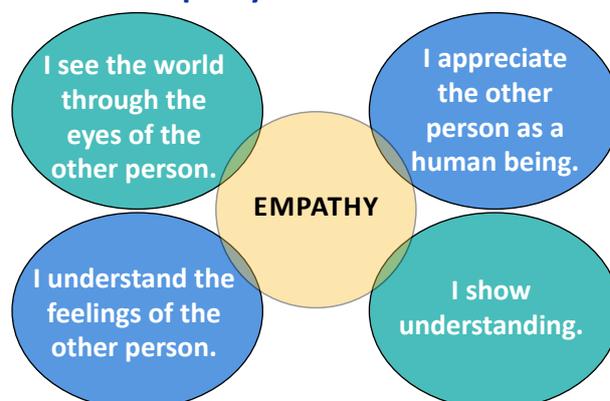
[63] IOM, *Reintegration Handbook: Practical Guidance on the Design, Implementation and Monitoring of Reintegration Assistance* (Geneva, 2019). Available at https://publications.iom.int/books/reintegration-handbook-practical-guidance-design-implementation-and-monitoring-reintegration.

While empathy means "understanding" someone else's feelings, sympathy means "sharing" those feelings of someone and taking that person's side. Empathy is the correct approach to adopt. A case manager's judgement and lucidity may be impaired if they identify too much with a migrant child's story.

Sympathy can cause the case manager to believe that they should be taking responsibility for the difficulties of migrant children and to make false promises or create false expectations.

Read here below some examples of empathy and some examples of sympathy.

Examples: Empathic remarks

- *"I am trying to figure out how you feel. I can only imagine it..."*
- *"Help me to understand how I can help you."*
- *"I see that you are considering some options."*
- *"I notice that you are struggling to find a solution."*

Examples: Sympathetic remarks

- *"Your problem seems challenging."*
- *"It is horrible that this has happened to you. I am astonished."*
- *"You can be sure that I am here, and I feel how difficult your situation is."*
- *"I am so sorry for you!"*

In addition, a front-line worker should not be apathetic (literally, "without emotions"), indifferent or incapable of showing concern, participation or motivation. Adopting a relaxed approach makes the other person feel they are not being listened to, misunderstood and left alone.

Examples: Apathetic remarks

- *"It is not my problem."*
- *"Bah...I do not know if it is possible to find a solution."*
- *"Can you speak a little more quickly? I have another person to meet."*
- *"Go ahead...I am listening to you...I am just drafting this email..."*

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In a nutshell…

- Empathy involves accepting another person's point of view and being interested in exploring its implication(s) on their behaviour.
- Sympathy involves feeling sorry for the other person.
- Apathy means not caring much for the other person beyond the pure mechanics of the job to be done.

Congruency and genuineness

Congruency and genuineness involve honesty and sincerity on the part of the front-line worker, who does not act a role but tries to be authentic to himself or herself and the migrant child. Congruency avoids the risky approach of having the front-line worker be seen as an expert who looks down patronizingly on the migrant child. Congruency is also crucial to obtaining trust, which is a core ingredient of any helping relationship. If a front-line worker behaves and feels congruent and genuine, this makes the migrant child feel at ease and allows them to be open and honest with themselves.

Examples: Congruent attitudes

- *"I do not have a ready solution but let us look for it together."*
- *"I am sorry. I do not understand what you are saying. Can you say it using other words?"*
- *"I may seem distant, but I am here fully listening to you."*

Concreteness

Concreteness is the ability to communicate figures, facts and information that can help a migrant child have a complete grasp of their situation. Migrants sometimes do not have clear information about their situation and rely on rumours or assumptions.

Concreteness enables a front-line worker to help identify the misinformation or information gaps and to allow the migrant to acquire a more realistic view of their situation. Concreteness helps the child focus on specific topics, reduce ambiguity and channel energies into more productive paths towards problem solution.

Attending and observing the behaviour

Being attentive, interested and concerned about what the migrant child is sharing and watching over what is going on during the interview or interaction serves to create and maintain a safe environment (physical and psychological). To help understand attending and observing in this context, it can be helpful to refer to the mnemonic, S-O-L-E-R.

S – Sit squarely
This means facing the migrant child squarely and adopting a posture that shows involvement. Sit in an "equal position": You may ask the migrant child where they prefer to sit and then sit accordingly, choosing to sit on a chair or the floor. This may make the migrant child feel respected and equal to you, the front-line worker.

O – Open posture
It is essential to ask oneself what postures are culturally appropriate and show openness and availability. In some cultures, crossing arms and legs can be signs of disrespect, while an open stance can show availability and receptiveness to what someone has to say.

L – Lean forward
A slight inclination of the trunk towards the migrant child demonstrates interest in what they are saying. Nevertheless, leaning too far forward or assuming such a posture too soon might be intimidating. Leaning back on your chair, on the contrary, could indicate a lack of interest or boredom.

E – Eye contact
It is essential to look at the migrant child in the eye as they are talking. This does not mean staring at the migrant but making frequent and gentle eye contact. It is essential to be aware of cultural differences, as eye contact is deemed inappropriate in some cultures. During an interview, it is better not to make frequent eye contact right away. Allow the child to get used to it. As the discussion continues, increasing eye contact to demonstrate genuine interest is possible.

R – Relax
While interviewing the migrant, it is essential to stay naturally relaxed. This helps the interviewee relax and focus more on the topic under discussion.

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8.5. WHAT NOT TO DO IN EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

Effective communication during interviews is also facilitated by knowing what NOT to do. The following box lists some of the more common actions and attitudes that serve as barriers to communication during an interview.

What not to do	Examples
Order/command or pretend	*"You must do what I say!"* *"Stop talking!"* *"Tell me everything about…"*
Warn or threaten	*"If you do not do this, you will face harmful consequences."* *"You had better engage in…"*
Judge or criticize	*"You should not have done that."* *"You had better do this…"* *"If you had been more careful, you would not have made this mistake."*
Provide unsolicited advice (even if the intention is helpful and cheerful)	*"If I were you, I would do it this way…"* *"This is better…choose it!"*
Dispute, challenge or cast doubt on a choice	*"Did you really do that?!"* *"Why did you decide to leave?"*
Ask to repeat too many times	*"What did you say again?"* (after you were distracted) *Ask to take a photo and fingerprints several times*

8.6. SUGGESTIONS ON INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

How and what you communicate through body language, physical contact and clothing, among others, can profoundly influence how migrant children perceive you very profoundly. The table below presents some suggestions to consider in this regard when interviewing migrant children, obtained during the multi-stakeholder workshop organized by IOM to inform the design of this Toolkit.

Good practices: Non-verbal communication 👍

→ **Body language and facial expressions**

- A child can see how the front-line worker is engaging with them by observing their body language, from which they may be able to pick up signs of tension. Facial expressions, likewise, are clear indicators of thoughts and mood. It is essential to be conscious of them. Rolling eyes, a stern look, slumping shoulders and excessive fidgeting all may show detachment from the conversation. It is good to look at the person talking and smile (if the context or situation calls for and allows it).

  Practical tip: Pay attention to your hand gestures because they might mean something different in another culture.

➔ **Positive, non-verbal feedback**

- Silence has the potential to give a chance to reflect on things. It offers room for reflection, but it must always be active and involve interest.

  Practical tip: Leave pauses, even at the beginning of the interview. If the migrant child stops talking, but you feel that they have not yet finished, it is essential to tolerate the silence.

➔ **Your voice**

- Speak slowly and calmly. The child might not understand you easily if you speak hurriedly. Even if you speak in the child's mother tongue, make sure you use the correct terms and articulate the words well. Also, be mindful of the right tone in your conversation.

➔ **Gender**

- Try to ensure the interviewer assigned to the child is of the gender the child has self-identified as. Also, address the child with the pronoun they have chosen or expressed they would like to be addressed (even if it is different than the gender marker in their passport/personal documents).

Here are what migrant children have said would be important to consider when interacting with them:[64]

"I generally feel that adult people view me with fear or anger even though I am [just] a child. I would like someone to explain to these people that I am not dangerous and that I have come here to ask for help. I think it would be nice if adults I meet would first ask me if I am well and if I need help."

– A.F., a 16-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

"At the police station, officers asked for our official documents, which we did not have. They had no interpreter and so we could not communicate nor understand what they were saying. If I had the chance, I would have told them that interpretation is necessary for us, so we would be able to communicate our needs to them and ask for help, in our language."

– M., a 15-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

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[64] In the framework of the project, "Contributing to address the needs of migrant children at borders in Europe", IOM conducted consultations with migrant children in 2022, in order to collect their views, opinions and feedback on the support they have received at borders. Consultation sessions with an FGD format were facilitated by IOM child protection experts.

"Having people we can communicate with, from the same community, is most important to me."

– A.S., a 16-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

"In my opinion, good treatment starts with the way people in reception centres ask questions. If you are polite and treat us humanely, it is already a good thing."

– F., a 17-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

Good practices: IOM cultural mediation services 👍

IOM provides high-level cultural mediation support to several Member States of the European Union, such as Italy and Spain, specifically to immigration officers, police officers and border guards (among other front-line workers) and migrants/asylum seekers at various border crossing points (sea, air and land). Through the presence of mediators with diverse linguistic skills, these cultural mediation services could entail the following:

➔ Support the optimization of procedures related to international protection applications, from the first claim to the issuance of the permit to stay.

➔ Support the provision of information to recently arrived migrants.

➔ Improve the authorities' insight and understanding of the profiles, experiences and routes of recently arrived migrants.

➔ Facilitate communication between police personnel/border guards and migrants and prevent and mitigate conflicts between migrants from different ethnic groups and between migrants and authorities (e.g. police officers/border guard) through cultural and linguistic mediation.

➔ Support the transfer of migrants and asylum seekers from the point of arrival to reception centres.

➔ Support authorities in identifying vulnerable asylum seekers and migrants, including unaccompanied children and victims of trafficking and labour exploitation, and facilitate their access to protection systems through referrals to competent local organizations.

➔ Support the verification of passports and other identification documents and permits to stay, as well as in the detection of counterfeit documentation.

➔ Support the identification of suspected human traffickers/smugglers.

8.7.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Front-line workers are subject to stressors that might lead them being stressed and cause them to committing errors at work.

- It is essential that, before the interview, you clarify to the child interviewee which information will be treated as confidential. Adapt the discussion according to the age, maturity, culture and gender of the child. You also need to take into consideration the need for any language interpretation.

- Anyone can practice active listening in a few steps. Active listening can help during the interview process.

- Other good practices are using empathy, being genuine, offering concrete information and avoiding making judgment.

- Avoid ordering, warning, threatening, criticizing, providing unsolicited advice and or disputing.

- Proper non-verbal communication can also help facilitate the interview and create a safe space for the child interview.

IOM protection staff: This IOM staff member will be assisting in the relocation of unaccompanied migrant children – Afghan refugees arriving in Toronto, Canada on a flight from Tajikistan.

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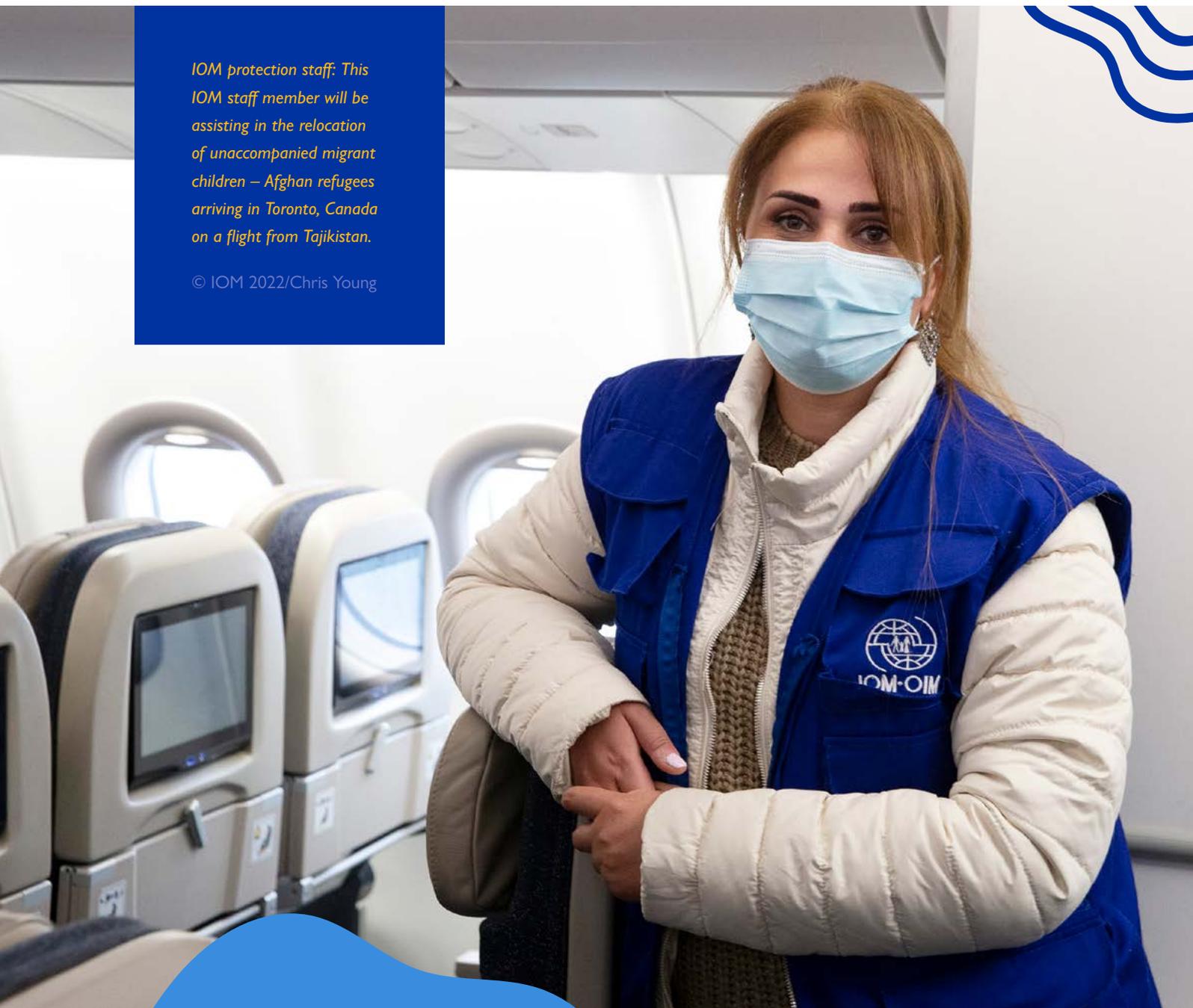
9. UNDERSTANDING CHILD TRAUMA

"I believe that there must be public authorities and NGOs at borders who could be able to support migrant children. First, their physical and mental well-being has to be examined and health care support should be available to them easily and quickly because the journey can be very long, with many challenges and life-threatening incidents."

– O.M., a 17-year-old migrant girl assisted by IOM

9.1. WHAT IS CHILD TRAUMA?

Child trauma refers to a scary, dangerous, violent or life-threatening event that happens to migrant children from when they are born until adult age.[65] This type of event may also happen to someone the child knows, and the child is impacted by seeing or hearing about the other person being hurt or injured.

When these experiences happen, a child may become overwhelmed, upset, and/or feel helpless. These experiences can happen to anyone at any time and at any age; however, not all events have a traumatic impact and not all individuals do respond in the same way to such events. Symptoms can manifest in many ways.

Traumatic events could be:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation
- Being a victim of trafficking
- Incarcerated household member

As a front-line worker, it is important to have a general understanding of how some children may have experienced traumatic events during their migration journey. Let us start with a general overview of the effects of trauma.

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[65] USCRI, *Trauma-informed Case Management* (see footnote 59).

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What are the effects of trauma?

| Under 5 years old	6–12 years old	13–17 years old
• Difficulty forming attachment to caregivers • Excessive fear or lack of fear towards strangers • Acute separation anxiety • Trouble eating or sleeping • High overactivity • Regression signs, e.g. returning to diapers after toilet training	• Aggressive or withdrawn behaviour • Being very focused on own safety or the safety of others • Re-enacting traumatic events in their play • Frequent nightmares • Have difficulty concentrating in school	• Signs of anxiety or depression • Engaging in risk-taking or self-destructive behaviour, including substance use, self-harm, high risk sexual behaviour, or other potentially dangerous activity • Feelings of intense guilt, anger or shame • Adopting a negative view of people • Having suicidal thoughts • Seeking revenge

Additional resources

As a front-line worker, it is important to be familiar with the concept of trauma-informed care and its impact, particularly in the work you do. There are many resources by professionals in the field of mental health and psychosocial assistance to support your work. Moreover, it is essential for a front-line worker to be familiar with how to react, act and support cases of migrant children who may show trauma or distress, for example, during an interview. The following are resources that could guide you through the process:

▪ Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers (IOM)

▪ Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Families at the US–Mexico Border (UNICEF)

▪ *IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse* (IOM)

▪ *Manual on Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Displacement* (IOM)

▪ *Flowers and Stones: Self-Care Handbook for Syrian Men Living in Germany* (IOM) (also available in German)

▪ *Labour Exploitation, Trafficking and Migrant Health: Multi-country Findings on the Health Risks and Consequences of Migrant and Trafficked Workers* (IOM)

▪ *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings: What Should Camp Coordination and Camp Management Actors Know?* (IASC)
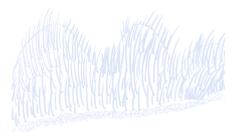
- *Basic Psychosocial Skills: A Guide for COVID-19 Responders* (IASC)

- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Minimum Service Package

- Mental health and psychosocial support for people on the move during COVID-19: A revised multi-agency guidance note

- *Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers* (WHO)

- *Psychological First Aid Training Manual for Child Practitioners* (Save the Children)

- The Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Network

What does a trauma-informed[66] front-line worker do?

A trauma-informed front-line worker DOES…	A trauma-informed front-line worker DOES NOT….
• Ensure training is provided by relevant experts in the field of trauma (acute and chronic) and traumatic stress to front-line workers interacting with migrant children at borders.	• Use judgmental language or become frustrated when the child shows signs of distress.
• Map available resources (at the local or national level) and identify available referral pathways for cases of migrant children who require psychosocial support and assistance.	• Assume all emotions, behaviours and physical responses are a result of migration or make assumptions about the impact of a traumatic event on an individual.
• Create a safe and nurturing space for migrant children at borders, including by ensuring confidentiality, informed consent and support of the legal guardian/caregiver.	• Ask for details about the trauma experienced.
• Offer consistency in and structure to the case management process.	• Place blame on those who have experienced the trauma.
• Exercise patience and calm in front of difficult or unexpected situations stemming from episodes of trauma the migrant child may exteriorize.	• Talk fast and be impatient, reacts aggressively or show apathy.
• Enable support to the child in situations of immediate distress using the psychological first aid (PFA) approach.	• Expect all migrant children will want to discuss or receive treatment for the health impacts of trauma. • Conduct diagnoses without having the relevant professional expertise and skills to do.

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[66] Trauma-informed care involves recognizing the impact of traumatic experiences (specifically, a range of violence that may include abuse prior to the actual trafficking experience) on an individual's life and behaviour, and on their perceptions of themselves and their bodies. (For more information about trauma-informed care, see: IOM, Caring *for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers* (Geneva, 2015), p. 33.

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9.2 TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

In situations of more severe trauma, consider having a specialist assessment in trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder and registering a history of trauma or abuse. A couple of illustrative cases of trauma-informed care are presented below.

Case 1

A migrant teenager comes to the office of a front-line worker for an interview. The receptionist warmly greets the teenager and asks the teenager their preferred pronouns and which staff member they have come to see.

The front-line worker comes to greet the teenager, then ushers her to a common conference room. To establish a sense of safety for the youth, including by maintaining confidentiality, the front-line worker shows her to a common conference room and asks her if she is comfortable meeting in that space and if she would like the door to remain open or be closed.

The front-line worker discusses emotional safety with the youth and asks her to describe a person or relationship that felt emotionally safe. The worker then proceeds to develop a safety plan with the youth that helps her meet her goals for emotional safety and ensures she has access to the necessary resources and emergency numbers.

Case 2

A case manager begins a professional relationship with a child by setting expectations around services, confidentiality and mandated reporting so that the child understands the case manager's role more clearly.

After the child discloses their past trafficking situation, the case manager thanks the child for sharing the story and validates their experiences. The case manager enables a supportive environment for the child to talk about what happened and reiterates that the child can continue to share as little or as much as possible. The front-line worker asks if the caregiver is aware of the trafficking history, and if the child feels safe in their current living environment. The front-line worker reminds the youth that they will not share any information outside of mandated reporting guidelines with the caregiver.

Do the reflection exercise on the next page based on the two cases you have just read.

Reflection exercise

What was good about how the front-line workers performed their tasks? Would you have done the same or behaved differently?

Write down your thoughts below.

Below are some good practices you may adopt as a trauma-informed front-line worker.

Good practices: For a trauma-informed front-line worker 👍

→ Post "All Are Welcome Here" posters or signs in multiple languages in your office.

→ Hire staff who speak the languages of and represent the populations you serve.

→ Ask the child interviewee what language they prefer to speak and what pronouns they use to identify their gender identity/expression.

→ Offer culturally relevant snacks and accommodations.

→ Provide materials in the language of the child's choosing.

→ Call a language line to have a third party interpret and coach the child on the effective use of language line services.

→ Educate the migrant child on your role and how it differs from that of others, including that of border management officials and police.

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- → Talk to the migrant child about their rights regardless of their immigration status.
- → Connect the child to legal representation, so they may speak to a professional about their rights as an immigrant victim of crime and seek legal relief.
- → When you make a mistake that is offensive in a client's culture, apologize and learn from it.
- → Commit to diversity, equity and inclusion training for staff.
- → Consider maintaining a list of specialists for severe trauma, with their contact information, in case you need to contact them for referrals and support.

9.3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Child trauma refers to a scary, dangerous, violent or life-threatening event that happens to migrant children from when they are born until adult age.
- Migrant children may have experienced traumatic events during migration.
- Results from research[67] show that newly arrived migrant children mainly show internalizing disorders.
- Risk factors for continuous problems are socioeconomic deprivation, parental divorce, bullying, and parents with stress-related psychological or psychiatric disorders.
- In dealing with trauma, patience and calm, in addition to the creation of a safe space, is necessary.
- In cases of more severe trauma, consider having a specialist conduct an assessment of the trauma and identify post-traumatic stress disorder (if any), and/or registering the history of the trauma or abuse.

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[67]   USCRI, Trauma-informed Case Management (see footnote 60).

10. HOW TO MANAGE YOUR STRESS

"I was very happy when I saw the people coming to save us and I was greeting each one of them one by one from inside the boat. So, I would like to say Thank You."

– Y., a 15-year-old migrant boy assisted by IOM

As a front-line worker, you may feel proud of and confident about your work. However, at times, there may also be challenges, for example, linked to the impact of the stress from working to address the challenges faced by children in the context of migration. As we have mentioned before, the realities in border areas may be different in each context. However, front-line workers may often be exposed to difficult situations, such as burnout and/or challenges linked to the frustration they may endure due to the lack of capacity to support situations that fall outside their scope of influence or control.

Stress might affect front-line workers like you in several ways, including physically and emotionally, and in various intensities. As we saw in previous chapters (notably, Matt's story in Chapter 8), this can also impact your work with migrant children.

Moreover, excessive and prolonged stress can lead to illnesses such as heart disease and mental health problems such as burnout, anxiety and depression. In this chapter, we will provide a few tips, practices, resources and suggestions on how you can cope with and manage stress. However, we would recommend seeking relevant support, either within your own organization or institution, or from a specialists who can support you properly and in a professional environment. Your well-being is extremely important. Thus, you need to also ensure you receive proper support and assistance to help you cope with difficult situations and stress at work.

Reflection exercise

Front-line workers often need to cope with different challenges that can create stress. Below are some of the main ones. Tick the ones that apply to you. Do you have others to add?

I am under a lot of time pressure when doing the interviews.

I have so many different tasks to deal with at the same time.

I listen all day to stories of pain and suffering.

I feel powerless. I feel I cannot help enough migrant children.

I do not have enough time to deal with all the tasks in a day.

There is no clarity about the procedures to follow.

My colleagues do not behave appropriately.

My colleagues have not been trained on how to deal with migrant children.

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I feel that I do not know how to deal with certain complex situations and there is nobody to coach me.

I feel alone.

I work long/extra hours.

My superior does not recognize my work.

The people I am trying to help create pressure and want answers, but I do not have any.

Others:

In stress management, the first step is to recognize if you have symptoms of stress because stress can sometimes go unnoticed. This is when stress can become dangerous. One of the most debilitating and often unrecognized types of stress is cumulative stress, which results from exposure to work and non-work stressors and is often intensifies when one person feels unable to help others.

10.1. STRESS SYMPTOMS

Everyone can have quite different symptoms related to stress. You can find below a list of the most common ones.

> **Examples: Stress symptoms at the individual level**
>
> • **Physical symptoms**: fatigue, feeling burned out, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, abdominal and back pains, sleeping disorders and appetite changes.
>
> • **Emotional signs**: anxiety, frustration, guilt, mood swings, undue pessimism or optimism, irritability, crying spells, nightmares, apathy and depression.
>
> • **Mental signs**: forgetfulness, poor concentration, poor job performance, negative attitude, loss of creativity and motivation, boredom, negative self-talk, paranoid thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and secondary stress (i.e. vicarious traumatization).
>
> • **Relational signs**: feelings of isolation, being resentful or intolerant of others, loneliness, marriage problems, nagging, social withdrawal, antisocial behaviour, compassion fatigue (a condition characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others).
>
> • **Behavioural changes**: (increased) alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use, changes in eating habits or sexual behaviour, (increase in) risky behaviour, hyperactivity, avoidance of situations and cynical attitudes.
>
> • **Collapse of belief systems**: feelings of emptiness, doubt in religious beliefs, feelings of being unforgiven, looking for "magical" solutions, loss of purpose of life, needing to prove self-worth, cynicism about life, and feelings of denial and anger.

> **Examples: Stress symptoms at the team level**
>
> • Anger towards managers
> • Lack of initiative
> • Clique formation (inner and outer "circles")
> • Conflict between groups
> • High turnover of personnel
> • Negative attitude towards workplace
> • Critical attitudes towards colleagues
> • Scapegoat mentality[68]

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[68] The term is used to describe when uncomfortable feelings such as anger, frustration, envy, guilt, shame and insecurity are displaced or redirected onto another, often more vulnerable, person or group.

10.1.1. What can you do to cope with stress?

The good news is that you could take actions to address day-to-day stress and cumulative and compassionate fatigue. The first step is to recognize that you are in a stressful situation. The support of professionals in the field is extremely important, particularly if you have experienced any type of critical incident stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Second, you should be open-minded to experimenting with what works best for you. We are not all the same. For some people, physical activities like running and yoga help. For others, it is easier to meet with a friend and explain what is happening to you. Here we propose some solutions, and it will be up to you to find out the best strategy for you.

- Acknowledge that in order to take care of others, you need to take care of yourself and be aware you are responsible for your own well-being.

- Understand that stress is inherent to work, especially in challenging environments, such as border areas with limited capacities or specific challenges.

- Talk regular breaks especially when you have difficulty concentrating.

- If you are triggered by difficult situations or emotions, find a space to breath and count until 10 (to keep your amygdala[69] from hijacking you and place you in a difficult situation).

- Avoid excessive alcohol, tobacco and caffeine.

- Discuss with your manager options to reduce your working hours or your workload, take some time off work from time to time (allot time for holidays and leave periods).

- Find someone you can trust to talk about how the stories of work that might affect you.

- Ask about how to access mental health resources at your workplace.

- Remind yourself that other people could also be in an unusual situation, similar to yours.

- Identify and accept those things which you do not have control over and that you cannot change.

- Engage in physical activities: running, playing team sports and/or yoga. Also, little walks during your breaks at work.

- Eat healthy food.

- Monitor your sleep time to ensure you get good rest. Respect and follow a regular schedule for sleep.

- Find pastimes or hobbies that can make you happy, such as listening to music, or engage in mindfulness techniques, such as breathing exercises and meditation.

- For managers: you have a key role in supporting your team to cope and manage stress. In addition to the above suggestions, you could plan actions to allow your staff to take their leave periods, ensure they leave work and arrive at a time that allows them to rest, organize events (e.g. team-building and get-togethers), to allow also social interaction and build team spirit.

---

[69] The amygdala is the name of a cluster of almond-shaped cells in the brain responsible for a person's emotional and behavioural responses. The amygdala activates the fight-or-flight response in a person's body when confronted with danger. "Amygdala hijack" is a term used to describe an immediate and overwhelming emotional response that is triggered by a perceived significant stressor. An amygdala hijack refers to a situation when the amygdala overrides control of a person's ability to respond rationally to a perceived threat – often thought of as losing control of one's emotions. To prevent or control an amygdala hijack, a person is encouraged to count to ten before reacting. It takes about six seconds for the chemical signals in an amygdala hijack to dissipate. By counting to ten slowly, this increases the likelihood of responding with a logical instead of an emotional response.

The strategies indicated above are to help you get started. However, you may need to pay attention. If the stress level is too high, or if you have experienced PTSD or critical incident stress, we encourage you to ask for professional support.

10.2. PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

We invite you to reflect on your action plan to cope with stress. Based on the above suggestions or others you may think of, visualize yourself with the next actions you will take to ensure you are taking care of your well-being. Reflect for a few minutes and complete the below table:

Reflection exercise ✒️

My top 3 commitments to improving my well-being are:

How do I get there?

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Within this week, I will start...

Within this month, I will start...

How will I make myself accountable and follow through on my personal action plan?

Do I need support from a friend, partner, colleague to help me follow through on my plan?

10.3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Stress might affect front-line workers like you in several ways, both physically and emotionally and in various intensities.
- Especially excessive and prolonged stress can lead to illnesses such as heart disease and mental health problems such as burnout, anxiety and depression.
- Everyone can have quite different symptoms related to stress; it is important to be aware of your stress symptoms.
- The good news is that cumulative stress is reversible – but, first, however, you should recognize that you are in a stressful situation.
- You need to be open-minded to experiment with what works best for you.
- You need to be aware of the stress level you are dealing with and plan for the appropriate support.

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A toolkit for front-line workers

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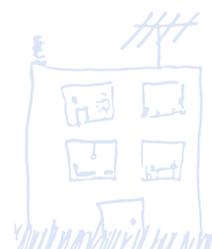
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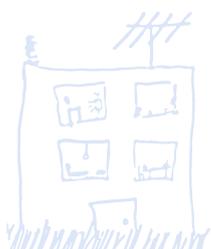
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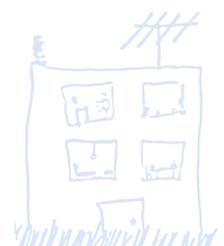
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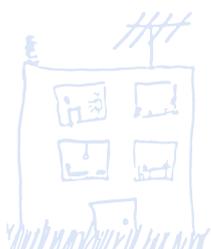
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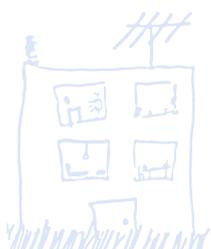
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