

The Global Perspective

The story of child refugees and migrants is a global story, not one confined to a single region


Nearly

1 in 200

children in the world
is a child refugee 

Nearly

1 in 3

children living outside
their country of birth
is a refugee 

2x

 as many child refugees*
in 2015 than in 2005

 2015

 2005

Data about children are crucial to decision-making but are incomplete

Children are too often relegated to the fringes of the world's debates about migration and displacement. One reason is the lack of hard numbers to support the case for children. Without reliable data, evidence-based debates and policymaking are hampered.

Global estimates are incomplete and therefore do not tell us the whole story. We do not know where all the world's child refugees and migrants were born, how old they are, or whether their migration was forced or voluntary. There are even fewer comprehensive and comparable indications about how child migrants fare in their countries of origin, transit, and destination.

This report is an effort to bring together the best data that are available, but effectively addressing the rights and needs of children requires concerted action to fill the gaps that remain.

Child refugees

- > 31 million children live outside their country of birth, including 11 million child refugees and asylum-seekers. An additional 17 million children have been displaced by conflict and violence within their own countries.
- > Nearly one in three children living outside their country of birth is a refugee; for adults, the proportion under UNHCR's mandate is less than 1 in 20.
- > In 2015, just two countries – Syria and Afghanistan – accounted for nearly half of all child refugees under UNHCR's mandate; about three-quarters of all child refugees under UNHCR's mandate came from only 10 countries.
- > Today, nearly 1 in every 200 children in the world is a child refugee. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of child refugees under the UNHCR's mandate more than doubled. During the same period, the total number of all child migrants rose by 21 per cent.
- > Approximately 10 million child refugees are hosted across the world, primarily within the regions where they were born.
- > Girls and boys are equally represented among registered refugees, although children's risk of specific protection violations – such as recruitment by armed forces and armed groups, or sexual and gender-based violence – may differ between girls and boys.
- > Overall, the refugee population is much younger than the migrant population. While a clear majority of the world's migrants are adults, children now comprise half of all refugees.
- > The 10 countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees are all in Asia and Africa, with Turkey hosting by-far the largest total number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate. Although complete age-disaggregated data are not available for refugees in Turkey, its substantial share of total refugees makes Turkey likely the host of the largest number of child refugees in the world.

*Under UNHCR's mandate

Child migrants

- > Globally, three out of every five international child migrants live in Asia or Africa.
- > Since 1990, the proportion of international child migrants within the global child population has remained stable at just over 1 per cent, but a rising global population means that the absolute number of child migrants has increased significantly in the past 25 years.
- > Today, 1 in every 70 children worldwide lives outside their country of birth. Like adults, most children who move migrate primarily within their own geographical region.
- > When girls and boys move across international borders, they do so in almost equal numbers. This pattern is contrary to adult migration, where there are pronounced differences in the proportion of men and women by region.
- > Half of all the world's child migrants live in just 15 countries, led by the United States of America, which is home to 3.7 million child migrants.

Around the world

1 in 8 migrants is a child



Around the world

28 million

children have been forcibly displaced



And there are

20 million

other international child migrants



The Regional Perspective

Childhood migration and displacement look different in each region of the world

More than half of all international migration is composed of movements within regions, and the three largest migration movements in the world are all intra-regional. Refugee movements are even more concentrated within regions than with general migration.

Africa

- > Some 86 per cent of African refugees find asylum in other African countries.
- > 5.4 million refugees originate from African countries and children are disproportionately represented among them.
- > Approximately one half of African refugees are children – nearly three million children who have been forced from their own countries and are confronting the world's harshest realities. Africa has one of the world's lowest rates of child migration, with just 1 in 90 African children living outside their country of birth.
- > While the total rates of migration are low, the share of children among Africa's migrants is the largest for any region. Nearly one in three African migrants is a child, more than twice the global average.

