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## SOUTH AFRICA COUNTRY BRIEF



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

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## 1 SUMMARY

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This country brief discusses the key findings of the evaluation of the *EU's Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration Project* (also known as *Children on the Move* or CotM). This 30-month programme (October 2020 – July 2023) covered four countries across two continents: El Salvador and Mexico in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region, and South Africa and Zambia in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region.

The purpose of this country brief is to inform UNHCR and UNICEF child protection officers engaged in decision making and programming involving children on the move of the findings and key lessons learnt from the CotM programme's interventions, as identified by the evaluation. This document summarizes the main messages and draws lessons and conclusions from these experiences for similar interventions in other regions.

## 2 CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

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Across southern Africa, there is a long history of migration; there are several reasons that children move within and across borders in southern African: to escape poverty or conflicts, and the need to support families at home are among the main reasons for children to move to South Africa from countries all over the region. South Africa has an estimated 642,000 migrant and refugee children,<sup>1</sup> making it the country with the largest population of children on the move on the continent.

In South Africa, children on the move are protected by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) and by the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (ACRWC). These conventions give respective countries the responsibility to protect children wherever they are, regardless of their origin. South Africa has also adopted the *Global Compact on Refugees* (2018) and the *Global Compact on Migration* (2018), both of which ensure a human rights and child-centred approach to child protection across borders and within the country.

South Africa's progressive legislative framework provides for migrants' right to self-settlement, access to education, basic healthcare, and protection. Laws and courts determine the care and protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant children, subsequently children are often being placed in child and youth care centres (CYCC) or in community-based foster care.

However, both laws and policies designed to address key welfare and protection challenges for children on the move lack a robust and effective means of implementation. The increasingly restrictive migration governance framework, inconsistencies between policies and practices, and growing xenophobia all pose challenges for those working with children on the move and, above all, for the children themselves.

The CotM programme, funded by the European Union (EU), and implemented in partnership between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) aimed to contribute to the effective protection of children on the move and the realisation of their rights through child protection systems that provide quality integrated services, alternative care and mental health and psychosocial support. The programme sought to document and share lessons learnt and best practices towards the use of alternative care options to replace immigration detention.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. (2023) "Working towards quality services for children on the move in South Africa: Technical Brief 4—addressing structural barriers." <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/media/8321/file/ZAF-technical-brief-4-addressing-structural-barriers-2023.pdf> Accessed 16 October 2023.

The programme's interventions focused on developing a gender-sensitive *Inter-Departmental Protocol on Multi-Disciplinary Management of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children*. It supported the Department of Social Development (DSD) to finalise the *National Guidelines on Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children in South Africa and Unaccompanied South African Children in Distress in Other Countries*, and it partnered with the South Africa Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) to address the barriers that children on the move who lack of identity documents face. The CotM programme worked to end the detention of children, bring coherence between laws and policies, and engaged at high levels with the Department of Home Affairs on the amendments in the Refugee Act.

UNICEF's key frameworks on children on the move, including the *Global Framework on Children on the Move*, the *Six-Point Agenda for Programmatic Action*, and *Children Uprooted: What Local Governments Can Do*, contributed to the approach used by the CotM programme in South Africa.<sup>2</sup>

In South Africa, the CotM programme was implemented fully in 2022, despite Covid-19: interventions were implemented across Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal, Western Cape and Gauteng provinces. UNICEF and UNHCR worked closely with six implementing partners (Future Families, Action Support, the Scalabrini Centre, Refugee Services, the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CORMSA) and Childline).

The programme supported the response to the increasing demand for services for CotM from countries such as: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Cameroon and by South African children on the move within South Africa. The overall objective of the CotM programme was to ensure that "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 objective was structured around four outcomes:

- 1) **Outcome 1:** Child protection systems include gender responsive quality and integrated services in reception centres and other care and attention facilities.
- 2) **Outcome 2:** Child protection systems have integrated gender responsive psychosocial services and prevention mechanism addressing gender-based violence and other structural problems.
- 3) **Outcome 3:** Child protection systems provide alternative care options, with emphasis on community and family-based alternatives.
- 4) **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.

### 3 EVALUATION OVERVIEW

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The evaluation employed mixed methods and tried to unpack 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. The evaluation used a theory-based approach that enabled a nuanced investigation into "What worked?" "For whom?" "In what respect?" "To what extent?" and "In what contexts?" that included participatory and qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The steps involved in this approach included: 1) document review; 2) secondary data analysis; 3) participatory focus groups with key informants; 4) an online survey; and 5) data analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. (2023) "Data Brief: Children on the move--key facts and figures." <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-move-key-facts-figures/>. Accessed 11 November 2023.

## 4 DISCUSSION OF KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS



### Relevance

The programme was developed to address the specific issues and needs of CotM in South Africa. The CotM programme addressed both humanitarian and long-term needs and was aligned with both UNICEF's and UNHCR's programmes and positions vis-à-vis the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The CotM programme aligned and adapted its activities as needed to national frameworks, priorities, and strategies. Partnerships were established with the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and the South African government to address HIV and AIDS, Mental Health, and Psychosocial support for CotM.

The CotM programme was built through partnerships with the South African government; it was layered on existing programmes in the Department of Social Development (DSD) at national and provincial levels, as well as with several other existing projects and partnerships, and was designed to enhance existing interventions. Its design reflects its priority of child protection systems strengthening and ending detentions. This was accomplished through different approaches, including capacity building of IPs, conducting a relevant law review, forming new partnerships around existing interventions dealing with: gender-based violence (GBV), HIV/ AIDS, sexual reproductive health, advocacy and awareness-raising activities, access to assistance and psychosocial support, the promotion of children participation in programmes designed to benefit them, and the provision of documentation to children on the move.

The implementation strategies of the CotM programme demonstrated flexibility to adapt to contextual circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Coherence

UNICEF empowered the staff of IPs across the country with standardized planning and reporting procedures during implementation to ensure effective coordination among the different stakeholders. Several strategies were implemented to ensure the continuing relevance of the programme and interventions, including the development of local and nation-wide coordination mechanisms, new partnerships, the installation of harmonized protocols and procedures, and by addressing other aspects affecting CotM that are particularly relevant within South Africa, (such as the previously mentioned issues of GBV, HIV/ AIDS and lack of documentation). These strategies ensured the CotM programme addressed the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls.

Both the programme approach and specific country design and implementation have formally established a certain degree of coherence with other interventions addressing the same affected groups in the local, regional, and global contexts. The programme leveraged existing partnerships with other relevant actors in the region, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Regional Economic Committees (RECs), such as the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the South African Development Community (SADC), as well as with key Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), and the Regional Child Protection Network (East and Southern Africa). The level of alignment and coordination of the CotM programme with national coordination systems and interventions and with other key actors was highly satisfactory.

South-south collaboration with Mexico also favoured the interchange of learnings and good practices among relevant authorities in Mexico and South Africa. Nevertheless, there was room for greater collaboration, and unexplored opportunities for the interchange of learnings and good practices with the other countries that were part of the CotM programme (i.e., El Salvador and Zambia).

The programme faced barriers of different types: COVID-19 significantly limited collaboration, both across the Atlantic and at the national level; poor access to reliable data on children migration statistics; the overall lack of human resources in different institutions; as well as the different capabilities of various government entities to address the challenges CotM faced in a timely manner. These obstacles were aggravated by the limited amount of financial resources on the South African government’s side, as well as the limited role the Department of Home Affairs played in the integration processes, as well as the complex legal processes involved in registering migrant children.



### Effectiveness

The CotM programme succeeded in making relevant progress to achieving the programme four outcomes listed above and because of the programme CotM were better able to access alternative care, mental health services, education, psychosocial support, interventions for survivors of GBV, treatment for those with HIV. Additionally, the CotM programme provided support to children with disabilities as well as basic health services.

Through the programme, CotM were able to access a range of services. As a result of capacity building interventions, social workers were able to conduct family tracing and reunification and families of children on the move were increasingly able to access birth registration and pensioners services. The interdepartmental protocol on the management of unaccompanied and separated children in South Africa was made to be multi sectoral and was endorsed by most key government departments.

In fact, one of the principal reasons the programme succeeded to the extent it did was its multi-sectoral approach. Another contributing factor was the capacity of the programme to engage with different governmental authorities and IPs with demonstrable experience working with CotM across different provinces in South Africa, as well as the investment made on capacity building at the different levels, and the flexibility to adapt CotM interventions so that they could be incorporated within relevant preexisting projects.

As a result of the work carried out by the CotM programme, future CotM programmes will be based on a much more established child protection system with clear and harmonized protocols, reinforced technical capacity, and both horizontal (among IPs and national authorities) and vertical integration (from the national sphere to the local communities). Nevertheless, there are areas for improvement, such as producing reliable and timely data, strengthening the capacity to respond at times more suited to the needs of CotM, and, above all facilitating the documentation process for migrant children.

The CotM programme made significant progress toward ending the detention of children on the move. This was accomplished in a variety of manners: supporting the South African government to review national laws, developing the technical capacities child protection system staff, developing harmonized procedures and protocols, and through the integration and coordination of different child protection services. Consequently, CotM are now forwarded to asylum refugee camps or CYCC with the help of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). However, challenges in coordination and in ensuring a reliably prompt response from all relevant government departments to the needs of CotM remain.



### Efficiency

The CotM programme benefited from the implementation of a cost-effective strategy that facilitated the allocation of resources in terms of budget, staffing, time, level of effort and partnerships. Financial resources were used efficiently, and accountability was ensured through established reporting systems. The programme also benefited from the funding model, which allowed the incorporation of CotM programme activities into the funded initiatives of IPS dealing with HIV and AIDS,



GBV and child protection. Several partners integrated their activities and projects into the CotM programme, allowing the creation of an economy of scale the more efficient use of the available resources. National authorities also contributed by mobilizing financial and human resources, which complemented the CotM programme’s existing budget and contributed to the attainment of CotM programme goals.

However, the evaluation found that the CotM programme’s monitoring system was not internally operable with that of the national government. Both the SAHRC and the DSD have their own monitoring systems that they use to provide feedback to UNICEF, UNHCR and their IPs. This is done through sharing data on unaccompanied and separated migrant children collected by the National Steering Committee and the National Interagency Working Group (NIAWG) on unaccompanied and separated migrant children. Overall, the monitoring and reporting processes of the CotM programme’s implementing partners (IPs) were inclusive, thanks to capacity building conducted by the UNICEF monitoring and evaluation technical team. The reports were shared and discussed nationally, and in provinces as well as during regional conferences.



### Sustainability

The CotM programme succeeded in placing children on the move on the agenda of the national government. This was accomplished through institutional strengthening, the improvement of legislation, capacity building, and awareness-raising initiatives with base communities. National policies were developed, and national institutions now have a better understanding of working with populations of internally displaced families, children, and returnees, and have improved their ability to protect their rights. The National and Provincial Steering committees on dealing with unaccompanied and separated migrants, and cross border collaborations with neighbouring countries, have been strengthened by the CotM programme, and new provinces with high numbers of migrant children are now participating in the forums noted above.

The alternative models to detention supported by the CotM programme are considered sustainable and likely to continue, as they have been consistently adopted by the national authorities and IPs. Moreover, because of the CotM programme, systems, networks, and partnerships have been established that build stakeholder ownership, improve coordination mechanisms, reinforce national capacities, provide resources to strengthen protection systems and ensure the commitment of the national government with CotM.

Despite this progress, unaccompanied female children and those with disabilities are still particularly vulnerable, even in terms having their specific needs recognized on the government’s agenda. Although several mechanisms to promotion government ownership of the CotM programme were effectively put in place, the sustainability of the progress achieved depends on the capacity of the government institutions and IPs to mobilize the resources needed to sustain the systems, protocols and plans developed by the CotM programme.

## 5 BEST PRACTICES AND KEY LESSONS LEARNED

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### Best Practices

The implementation of CotM programme offers some good practices and lessons:

- a) **UNICEF’s technical support to the Department of Basic Education (DBE):** the coordination and planning of the education sector’s COVID-19 emergency response provided by an embedded consultant who advised the Department of Basic Education on the re-opening of schools and on the education sector’s COVID-19 vaccination campaigns were fundamental to ensuring the continuity of education (to all learners, including CotM) during the pandemic.

- b) Through training and capacity building activities, the **CotM programme increased the knowledge base and strengthened the capabilities IPs (including social workers and centre staff who dealt with CotM daily). The creation of a platform for peer learning and improving services for CotM played a crucial role in this endeavour.**
- c) **Youth-led research, dialogue and broadcasting** was strengthened through a partnership with the Children’s Radio Foundation (CRF). Through the multi-country Children and Young People’s Participatory research programme, 17 youths considered to be especially vulnerable were recruited and trained on how to conduct research and basic data analysis.
- d) **Young reporters were trained and led 16 interactive community radio programs on peacebuilding** as part of the peacebuilding dialogues initiated in response to the July riots. In total, around 270 community members were directly involved in these initiatives.
- e) **Regional forums held in Zambia and at border workshops with Zimbabwe** discussed joint ways to protect CotM and developed approaches to help CotM restore family links.
- f) After **Future Families took on the role of secretariat for the IAWG** (Interagency Working Group), the group was reinvigorated and catalysed the integration of services for children on the move; this included working with undocumented migrant children.

### Lessons Learned

There were many learnings that happened over the course of the CotM programme, some of the principal lessons learned include the following:

- a) **The Importance of multi-country coordination:** the processes involved in family reunification work more effectively and faster there is active coordination between the authorities in countries of origin and countries of destination.
- b) **Developing capacity building activities that engage multiple stakeholders**, including IPs, not only allows for gains in efficiency and scope in terms of skill development processes, but it also **favours informal sharing and learning between peers** as it creates opportunities to share experiences, working methods, frustrations, and solutions in supporting CotM.
- c) The **development of standard operational procedures (SOPs) is essential if authorities and service providers** responsible for facility management are **to have uniform procedures** relating to crisis response and management. SOPs protect CotM from variances in protection levels that arise from the development of *ad hoc* procedures; they allow both IPs and national authorities to adequately prepare facilities for potential crisis situations.
- d) **Children's rights are enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa.** These rights apply to all children in South Africa and include the right to education, the right to health care, the right to social assistance and the right to be protected from ill-treatment, abuse, or degradation. However, to fully guarantee these rights, children need to have appropriate civil documentation; unfortunately, many CotM lack this.
- e) The **government's role in protecting CotM requires more than policies.** To enable effective implementation of policies, laws, and strategic plans designed to protect and serve CotM, it is essential to develop adequate systems, processes and local structures and to mobilize and sensitize local communities so that they can embrace CotM and welcome them into society.
- f) **Making sure that helplines have counsellors who can speak the languages that children on the move speak** contributes to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the helpline service.



## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

#	Recommendation	Suggested activities	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline
1	<b>Recommendation 1:</b> Establish a ToC from the design/beginning, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the programme, its scope, and routes to impact (for future programmes).	<p>Use the regional ToC to develop a country-specific ToC, explaining how expected results in the country contribute to expected results at the global and regional level.</p> <p>Identify country-specific risks and assumptions that may affect the performance of the implementation and the achievement of the outcomes and impact desired.</p>	Structural	UNICEF RO / CO UNHCR RO / CO	Before the beginning of new programmes
2	<b>Recommendation 2:</b> Enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing with all programme countries, including El Salvador and Zambia.	<p>Establish a Community of Practice with other countries and regions with meetings, exchanges, workshops, seminars, training sessions and on-site visits.</p> <p>Include specific joint activities in project design to enhance the knowledge sharing opportunities, at least at regional level.</p>	Operational	UNICEF RO / CO UNHCR RO / CO	Before and during implementation
3	<b>Recommendation 3:</b> Develop capacities of the departments of Home Affairs and Justice for a more efficient and effective response to the requests for documentation from CotM.	<p>Provide technical assistance and capacity building activities in topics related to the existent legal and policy frameworks, data management and information sharing, community engagement, etc.</p> <p>Provide technical guidance to Home Affairs and Justice to overcome the challenges identified and related to the complex legal processes for registration of migrant children.</p>	Operational	UNICEF RO / CO UNHCR RO / CO Home Affairs and Justice	During implementation
4	<b>Recommendation 4:</b> Increase clarity, consistency and understanding of key terms and measurement criteria related to detention, with a specific focus on children.	<p>Develop accurate definitions and indicators, as well as baselines, to be shared and appropriated by stakeholders systematically.</p> <p>Offer lectures and workshops for government officials and implementing partner teams aimed at advocating and raising awareness of the importance of collecting and disseminating data on detention, especially of children.</p> <p>Develop a common glossary with the main terms and definitions.</p>	Operational	UNICEF CO UNHCR CO	During implementation
5	<b>Recommendation 5:</b> Align M&E systems between the modus operandi of the donor, implementing agencies, IPs, and the South African government and other governments involved.	Build the capacity of national information management systems, including that of local authorities, shelters, care centres and implementing partners, to gather data on groups of CotM who might be left behind.	Structural	UNICEF CO UNHCR CO IPs Department of Social	During the implementation

#	Recommendation	Suggested activities	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline
		<p>Standardize disaggregated data collection, monitoring, and reporting tools and transparently sharing this data with relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Adapt M&amp;E systems to "communicate effectively" with public entities' data systems, without compromising usefulness for project management and implementation.</p>		Development	
6	<b>Recommendation 6:</b> Improve access to essential services for CotM and their families, such as access to healthcare, education, psychological support, and social subsidies.	<p>Appoint a dedicated "childcare" worker at each Refugee Reception Center to facilitate access to information and basic services for children on the move (e.g. healthcare, education, psychological support, and social grants).</p> <p>Create and implement a supervision mechanism to ensure the follow-up of children's cases by social workers and the consistent monitoring of family reunification processes after care.</p>	Operational	SAHRC/IPS	During and after implementation
7	<b>Recommendation 7:</b> Reinforce the implementation of child-friendly legal placement practices across children's homes, orphanages, and asylum reception offices.	<p>Develop comprehensive guidelines outlining child-friendly legal placement practices.</p> <p>Disseminate guidelines to all relevant stakeholders, including children's homes, orphanages, and asylum reception offices.</p> <p>Provide training sessions for staff working in children's homes, orphanages, and asylum reception offices on child-friendly legal placement practices. Include modules on child rights, trauma-informed care, and cultural sensitivity.</p>	Operational	Department of Social Development UNICEF CO UNHCR CO	During the implementation
8	<b>Recommendation 8:</b> Enhance safety and protection within Refugee Reception Centres.	<p>Improve the quality of security at Refugee Reception Centres to prevent sexual assault and prostitution of children on the move.</p> <p>Develop guidelines and train Refugee Reception Centre staff on standard security measures and procedures.</p>	Operational	Department of Social Development	During and after implementation
9	<b>Recommendation 9:</b> Prevent statelessness among children on the move by ensuring they have legal protection, can realize their rights and have access to relevant services.	<p>Advocate to the South Africa government to sign a Declaration or Convention on the Eradication of Statelessness, to protect children on the move from being stateless (recommended by RSS).</p>	Structural	Government of SA	During implementation