

Summative Evaluation of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration Programme

Mexico, El Salvador, Zambia, South Africa



Summative Evaluation of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration (2020 – 2023)
Project

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1. SUMMARY

This report presents the result of the final evaluation of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme. Implemented from 2020-2023, the Children on the Move (CotM) programme covered four countries (Mexico, El Salvador, Zambia and South Africa), spanned two regions (Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR) and Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC)), and involved the partnership of two UN agencies (UNICEF and UNHCR).

The CotM programme included countries of origin, transit and destination and incorporated all categories of children on the move with the goal of ensuring that all “children on the move are effectively protected and their rights are being realized through child protection systems that provide quality integrated services, alternative care, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).” This overall objective was approached from the angles of systems strengthening and the exchanges of good practices, and was structured around four outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Child protection systems include gender responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities.
- **Outcome 2:** Child protection systems have integrated gender responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanisms addressing gender-based violence and other structural problems.
- **Outcome 3:** Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives.
- **Outcome 4:** Exchanges of gender sensitive good practices and lessons learnt across two regions/ four countries serve as evidence for the protection of CotM in different contexts, based on empirical evidence and data.

2. CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

Children on the move are one of the most marginalised young populations in the world; this is true regardless of whether they live in high-income countries or in emergency settings. They endure serious risks and severe deprivation in their day-to-day lives. There is an urgent need to better protect these children. Children on the move is a compound concept that describes children who have been directly or indirectly affected by migration and displacement, either internationally across borders or within the same country: this includes child migrants; children in need of international protection, such as refugees and asylum seekers; internally displaced children; children indirectly affected by migration and displacement, such as children who stay behind while parents or caregivers migrate; stateless children and child victims of cross-border trafficking.

3. EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The evaluation applied a theory-based approach that enabled a utilization-focused examination of the various ways that program activities led to achievements. The realist approach enabled an understanding as to the “how” and the “why” interventions achieved their objectives; it also enabled a more nuanced investigation into “What worked?” “For whom?” “In what respect?” “To what extent?” and “In what contexts?” The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach to assess the implementation process, challenges, and lessons learned, from both the perspectives of implementers and of the beneficiaries. The key evaluation questions were focused on analysing the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the programme’s activities. This participatory approach employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection method and included: 1) document review; 2)

secondary data analysis; 3) participatory focus groups with key informants, 4) online survey, and 5) data analysis, and 6) a co-creation workshop.

4. DISCUSSION OF KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS



Relevance

Finding 1:

The CotM programme exhibited strong alignment with national and regional priorities, aligning seamlessly with UNICEF's and UNHCR's programmatic niches and catering effectively to the needs of rights holders and duty bearers. Moreover, the programme showcased remarkable adaptability, particularly in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finding 2:

The CotM programme leveraged existing efforts, including strategic partnerships with government stakeholders, and implementing partners, to maximize its impact. All interventions were designed to strengthen child protection systems and ultimately end detention. Notably, interventions were tailored to address specific challenges within each country context.

Finding 3:

The CotM programme effectively targeted its interventions towards strengthening child protection systems and collaborating with government authorities and key stakeholders, thus ensuring their continued relevance throughout the programme's duration. This targeted approach contributed significantly to the programme's success in aligning with national priorities and addressing emerging needs.

Finding 4:

Despite acknowledging the need for improved accountability to children and great responsiveness to the specific needs of women and girls through previous lessons learned, the CotM programme continued to exhibit weaknesses in prioritizing intersecting vulnerabilities.



Coherence

Finding 5:

The CotM programme effectively leveraged existing partnerships with relevant regional actors, fostering synergy and coherence with other interventions addressing the same affected groups. Notably, programme design and interventions were adapted to specific country contexts, ensuring a sufficient degree of coherence with existing initiatives at both local and regional levels.

Finding 6:

The CotM programme established national coordination mechanisms that improved the ability of protection systems to identify the needs of CotM and collaborate effectively with relevant institutions. This enhanced collaboration led to a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to protecting CotM.

Finding 7:

The CotM programme fostered an environment for learning and exchange of best practices across various levels. This contributed to knowledge sharing and capacity building within the child protection sector of the four involved countries.



Effectiveness

Finding 8:

The CotM programme made significant strides in facilitating children's access to high-quality integrated services, including alternative care options and mental health and psychosocial support using a gender-sensitive lens.

Finding 9:

The CotM programme achieved notable success in preventing and reducing child detention across all four countries. This included a commendable decrease in detention times and the implementation of effective alternatives to detention. While the programme demonstrably strengthened child protection systems, continued work is needed to ensure that detention remains the absolute last resort and that all children on the move have access to appropriate alternative care options.

Finding 10:

Despite operating in a complex environment with diverse monitoring components, the CotM programme's monitoring systems contributed to programme effectiveness. This was achieved by collecting, integrating, and sharing diverse data sets with relevant stakeholders, which proved particularly valuable for addressing critical issues related to human rights, gender, and equity.



Efficiency

Finding 11:

The CotM programme implemented several cost-effective interventions through a combination of strategies. These included co-financing agreements and leveraging institutional resources, efficient management of existing funds, and the valuable contributions of national partners and authorities.

Finding 12:

The CotM programme exhibited uneven outcomes in terms of the interoperability of its monitoring systems. Monitoring systems and stakeholder participation lacked consistency across the four programme countries. This resulted in limited interoperability, despite the programme's positive emphasis on national collaboration and the provision of technical support to both governments and implementing partners.



Sustainability

Finding 13:

The programme's efforts significantly elevated the issue of children on the move within the political agendas of all four programme countries. However, the programme showed limited success in raising awareness and advocating for the needs of the most vulnerable groups of children on the move.

Finding 14:

The CotM programme strengthened child protection systems across the four countries. Through targeted interventions the programme improved national capacities, fostered integrated service delivery, and enhanced collaboration among key stakeholders. However, practical implementation gaps persist due to budgetary and human resource limitations at the individual stakeholder level: this includes government agencies and IPs.

Finding 15:

The CotM programme successfully developed and strengthened systems and partnerships. It fostered local and national ownership, built capacity and resources. The programme established national and regional coordination mechanisms, multi-stakeholder advisory boards, civil society networks, and multisectoral teams to facilitate collaboration and strengthen child protection systems. Additionally, the programme provided capacity building opportunities for government institutions, further equipping them to address the needs of children on the move.

Conclusion 1¹:

Alignment with national priorities was achieved in both regions due to the CotM programme's strong commitment to collaboration and context-specific approaches.

This success can be attributed to close and extensive dialogue with relevant national authorities and partners, as well as ongoing communication between field offices and staff. The program offered ample opportunity for addressing priorities specific to each country and region. In this regard, accurate context analysis and learnings from previous CotM evaluations proved to be particularly effective tools for identifying and assessing needs, ultimately ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of the program's interventions. (Finding 1)

Conclusion 2:

The CotM programme demonstrated remarkable adaptability to diverse contexts and conditions, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The deployment of remote services proved instrumental in ensuring continuous programme implementation that responded to unforeseen challenges. The initial six-month inception stage played a crucial role in facilitating programme adaptation and ensuring alignment with UNICEF's and UNHCR's programmatic niches, even in countries where an initial Theory of Change was not yet drafted. (Finding 1)

Conclusion 3:

The CotM programme effectively leveraged existing partnerships, projects, previous CotM experiences and long-standing cross-sectoral collaborations to strengthen child protection systems and reduce detention.

This flexibility enabled each country to tailor their approach to address a range of situations resembling detention, considering local terminology and specific contextual realities. (Finding 2)

Conclusion 4:

¹ Conclusions are colour-coded using a "Red, Orange, Green" scale to express the judgement of the evaluation: Green = the programme was successful; Amber = the programme had some success, but there were areas that did not meet the expected results; Red = unsatisfactory.

The CotM programme effectively maintained its relevance to systems-strengthening objectives through close and sustained coordination with government authorities and key stakeholders. This collaboration ensured that the program remained aligned with national priorities and addressed emerging needs. While the CotM program successfully incorporated GBV lessons and tailored its responses to the needs of women and girls, its design did not fully develop an intersectional approach. This limitation led to insufficient attention to the needs of children with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ children, and girls beyond the context of GBV. (Findings 3 and 4)

Conclusion 5:

The CotM programme effectively leveraged existing partnerships with relevant regional and national actors. The programme's approach and design facilitated a high degree of coherence and coordination with other interventions and stakeholders in both national and regional contexts. Robust regional coordination was established with diverse partners and networks, while national coordination systems demonstrated satisfactory alignment across all four countries. In Zambia and South Africa, strategic partnerships with key local organizations played a pivotal role in significantly improving the overall well-being and protection of children on the move. (Finding 5)

Conclusion 6:

Despite successfully establishing new partnerships to support national child protection systems and prevent child detention in migratory flows, the CotM programme encountered diverse challenges across all four countries. These challenges limited the number, frequency, and effectiveness of these partnerships. In Mexico, concerns regarding the scope of partnerships and reliance on UN agencies for communication hampered collaboration. South Africa faced challenges due to limited national capacity and resources, unreliable data on children on the move, and difficulties with legal and documentation processes. Zambia experienced language barriers, inadequate legislation, and staff transfers within key institutions, which hindered partnership development. All these limitations were exacerbated by national governments' restricted financial resources. (Finding 6)

Conclusion 7:

While the CotM programme facilitated inter-regional learning and exchange of good practices, it did not fully capitalize on the potential of its multi-country, multi-region design. This unfulfilled potential lies in missed opportunities for fostering cross-border and interagency collaboration, which could have further strengthened the program's impact and reach. (Finding 7)

Conclusion 8:

The CotM programme successfully implemented gender sensitive MHPSS and improved child protection services, achieving and even surpassing initial targets in some instances. Integrating GBV prevention training within care centres offering integrated services ensured that survivors benefitted from rapid response interventions. Program activities yielded positive impacts on children's well-being, fostering increased happiness and dynamism. Innovative engagement methods, the flexibility for context-specific program adaptations, and the development of case transfer protocols bridging government agencies, NGOs, and implementing partners all contributed to enhanced project results. Furthermore, the numerous training initiatives targeted at dedicated staff and stakeholders, alongside collaboration with local authorities across diverse sectors, enabled CotM to access strengthened services and support. (Finding 8)

Conclusion 9:

The programme made notable progress in promoting alternative care measures and reducing detention of children on the move. This progress was achieved through strengthening national referral mechanisms and case management systems, supporting legislative reforms and legal representation, and enhancing the technical capacity of child protection stakeholders. Despite these significant strides, challenges remain. **The transition to alternative care models is a gradual process, and in some instances, these models have inadvertently replicated detention-like practices under different labels.** (Finding 9)

Conclusion 10:

The monitoring strategy played a vital role in the programme's effectiveness by facilitating ongoing training processes, information sharing, intervention follow-up, verification visits, and the production of standardized reports. Notably, these systems enabled corrective measures to be implemented between the two agencies, reducing duplicated registrations, while aiming to unify data processes that stemmed from diverse gathering practices. Despite these positive contributions, the efficacy of the monitoring systems varied across the four countries, revealing limitations such as: weak national registration systems, lack of baseline assessments, unsystematic collection of disaggregated data, and insufficient measurement of sustainability. These constraints ultimately limited the efforts to quantify the programme's impact. (Finding 10)

Conclusion 11:

The CotM programme prioritized cost-effectiveness in strengthening child protection systems by leveraging existing expertise. Effective coordination between UNICEF, UNHCR, and their implementing partners minimized duplication of efforts and broadened the programme's reach. Additionally, the program's emphasis on capacity building for child protection staff and its focus on long-term approaches contributed to cost-efficiency and fostered institutional learning. However, the programme's conceptual framework lacked efficiency-specific indicators at the outset. This limited efforts to retrospectively quantify programme efficiency. (Finding 11)

Conclusion 12:

Varied inclusivity in its intervention processes and limited interoperability showed the importance of standardized monitoring and technical support. While Mexico demonstrated successful participation through initiatives like SIPINNA, most countries primarily relied on partner training, joint field monitoring, and feedback meetings—highlighting the need for more standardized approaches. The programme's focus on technical support for strengthening child protection systems and developing robust data management mechanisms underscored the inherent challenges and time commitment associated with such initiatives, emphasizing the crucial role of technical assistance in facilitating effective monitoring and tailoring interventions based on migratory flows, access to services, and service quality. (Finding 12)

Conclusion 13:

The CotM programme successfully positioned children on the move (CotM) on national agendas. However, significant gaps remain in prioritizing and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable CotM populations. While the programme advanced legislative and policy frameworks supporting the rights of CotM, implementation and enforcement capacities remain insufficient. These gains risk reversal if strong advocacy, policy implementation, and monitoring efforts are not sustained. (Finding 13)

Conclusion 14:

The CotM programme achieved moderate and diverse success in embedding sustainability into the strengthened child protection systems. While legal frameworks, coordination mechanisms, national policy integration, case management, alternatives to detention, and access to mental health and GBV services all witnessed broad improvement through the programme's efforts, sustainability remains contingent upon securing adequate funding, staffing, and garnering sustained government support. As such, incomplete government ownership, limited institutional capacity, and persisting budgetary constraints continue to constrain the programme's long-term viability, which currently depends on continued technical and financial assistance from UNICEF and UNHCR. (Finding 14)

Conclusion 15:

The CotM programme successfully developed and strengthened systems, fostered multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms, leveraged partnerships, and built the capacity of government and community stakeholders. These efforts, including joint advocacy and capacity building initiatives, led to enhanced oversight of CotM protection efforts at national and subnational levels. **However, systemic gaps, such as limited funding, staff turnover, inadequate infrastructure, and weak data sharing systems, constrain the programme's potential for long-term sustainability and large-scale replication.** CotM programme viability relies on UNICEF's and UNHCR's continued technical and financial support. (Finding 15)

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
1	<p>Recommendation 1: To ensure CotM programs effectively address country- and region-specific issues and bottlenecks impacting children on the move, develop (or review and update) regional and country-level Theories of Change (ToCs). These ToCs should frame and prioritize CotM's needs, aligning them with UNICEF's six CotM policy asks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ROs: Ensuring that a wide migration and displacement lens considers all categories of CotM per region, by capitalizing on learnings from LACRO's ToC process to inform development and/or region-specific adaptation of ToCs. ▪ COs: Adopt a CotM lens during development of Country Programme Documents and Situation Analysis by ensuring alignment between country level and regional strategic planning on CotM programming goals. 	<p>UNICEF/ UNHCR</p> <p>All ROs and COs with CotM programmes</p>	Structural	COs and ROs	Before start of next CotM programme	<p>C 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15</p> <p>SA CB R1</p>
2	<p>Recommendation 2: Support governments in developing and implementing laws, protocols, policies, and procedures that explicitly end child immigration detention and that prevent the perpetuation of detention-like practices under different names.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ COs: Provide technical guidance and train immigration authorities as to what technically constitutes alternative care, detention, and detention-like practices. Building government awareness of CotM rights and protection frameworks. ▪ COs: Develop and implement plans on how to identify, deconstruct and modify detention-like situations within shelters and care centres. 	<p>UNICEF/ UNHCR COs in ESAR & LAC</p>	Operational	COs	Before & during implementa tion	<p>C 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15</p> <p>LL 3, 5</p> <p>ES CB R7, R10</p> <p>M CB R3, R5</p> <p>Z CB R4, R6</p> <p>SA CB R3, R7, R9</p>

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COs: Support immigration authorities and/ or relevant government agencies and IPs to actualize legal practices towards “alternative to detention” care models and child-friendly spaces. Promoting research and collaboration between academic institutions, government agencies, and NGOs to advance knowledge. 					
3	<p>Recommendation 3: Intensify efforts to generate disaggregated data and harmonize cross-border evidence on children on the move. This enhanced data collection will provide deeper insights into the multifaceted vulnerabilities and risks these children experience in highly precarious situations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ROs: Work in partnership with COs to improve quality of UNICEF/UNHCR reporting mechanisms and encourage use of cross-border and established indicators to easily share and aggregate data collected; promote standardized data collection tools and methodologies; and the conduction of joint monitoring missions, where relevant (i.e., emerging migration routes and high traffic zones). ROs: Improve current Information Management Systems, by ensuring that UNICEF/UNHCR COs collaborate to bridge data gaps, and enhance data availability, by regularly collecting, tracking, and sharing data on CotM. Taking advantage of alternative data sources, and targeting high mobility corridors, where possible. ROs & COs: Ensure that CotM related programmes provide accurate information on trends, highlight situation of children with intersecting vulnerabilities through data disaggregation (i.e., disability, sexual orientation/gender identity, culture/ethnicity/ race/language), and where possible, target their specific needs. 	UNICEF/ UNHCR COs in ESAR & LACR	Operational	COs	Before and during implementa tion	<p>C 7, 10, 12, 13</p> <p>LL 1, 2, 3</p> <p>ES CB R1, R5, R6, R8</p> <p>M CB R2</p> <p>Z CB R3, R5</p> <p>SA CB R4, R5</p>
4	<p>Recommendation 4: As part of broader child protection systems strengthening efforts, UNICEF and UNHCR will advocate for interoperability with and within administrative data systems. This</p>	UNHCR/ UNICEF COs	Structural & Operational	COs	Before and during	C 1, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
	<p>includes promoting the inclusion of CotM-specific indicators across government and civil society datasets to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ COs: Provide technical assistance to strengthen national information management systems to be inclusive of CotM, by building capacity of local authorities and implementing partners on disaggregated data collection and data management. ▪ COs: Promote standardization of data formats and protocols, ensuring data compatibility across different platforms and organizations. Enhancing disaggregated data collection on CotM migration patterns and trends, within national as well as civil society records. ▪ COs: Support governments in the establishment of transparent and open-access data platforms to allow relevant stakeholders to access and utilize CotM data for research and policy development. Implementing data visualization tools and dashboards to enhance data accessibility and understanding for a wider audience. ▪ ROs & COs: Advocate with governments to invest in technology and infrastructure to support efficient data collection, processing, storage, and analysis. 	in ESAR & LACR			implementation	<p>LL 1, 2, 3</p> <p>ES CB R1, R5, R8</p> <p>M CB R8</p> <p>Z CB R3, R5</p> <p>SA CB R4, R5</p>
5	<p>Recommendation 5: Champion increased budget allocation for national social and child protection services targeting CotM. This includes supporting governments in assessing financial gaps and developing resource mobilization strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ROs: Support country-level strategies to increase public financing for CotM considering operational expenses, the potential expansion/adaptation of inclusive child protection systems and services, national budgetary constraints, and the imperative for consistent international support. 	UNICEF/ UNHCR COs in ESAR & LACR	Structural	COs	Before implementation	<p>C 6, 14, 15</p> <p>LL 5</p> <p>M CB R8</p>

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COs: Provide technical support to governments on how to develop inclusive child protection systems-specific financial sustainability plans, by identifying gaps and priorities and holistically defining long-term budgetary needs. 					
6	<p>Recommendation 6: To secure sustainable financing for inter-agency CotM strategic programming, UNICEF and UNHCR will strategically engage with international financial institutions and relevant donors to mobilize multi-year, cross-border funding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ROs: Develop a roadmap that identifies strategic entry points for engaging with specific IFIs and donors – recognizing their respective mandates, rules and regulations, and modalities-, to leverage funding for CPSS and CotM programming’ gaps. ROs: Strengthen information-sharing mechanisms to facilitate early warning, joint assessments, and coordinated responses; promoting cooperation between governments, international organizations, NGOs, and civil society. COs: Profile CotM programme results with relevant national stakeholders and donors, and advocate for long-term funding solutions, prioritizing the development of joint UNICEF/UNHCR proposals. 	UNICEF/ UNHCR COs in ESAR & LACR	Structural	COs	Before implementa tion	C 14, 15 LL 5
7	<p>Recommendation 7: Support governments in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the child's right to non-discrimination, ensuring children on the move (CotM) are free from xenophobia, discrimination, and marginalization in transit and destination countries. This will be achieved by promoting exchanges between CotM groups and host communities, alongside generating tailored messaging informed by evidence-based research.</p>	UNICEF/ UNHCR COs in ESAR & LACR	Operational	COs	Before and during implementa tion	C 4, 8, 9, 13 LL 2 M CB R1, R4, R7 Z CB R1

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ROs: Ensure that UNICEF/UNHCR communications broadcast positive depictions of CotM —their needs, their rights, and the positive impact they can have on host communities-; and amplify their voices through existing social platforms (e.g., X, Instagram, and U-report). ▪ COs: Support social and behaviour change strategies and campaigns that promote the rights of the child in the context of migration / the rights of children on the move and mobilize government, host communities and local organizations, to protect CotM and their families. ▪ COs: Support national and local implementing partners’ initiatives that through education or sports promote participation and exchanges around CotM, and other vulnerable groups, with host communities. 					SA CB R3, R7, R8, R9