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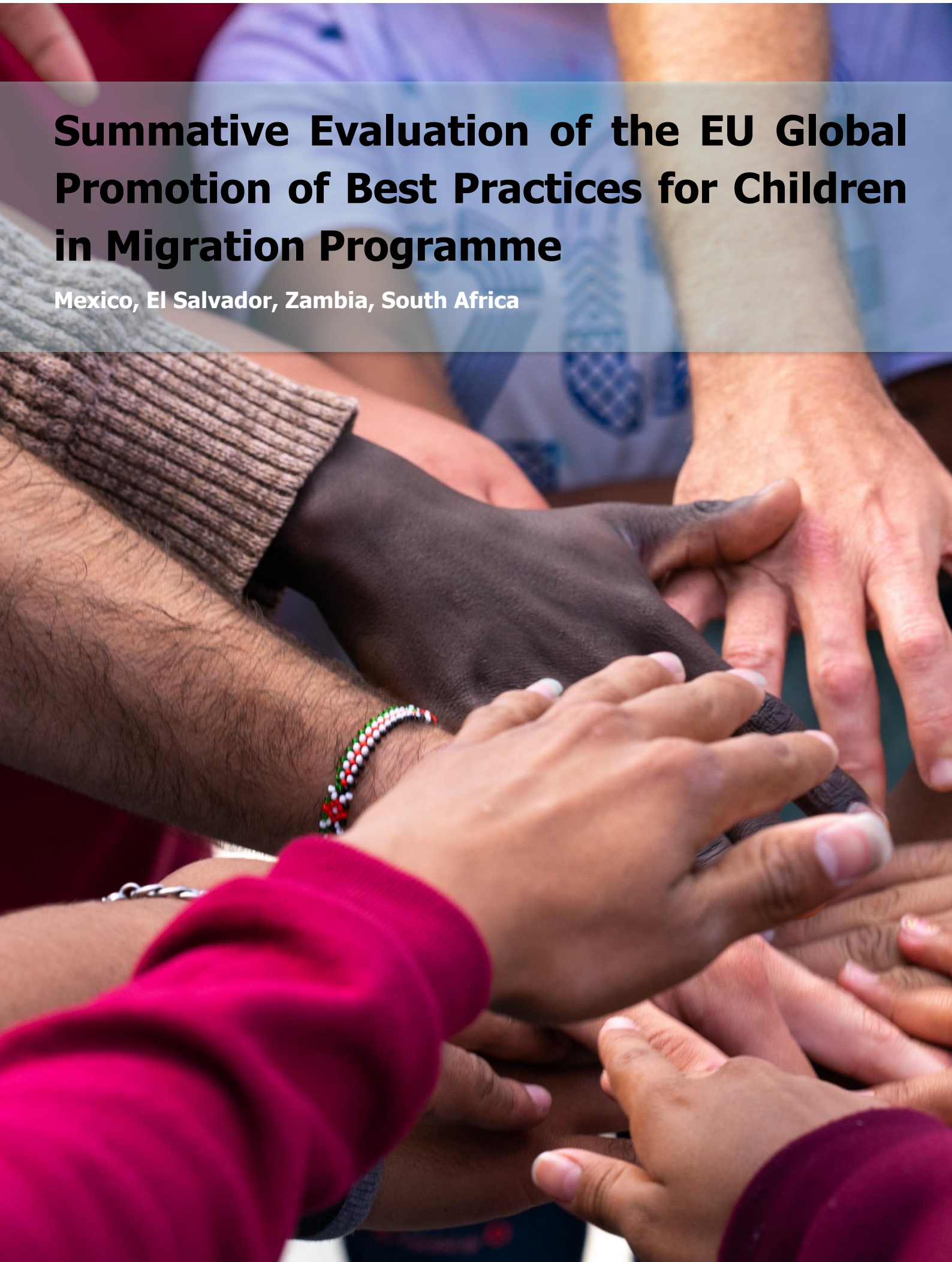
Summative Evaluation of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration Programme

Mexico, El Salvador, Zambia, South Africa



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

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Three United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

December 2023

Photo credit: © UNICEF Mexico/2023/Hernández. *Sport and other psychosocial activities can help manage emotions and provide tools for the lives of children and adolescents on the move. In Tijuana, through implementing partners, UNICEF brings sports and educational activities in shelters for children on the move to promote their emotional and physical well-being*.

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For citation please use:

Johnston, D. et al. (2023) "Summative Evaluation of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration (2020 – 2023) Programme." United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) Evaluation Office, New York.

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Acknowledgements

This exercise has been a global collaborative effort, involving a wide array of stakeholders. We are thankful to all the stakeholders who provided their valuable experiences, insights, and impressions on the implementation of the programme: UNICEF and UNHCR staff at country, regional and headquarters levels, government representatives, implementing partners, non-governmental organisations and other United Nations agencies and frontline workers directly involved in the provision of services and assistance to children on the move.

We would like to express our gratitude to the various groups of child refugees and migrants who interacted with members of the evaluation team: your experiences and feedback was crucial in the endeavour to make future CotM programmes more responsive to your different needs.

We are grateful for the contributions provided by all the members of the Evaluation Reference Group[1], as well as the members of the Evaluation Management Group, listed below:

- **Violeta Leiva** – Evaluation Manager & Chair of the Evaluation Management Group, Evaluation Specialist, UNICEF ESARO
- **Elena Gariboldi** - Child Protection and M&E Consultant, UNICEF ESARO
- **Nicola Brandt** – Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF ESARO
- **Fiona Wambui Gatere** – Evaluation Specialist, UNHCR South Africa
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who offered technical expertise and continued feedback at critical points during the evaluation process and who participated in the validation of the preliminary findings and co-creation of recommendations to ensure their usefulness for the organizations involved.

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CR, GG, NC, CP, MN	JD, LBF	1	21 July 2023
CR, CC, GG, NC, CP, MN	HH	2	15 September 2023
CC, GGA, NAC, CP, MN, JM, DJ	FR	3	6 November 2023
DJ, NAC, CC, GGA, MN, CP	LBF	4	27 November 2023
DJ, NAC, CC, GGA, MN, CP	DJ, JM	5	14 December 2023

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BPRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (US)
BIP	Best Interest Principle
CANAF	Centro de Atención a la Niñez, Adolescencia y Familias Migrantes Retornadas / Center for the Care of Children and Migrant Returnee Families (El Salvador)
CAS	Centros de Assistencia Social/ Social Assistance Centers
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CO	Country Office
COMAR	Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados / The Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (Mexico)
CONAPINA	Consejo Nacional de la Primeria Infancia, Niñez y Adolescencia (El Salvador)
CONNA	Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y Adolescencia / National Council for Children and Adolescents (El Salvador)
CoRMSA	Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa
CotM	Children on the Move
CPA	Child Protection Authority(ies)
CPD	Country Program Document
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRF	Children's Radio Foundation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWAC	Community Welfare Assistance Committee
CYCC	Child and Youth Care Centres
CYCW	Child and Youth Care Worker
DGME	Direccion General de Migración y Extranjeria / General Directorate on Migration and Foreign Affairs (El Salvador)
DHA	Department of Home Affairs (South Africa)
SNDIF	Sistema Nacional Para para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia / National System for Integral Family Development (Mexico)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSD	Department of Social Development (South Africa)
EA	Evaluability Assessment
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ESAR	Eastern and Southern Africa Region

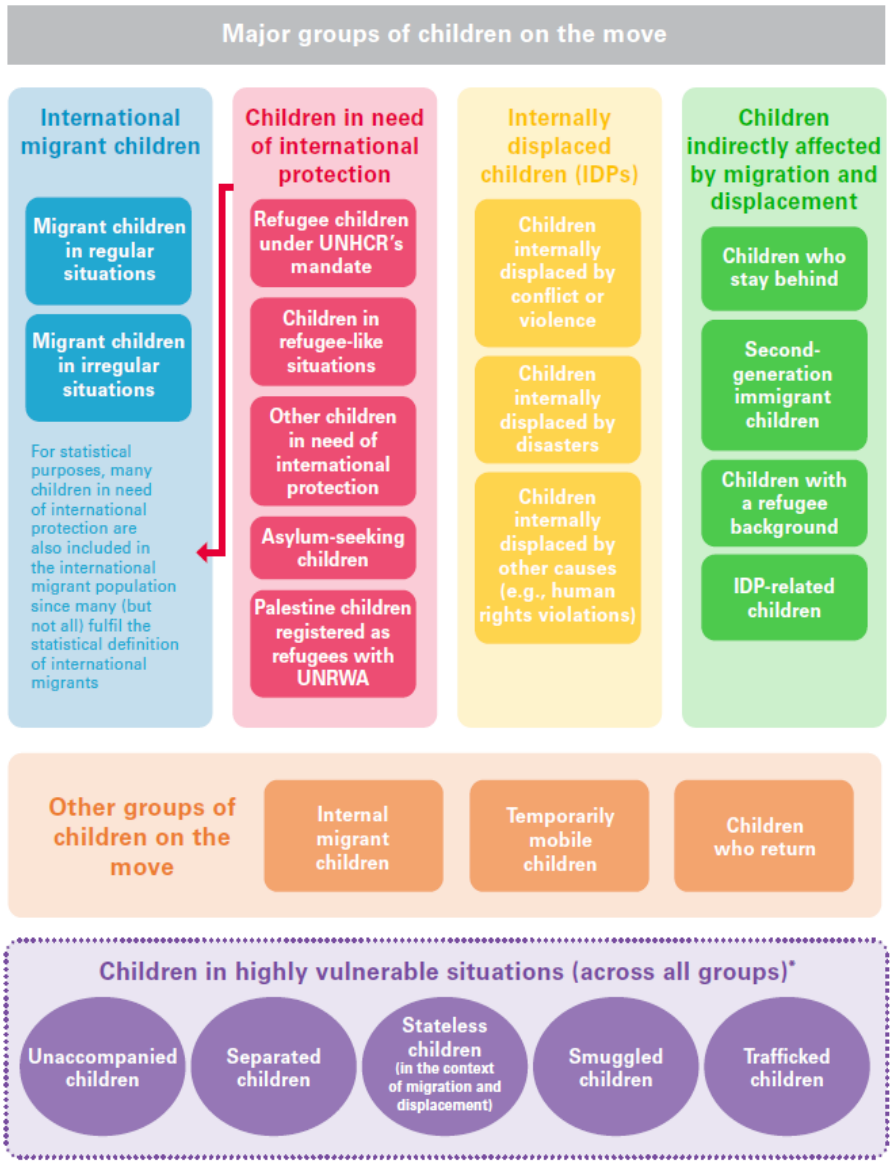
ESARO	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (UNICEF)
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
FBO	Faith-based Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCM	Global Compact for Migration
GEEW/G	Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women/ Girls
GIMH	Grupo Interagencia de la Movilidad Humanitaria/ Interagency Group on Human Mobility (UN Mexico)
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
GSC	Global Steering Committee
HDP Nexus	Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus
HQ	Headquarters
HRBA	Human Right's Based Approach
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDC	International Detention Coalition
IDHUCA	Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centro Americana 'José Simeón Cañas' / Institute of Human Rights of the Central American University 'José Simeón Cañas' (El Salvador)
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority for Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTPA	International Partnerships (EU)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementing Partner
ISNA	Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia / Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (El Salvador)
KII	Key Informant Interview
LACR	Latin America and the Caribbean Region
LACRO	Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (UNICEF)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCDSS	Ministry of Community Development and Social Services of Zambia

MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs (South Africa)
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MIDSA	Migration Dialogue of Southern African Countries
MIRPS	Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones / Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México and Panamá)
MoHAIS	Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security (Zambia)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAB	National Advisory Board
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMES	National Monitoring and Evaluation System (Zambia)
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development—Development Assistance Committee
PDDH	Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos / Human Rights Ombudsperson (El Salvador)
PPNNA	Procuraduría de Protección de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes / Child Protection Authorities (Mexico)
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RAG	Red-Amber-Green
RBA	Regional Bureau for the Americas (UNHCR)
RBSA	Regional Bureau for Southern Africa (UNHCR)
RCM	Regional Conference on Migration
REDLAC	Red de Fondos Ambientales de Latinoamérica y el Caribe/ Latin America and Caribbean Environmental Fund Network
RF	Results Framework
RO	Regional Office
RTC	Regional Technical Committee
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SCMIMS	Statutory and Integrated Case Management Information System
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

SIPINNA	Sistema Nacional de Protección Integral a la Niñez y la Adolescencia / National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (Mexico)
SNDF	Sistema National para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia / National Welfare System (Mexico)
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNJP	United Nations Joint Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary of Terms

Children on the Move (CotM) represent a highly diverse population. They live in a wide variety of circumstances that shape their risks, deprivations, needs and opportunities. Many are of these children are marginalised and highly vulnerable. The conceptual framework below illustrates the major categories of children on the move and key groups that fall under each category and is followed by a description of each group. N.B. Children may fall into multiple categories and switch between groups. The category "other children on the move" includes children who do not fit squarely under the major categories but also need to be counted. Groups noted in purple represent children on the move who are in highly vulnerable situations and whose precarious circumstances may demand more targeted intervention.[2]



[2] International Data Alliance for Children on the Move. (2023). Children on the Move: Key terms, definitions and concepts. United Nations Children's Fund, New York.

Children on the Move: A compound concept that has gained traction on the operational level in the international community, the term describes children who have been directly or indirectly affected by migration and displacement, either internationally across borders or within the same country. When referring to children on the move, 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[3] and child victims of cross-border trafficking.[4]

Child: A child is every human being below the age of 18 years**.**

Children Affected by Migration: The umbrella term for children who fall within the target groups of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme, which includes children affected by labour migration, trafficked children, refugee, and asylum-seeking children, separated and unaccompanied children, documented and undocumented migrant children, children in host communities, internally displaced children, and stateless children. Definitions for these categories are provided in this glossary of terms.

International Migrant Children: A child who has changed his or her country of residence and established new residence in the country within a given year. International migrant can be either 'immigrant' or 'emigrant' and include those with national or foreign citizenships or stateless persons.[5]

Migrant Children in Regular Situations: A child who moves or has moved across an international border and is authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to with that State is a party.[6]

Migrant Children in Irregular Situations: A child who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.[7]

Displaced Children: Children who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or place of habitual residence as a result of, or in order to avoid, the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters. The term includes internally displaced person (IDPs) and refugees.[8]

Internally Displaced Children: Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular because of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border."[9] These displacements can be due to conflict, situations of generalized violence, sudden- and slow-onset disasters, and other causes.

[3] This only includes children who are stateless in the context of migration or displacement.
[4] International Data Alliance for Children on the Move. (2023). Children on the Move: Key terms, definitions and concepts. United Nations Children's Fund, New York.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] OHCHR. (1998). Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Children in need of International Protection (under UNHCR's mandate)

Refugee Children: Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.[10]

Children in Refugee-like Situations: A category which is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks like those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained.[11]

Other Children in need of International Protection: People who are outside their country or territory of origin, typically because they have been forcibly displaced across international borders, who have not been reported under other categories (refugees, asylum seekers, people in refugee-like situations) but who likely need international protection, including protection against forced return, as well as access to basic services on a temporary or longer-term basis.[12]

Asylum-Seeking Children: A general term used to describe any person who is seeking international protection. In some countries, it may be used as a legal term to refer to a person who has applied for refugee status or another form of international protection but is still waiting to receive a final decision on the determination of their status. An asylum-seeker may also refer to a person who intends to apply for asylum but has not yet formally started the asylum application process.[13]

Children Indirectly Affected by Migration and Displacement:

Children who stay behind: Children who remain in their home countries or in their countries of habitual residence while their parent(s) or caregiver(s) migrate.[14]

Second-generation Immigrant Children: Children who are not immigrants themselves but are born to immigrant parents.

Children with a Refugee Background: Groups of children related to refugees who are not currently in need of international protection.[15]

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

Other Groups of Children on the Move:

Internal Migrant Children: The movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence.[16]

International Temporarily Mobile Children: All international border crossings except those related to changes in the resident population. This may include circular or pendular movement of persons who are

[10] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2023). Master Glossary of Terms. www.unhcr.org/glossary, accessed 20 November 2023.
[11] International Data Alliance for Children on the Move. (2023). Children on the Move: Key terms, definitions, and concepts. United Nations Children's Fund, New York.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

not residents of the country and travelled to the same country more than once during a particular year.[17]

Children who Return: In a general sense, the act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure. This could be within the territorial boundaries of a country, as in the case of returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and demobilized combatants; or between a country of destination or transit and a country of origin, as in the case of migrant workers, refugees, or asylum seekers.[18]

Children in highly vulnerable situations (across all groups)

Migrants in Vulnerable Situations: Persons who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care.[19]

Trafficked and Smuggled Children: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation. The procurement, to obtain—directly or indirectly—a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a state party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.[20]

Unaccompanied Children: Children who have been separated from both parents and other relative and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.[21]

Separated Children: Children who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.[22]

Stateless Children (in the Context of Migration and Displacement): A person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.[23]

Mixed Movement: Flows of people who are on the move for different reasons but make use of the same routes and means of transport to reach an international destination. Mixed flows can include refugees, asylum-seekers, trafficked persons, stateless persons, populations affected by humanitarian crises, unaccompanied or separated children as well as other irregular migrants. These groups have varying needs and profiles and are not mutually exclusive, as people often have more than one reason for leaving home.[24]

A note on intersecting vulnerabilities: The EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme targets children in highly vulnerable situations (across all groups). Children on the move are at risk of economic and/ or sexual exploitation, neglect, abuse and violence. This vulnerability intersects with other cross-cutting vulnerabilities that may place children on the move especially at risk. These vulnerabilities include those relating to gender, legal status, disability, or belonging to a minority ethnic group, among others. Through this report, we refer to 'intersecting vulnerabilities' to understand the multiple layers of vulnerability and risk faced by children on the move.

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] UNHCR. (2016) "Glossary." *The 10-Point Plan in Action*. https://www.refworld.org/docid/59e99eb94.html Accessed 17 October 2023.

Executive 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 (ESA) 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.

The evaluation team retrospectively developed a global theory of change (ToC) to examine the causal linkages between short-term and long-term outcomes of the CotM programme and reflect on what worked and what did not in each outcome pathway. Evaluation questions were structured around the core criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Data collection was conducted between May and October 2023. The evaluation team applied a mixed methods approach including document review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and an electronic survey.

Overview of conclusions[25]

Conclusion 1:

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)

[25] 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.

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:

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)

Recommendations

The evaluation offers seven recommendations building on efforts made to date by UNHCR and UNICEF country offices, regional offices, government partners and implementing partners to ensure that children on the move are effectively protected and their rights being realised.

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.

- **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.

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.

- **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.
- **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.

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.

- **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.

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 includes promoting the inclusion of CotM-specific indicators across government and civil society datasets to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis.

- **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.

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.

- **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.
- **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.

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.

- **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.

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.

- **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 of CotM, and other vulnerable groups, with host communities.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the final evaluation of the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme (henceforth referred to as the CotM programme), which was launched by the European Union (EU) in partnership with UNICEF and UNHCR. The multi-country programme had a total budget of USD $8.9M over the 33 months of the programme (October 2020 – July 2023). The CotM programme covered four countries and two regions: El Salvador and Mexico in Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), and Zambia and South Africa in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA). The CotM programme was under the overall coordination of the ESAR Office and is one of several cross-regional programmes jointly implemented by UNICEF and UNHCR to support Children on the Move (CotM).

The report begins by outlining the evaluation objectives and scope as well as the programmatic and normative frameworks that guided programme design and implementation. It subsequently provides details of the evaluation framework and methodology, including limitations and mitigation measures adopted by the evaluation team, as well as normative and ethical considerations. Findings are presented globally, according to the criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC), namely: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Gender, diversity, and human rights concerns are mainstreamed as appropriate. The report closes with conclusions, best practices, lessons learned and recommendations.

2. Objectives and scope of the evaluation

2.1 Overview of the programme

The right of children and their families to seek protection and better life opportunities through migration is widely recognized through international human rights frameworks and norms;[26] Moreover, the recent and increased flow of people leaving their communities due to conflict, violence or poverty has made migration and displacement a global priority, reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[27] Around the world, nearly 50 million children have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced: more than half fled violence or insecurity.[28]

Children on the move is a compound concept that describes children who have been directly affected by migration and displacement, either internationally across borders or within the same country.[29] This category includes migrant, internally displaced, returnee, asylum seeking and refugee children, as well as children who move voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers. CotM 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, and there is an urgent need to better protect these children.

[26] For a complete list, see Annex 3 of: United Nations Children's Fund. (2017) Global Programme Framework on Children on the Move. New York.
[27] These SDBs are 10.7: Well Managed Migration; 8.7: Trafficking and Modern Slavery; 8.8 Migrant Workers Rights; 5.2: Trafficking of Women and Girls.
[28] United Nations Children's Fund. (2016) Uprooted: The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children. https://data.unicef.org/resources/uprooted-growing-crisis-refugee-migrant-children/. Accessed 21 November 2023.
[29] International Data Alliance for Children on the Move. (2023) Children on the Move: Key terms definitions and concepts. United Nations Children's Fund, New York, p. 7.

The CotM programme was launched to strengthen child protections systems and provide alternatives to immigration detention in four countries with significant levels of migration. The CotM programme sought 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)." Children on the move, their mothers, fathers and caregivers benefited from the programme, as did implementing partners, public servants, and the care centre/ shelter staff who received technical assistance or training as a result of the UNHCR/ UNICEF alliance.

The overall programme objective 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.

During the implementation of the programme, Mexico and South Africa developed ToCs based on their countries' specific activities. For El Salvador and Zambia, country ToCs were reconstructed during the Inception Phase (Annex 8.9).[30] The evaluation team retrospectively developed a global theory of change (ToC) (see below) to examine the causal linkages between short-term and long-term outcomes of the CotM programme and reflect on what worked and what did not in each outcome pathway. This ToC was constructed based on EU/UNHCR/UNICEF programme documents, consultations with key stakeholders and in collaboration with COs and regional offices.

The global ToC reconstructed outlines the logical framework that supports the EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration programme, and the outputs align with programme activity indicators. The ToC includes a vision, areas of impact, outcomes, outputs, change pathways, crosscutting approaches and assumptions and was designed to test variances in how the programme was implemented and adapted to each country's context.

The theory behind the CotM programme is as follows:

- **IF** the capacities of child protection systems are enhanced to include integrated gender responsive services and alternative care options to immigration detention,
- **AND** the capacity of frontline actors to detect children at risk and to refer them to appropriate alternative support are strengthened,
- **AND** lessons learned and best practices are documented and shared,
- **THEN** children on the move will be effectively protected, and their rights realized.

The assumptions underlying the ToC are as follows:

- Around the world, the number of people on the move will follow the trend of rapid growth for the foreseeable future.
- A child on the move who benefits from appropriate services has less risk of ending up in detention.

[30] As a global ToC was not a component of the initial CotM programme design, the ToR for this evaluation requested the retrospective construction of a global ToC.

- Lessons learned and best practices from the CotM programme can positively inform related CotM programmes in other contexts.
- UNICEF and UNHCR have the capacities, resources, and access to funding to collaboratively implement CotM programmes in a manner that promotes local ownership, sustainability, and long-term solutions.

Theory of Change: EU Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration (2020-2023)

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, UNICEF Global Programme Framework on Children on the Move, Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Global Compact for Migration, Global Compact on Refugees, New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021, 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

CHANGE PATHWAYS

- Support national authorities, institutions and relevant committees for the implementation and improvement of their SOPS
- Build capacity of frontline staff, officials and partners for improved basic services for CotM.
- Develop and distribute communication for development (C4D) in key areas)e.g., rights of CotM, responsibilities, referral pathways and available services during the migratory route).
- Provide resources and support to frontline providers of basic services and/ or to CotM and their families.
- Strengthen the systems of MHPSS and resilience building for CotM.
- Build the capacity to deliver PSS for CotM.
- Provide PSS and resilience building services for CotM and their families.
- Build the gender-responsive capacities of frontline actors to detect and refer CotM suffering or at risk of GBV or other trauma.
- Strengthen the systems and referral pathways to address GBV and trauma.
- Strengthen referrals and case management of unaccompanied and at risk CotM.
- Capacity building focused on alternatives to detention, to increase referrals to alternative care of unaccompanied CotM.
- Pilot and improve the options of alternative care for vulnerable CotM.
- Help improve information and case management systems and registries; promote the systemic use of data management systems and share lessons learnt about data management systems.
- Ensure knowledge exchange, analyse lessons learned and disseminate key data about CotM and the best practices to national, regional and international stakeholders.
- Defining models, strategies and giving input and feedback to global strategies about CotM.
- Facilitate south-south exchange and promote cross border coordination and collaboration aligned with national systems.

OUTPUTS

- Improved systems for coordinated care and access to gender sensitive basic services.
- CotM have increased access to gender response MPHSS services.
- Gender-responsive capacities of frontline actors to detect children on the move suffering from, or at risk of trauma and gender-based violence, and to refer them to appropriate alternative family and community-based care and MHPSS is strengthened.
- Improved system and increased capacities of gender responsive child protection service providers and relevant official actors for identification, case management (BIA and BID), referrals and legal aid.
- Availability of appropriate gender-responsive family and community and family-based alternatives.
- Data on the prevalence of child immigration detention and on children benefiting from alternative care is strengthened and made available to relevant institutions and partners working on the issue and the use of registries and case management is promoted.
- Evidence on gender sensitive good practice is documented and made available to relevant institutions and partners across the 4 countries.

OUTCOMES

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

IMPACT AREAS

- CHILD RIGHTS AND PROTECTION
- SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING
- ASSISTANCE
- CAPACITY BUILDING
- DURABLE SOLUTIONS
- KNOWLEDGE SHARING

VISION

Children on the Move are effectively protected, and their rights are being realized.

CROSS CUTTING APPROACHES : Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP); partnerships; protection, gender, diversity and inclusion

ASSUMPTIONS

- The number of people on the move around the world will continue the trend of rapid growth for the foreseeable future
- A child on the move who benefits from appropriate services has less risk of ending up in detention.
- Even as Mexico, Zambia, El Salvador and South Africa will continue to be countries of origin for mixed migration, they will continue to be countries of transit.
- UNICEF & UNHCR have the capacities, resources and access to funding to collaboratively implement CotM progammes in a manner that promotes local ownership, sustainability, and long-term solutions.
- Lessons learned and best practices from the CotM project can positively inform future CotM and Children affected by Migration (CAM) projects in other contexts.

The CotM programme is explicitly aligned with the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is also implicitly framed by the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the Global Compact on Refugees, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the European Consensus on Development "Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future," and the UNICEF Global Framework for Children on the Move.

Since the programme's inception, UNICEF has promoted a systems' strengthening approach to child protection. In its recently released Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030, it makes specific mention of the "gender responsive justice services" and "scaling up alternatives to detention."[31] Within the child protection systems approach, "UNICEF has prioritized the planning, development and support to the social service workforce to prevent and respond to the exploitation and abuse of all children at the national level, including children on the move."[32]

The focus on strengthening national child protections systems promotes a continuity of care for children on the move, including in the country of origin, transit, and destination. Key to this approach—in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNICEF's Core Commitments to Children (CCCs)—is a focus on working towards high quality, gender responsive, integrated service provision. Technical support and advocacy with government authorities and service providers to address the needs of CotM and their families is key, including enabling access to quality services and the documentation and sharing of lessons learned and best practices.

The primary users of this evaluation are the EU, UNHCR, and UNICEF offices responsible for design, implementation, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation aspects of the CotM programme, which are in El Salvador, Mexico, South Africa and Zambia and their respective regional offices/bureaus.

Secondary audiences include:

- The governments of El Salvador, Mexico, South Africa, and Zambia.
- Partners involved in child protection/migration (e.g., the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Detention Coalition (IDC), and Save the Children).
- EU, US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM).
- Rights holders, primarily in communities and institutions where UNICEF and UNHCR have intervened and might intervene in the future.

2.2 Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation covers the full CotM programme cycle and was undertaken from January through November 2023, having overlapped with the last several months of the programme. The CotM programme was initially expected to run until April 2023, but an extension was granted for implementation through July 2023. The evaluation assessed programme implementation in each of the four programme countries. Given the broad nature of the CotM programme and the multiple categories of CotM, the evaluation examined how these categories were addressed by the programme, in addition to taking gender, inclusion and intersection considerations into account.

[31] UNICEF. (2021) Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030, p 38.
[32] Ibid, p 40.

All stakeholder groups, relevant to programme implementation, were engaged during the evaluation. These included UNICEF and UNHCR staff at country, regional and headquarters (HQ) levels, implementing partners, government counterparts, IOM, and frontline social workers. As agreed during the inception phase, the evaluation included the participation of children on the move and/ or their parents and caregivers.[33]

3. Evaluation framework and methodology

The structure for the evaluation is outlined in the evaluation matrix (see Annex 8.3), which maps the evaluation questions against criteria, indicators, data sources and data collection methods. The data collection tools (see Annex 8.7) were designed based on the matrix, which also provided the coding structure used for analysis and data triangulation. Data collection methods were designed to promote the active engagement of all stakeholders. The evaluation questions can be found in Table 1 below. This approach allowed the team to triangulate between evidence streams, and to ensure a consistent approach to data collection and analysis across program countries and regions. This in turn enabled the evaluation team to establish clear evidence chains for the findings.

3.1 Methodological design

The evaluation applied a theory-based approach that enabled a utilization-focused examination of the various ways that programme 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's utilization-focus (U-FE)[34] informed how the evaluation was planned and conducted to ensure that the findings were likely to be utilized by real and specific users.[35]

The CotM programme had a strong focus on activities related to capacity building, technical assistance and the development of lessons learned and best practices. A theory-based approach is well suited to examine this type of programme because it enables recording progress toward programme objectives, even if those objectives were not fully realized.

3.1.1 Gender, equity, and human rights-based approach

The two regions and four countries covered by the CotM programme experience diverse mixed migration flows and the focus of the CotM programme varied according to the needs of different categories of CotM, depending on regional and country context and priorities. Data collection tools were adapted to be relevant to each category of stakeholder, in terms of scope, focus, and language (e.g., English and Spanish).

Gender Equality, the Empowerment of Women/ Girls (GEEW/G) and the principles of equity, human rights, and doing no harm were transversally integrated into the evaluation matrix, data collection tools, as well as in coding and analysis matrices: These considerations are also highlighted in the findings presented throughout this report. Additionally, the evaluation team examined the extent to which gender disaggregated results were available and explored partly the differential impact of the programme's intervention on boys and girls, as well as on different categories of CotM

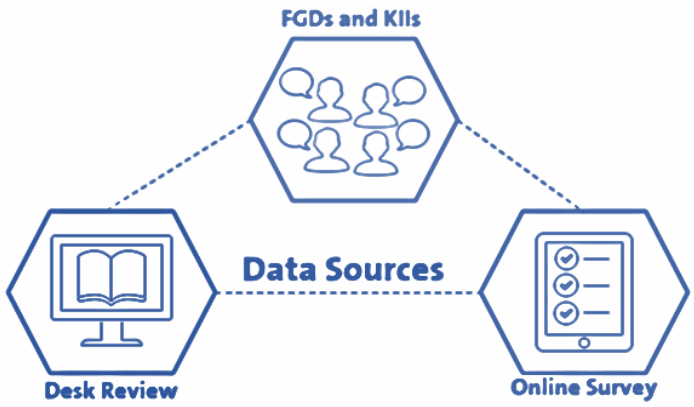
[33] See the section on ethical considerations in the Norms and Standards section below.
[34] https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/utilisation-focused-evaluation
[35] https://www.methodspace.com/blog/what-utilization-focused-evaluation-is-and-why-it-matters

Table 1: Evaluation Questions

Criteria	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	1. To what extent was a rationale for the program design provided and valid (i.e., aligned with country priorities, key partners' priorities, donor policies, UNICEF's ad UNHCR's programmatic niche and positioning in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus)? To what extent was adaptability to context, risk and changing circumstances built into the design? 2. How did program design expand on existing projects and partnerships? To what extent were the interventions designed for child protection systems strengthening and ending detention (e.g., included hand over and transition plans)? 3. During implementation, to what extent and how has the program ensured that it remained relevant to the needs of rights-holders and to systems-strengthening objectives in the four countries and/or adapted as needed to contextual changes (including, but not limited to, COVID19 pandemic and changes in migratory fluxes and trends)? How has the program ensured accountability to children on the move and other affected populations? To what extent the program response was tailored to the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls?
Coherence	4. To what extent is the program in synchrony with relevant coordination systems in each setting (e.g., sector working groups, UN Network on Migration, regional fora, Opportunities and Issue Based Coalitions on Human Mobility, the Regional Conference on Migration, The Risk Emergency Disaster Working Group for Latin America, and the Caribbean (REDLAC)) and with the efforts of other key actors at national and regional level? 5. What were any barriers to and opportunities for synergies for partnerships, and how were these managed by the different country teams? 6. To what extent has the program facilitated cross-regional, as well as inter-regional, learning and exchanges of good practices and inter-government peer learning initiatives?
Effectiveness	7. How and to what extent have the program activities resulted in children accessing quality integrated services, alternative care, mental health, and psychosocial support? To what extent, how and why did the program components achieve expected progress, within the expected timeframe? What does this tell us and future programming for migration about what works, how and why for children on the move with different characteristics and in different settings? 8. To what degree has the program contributed to prevent and end immigration detention? To what extent has the program strengthened the capacity of child protection systems to protect children on the move? 9. How did the monitoring system within countries and across regions contribute to program effectiveness? How does it demonstrate results for the most vulnerable children (e.g., girls and children with disabilities) and on human rights, gender, and equity dimensions more generally?
Efficiency	10. To what extent has the program applied a cost-effective approach to building the capacity of the child protection systems to protect children on the move? How effectively have resources been used to complement existing capacities and achieve results in the four country-specific interventions within the two regions? To what extent has the availability of resources enabled interventions implemented by different country offices and regional offices? 11. Have the intervention processes, including program monitoring, evaluation and learning been inclusive and participatory? Is the monitoring system built/ inter-operable with government systems or is it standalone?
Sustainability	12. To what extent has the program succeeded in placing children on the move on the agenda of national governments and regional governance bodies, in particular the needs of most vulnerable children (e.g., girls, LGBTQI+, and children with disabilities)? 13. To what extent are results of the child protection systems-strengthening working (e.g., improving case management systems, strengthening data, promoting care and alternatives to detention; access to MHPSS and GBV services) and sustainable and resilient to risk once UNICEF/UNHCR support ends? How likely are those results to continue once the program resources cease? 14. What systems and partnerships have been put in place to build stakeholder ownership, capacity and resources and ensure that child protection systems-strengthening work is inclusive of children on the move and can be scaled up by governments and complemented by civil society and other UNICEF/UNHCR partners?

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Figure 1: Data Sources



3.2.1 Data Collection methods

Data collection was conducted between May and October 2023. The evaluation team applied a mixed methods approach[36] to collecting and triangulating qualitative and quantitative data from different data sets to increase the rigour of the findings. A purposive stratified sampling strategy[37] was applied across all qualitative data collection methods to identify, select, and make efficient use of limited yet information-rich sources to capture variations across the strata.

Data collection methods included:

Document review: A review of documents was conducted over three phases: an initial review of programme documents during the design of the evaluation; an in-depth review of country- and regional-level data and relevant documentation regarding other programmes, laws and initiatives linked to the CotM programme in each country during the data collection phase[38]; and a final batch during the revision of the draft of the evaluation report. Annex 8.16 presents the list of documents that were consulted and coded, as well as those that were used as references in this report.

Key informant interviews (KIIs): KIIs were one of the two principal tools used for qualitative data collection: these were conducted both in person and remotely. A total of 123 semi-structured interviews were conducted over the four countries with stakeholders ranging from UNICEF and UNHCR country and regional offices/bureaus and HQ staff, government and university counterparts, human rights commissions, implementing partners, civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as relevant stakeholders from the EU,

[36] This approach combined quantitative analysis (using numerical or statistical data) with qualitative analysis, which enabled participants' voices to be included while providing nuance/ detail behind the statistics/ numbers.

[37] Relevant stakeholders were identified and divided into homogenous subpopulations or stratum and members from each subpopulation were sampled.

[38] Nexus Interamerican Consulting Services. (2021) "Evaluación de las intervenciones en materia de migración en México, Guatemala, Honduras y El Salvador, período entre 2017-2020 (UNICEF): Informe País – El Salvador." June 2021; Nexus Interamerican Consulting Services. (2021) "Evaluación de las intervenciones en materia de migración en México, Guatemala, Honduras y El Salvador, período entre 2017-2020 (UNICEF): Informe País – Mexico." February 2021; UNICEF. (2020) "What works to protect children on the move: Rapid Evidence Assessment." ; UNICEF. (2021) "Programme Evaluation: Protecting Children on The Move in the Horn of Africa 2021."

United Nations,[39] and frontline workers. Annex 8.13 provides details of KII participants. The data collection tools can be found in annex 8.7. KIIs were conducted in English (Zambia, S. Africa), Spanish (Mexico, El Salvador), and Lozi and Bemba (Zambia).

Focus group discussions (FGDs): FGDs with implementing partners and programme beneficiaries were the other principal tool used for qualitative data collection. The format and structure of FGDs with youth (see Annex 8.7) were adapted to suit the age of the participants[40] (15-18—adolescents; 18-24 youth) to stimulate discussion, taking into consideration the age, language, and capacity to respond. A total of 124 people took part in the FGDs, with participation of men and women (75% women). Table 2 provides details as to the locations in which field visits and FGDs were conducted.

Observation: Field visits to observe children and youth in selected programme activity locations (e.g., playrooms, child friendly spaces, shelters, sports facilities, counselling rooms, etc.) were conducted in May and June. The behaviour of adolescent and programme staff was observed regarding interpersonal communication[41]; willingness/ resistance of adolescents to engage in discussions; dis/satisfaction with activities and services; and the way children used the facilities and spaces provided.

Electronic Survey: An electronic survey was used to gather quantitative data to supplement other evaluation data streams. Purposive stratified sampling was used to target 157 UNICEF and UNHCR staff, NGO, and Civil Society Organization (CSO) stakeholders directly involved with the implementation of the programme, as well as relevant government officials in each of the four programme countries, and UNICEF/UNHCR staff at regional (LACR & ESAR) and HQ levels. 33 stakeholders completed the survey. The 21% response rate, while low, does not deviate far from typical response rates to email surveys, which are traditionally between 25 – 30%.[42] Broken down by category, there were 14 respondents from UNICEF, 10 from NGOs/CSOs, 3 from UNHCR, 2 Government officials and 4 who identified as "Other."[43] For further details on survey questions, stakeholder profiles, and response rates, see annex 8.15.

Table 2: Locations in which FGDs and field visits were conducted.

Country	Districts visited and rationale
El Salvador	Of the 20 projects supported by the CotM programme, the evaluation focused on two regions where there was a higher number of returned/deported children from Mexico and the United States back into the country: **San Salvador** and **San Miguel.**

[39] International Organisation for Migration (IOM).
[40] By ensuring that the terms used during the discussions would be easily understood by each age cohort and simplifying the question format.
[41] As per the PSEA protocol mentioned, if a participant demonstrated distress or repeatedly refused to answer questions, the evaluator would refer him/her to the UNICEF CO team to ensure appropriate support and/or referral to services.
[42] Menon, Vika and Aparna Muraleedharan. "Internet-based surveys: Relevant, Methodological Considerations and Trouble Shooting Strategies." https://www.nobi.nlm.nih.gov/pme/articles/PMC7398086. Accessed 21 November 2023.
[43] Fútbol Más México, South African Human Rights Commission, Fundamissioneros, secretaria ejecutiva del Sistema Nacional de Protección de Niñas, Niños, y Adolescentes.

Country	Districts visited and rationale
Mexico	Locations on the northern (**Tijuana, Mexicali**) and southern (**Tapachula**) borders were selected because of significant CotM population/ activities. UNICEF has field offices in Tapachula and Tijuana; UNHCR's intervention takes place in Mexicali.
South Africa	The evaluation team selected Pretoria and four provinces: **Kwa Zulu Natal (Durban), Western Cape (Cape Town), Gauteng (Johannesburg), and Limpopo (Musina).** These were chosen based on the availability of children/youth and staff in these locations.
Zambia	The evaluation focused on three sites: the old refugee settlement in **Meheba (Kalumbila district)**, as well as **Ndola-Chililabombwe districts**, and **Katima Mulilo** (Sesheke district). They were selected due to their location, high rates of cross-border migration and recording of best practices.

3.2.2 Methodological limitations

Table 3 outlines the potential risks/ limitations the evaluation encountered and the strategies the evaluation team employed to mitigate those risks.

Table 3: Limitations and measures

Risk / limitation	Mitigation measures
Document Review Lack/ poor quality of relevant documentation and data.	▪ Requests for relevant documentation and data were made at the start of the evaluation. Snowball sampling was employed during KIIs to identify additional relevant documentation and fill in identified data gaps. ▪ During the revision of the draft report, additional documents/ data sets were identified and shared with the evaluation team.

Risk / limitation	Mitigation measures
KIIs and survey The evaluation was heavily reliant on UNICEF counterparts to secure access to (high-level) stakeholders to participate in data collection. Low response rate for the email survey (21%).	▪ All key stakeholders were informed about the evaluation, its purpose and timing by UNICEF. ▪ Evaluation team members were introduced to country offices by UNICEF/UNHCR staff. ▪ At the evaluation team's request, UNICEF recontacted partners prior to the commencement of the field visits, requesting their collaboration. ▪ Emails were sent to stakeholders targeted to participate in the online survey. These emails explained the purpose of the survey, the time required to complete the survey (20') and contained a hyperlink to the online survey. Plan Eval's project manager sent the initial email (June 28), and UNICEF ESARO Child Protection Advisor followed that up with an FYI reminder (July 4).
Institutional memory and stakeholder unavailability Instances of staff turnover (UNICEF, Government counterparts, IP organizations) resulted in limited institutional memory.	▪ The evaluation team worked closely with COs and ROs to engage with stakeholders who could be reached and were willing to participate. For instance, KIIs were conducted with former staff (UNICEF, UNHCR, IPs).
Permissions In some countries, permissions were required from the government to launch data collection and engage with government counterparts and participation rates were low	▪ Though the evaluation team worked with UNICEF, UNHCR and an external independent review board to ensure compliance, the process (and the many unforeseen requirements they encountered) resulted in some degree of delay in launching data collection with stakeholders external to UNICEF and UNHCR. This was mitigated by conducting a UNICEF CO-facilitated second round of requests for data collection in Zambia. Despite being invited to provide feedback during the 2nd round of data collection, and having been offered options of speaking face-to-face or virtually in either the first or second round of data collection, the Zambian consultant only managed to speak with the European Union delegation to Zambia and two civil society organizations in the 2nd round of data collection: Up Zambia, Childline/ Lifeline; representatives from the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) and Ministry of Home Affairs (Police, Immigration and Correctional Service) did not make themselves available.

Risk / limitation	Mitigation measures
Working with children and youth Challenges related to organizing group discussions with (vulnerable groups of) youth and children.	▪ Evaluation team members complied with all ethical guidelines and requirements for working with children and youth, this included completion of the UNICEF PSEA course.
Changes in evaluation team makeup There was turnover in the makeup of the evaluation team.	▪ Over the course of the evaluation, the evaluation team with support of UNICEF, found qualified replacements for the positions of evaluation specialist, project manager, team leader and the Mexico- and South Africa-based consultants.
Inter-country alignment There were significant challenges aligning the agendas of the four country programmes.	▪ The evaluation team worked with the four COs to adjust/ adapt agendas and implemented alternative arrangements (e.g., online meetings or changing dates).
End of project The completion of the CotM programme made it challenging for the evaluation team to contact programme implementers and beneficiaries.	▪ With the help of the COs, the evaluation team prioritized ongoing activities and used indicators that tracked activities that have already been completed.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

The evaluation team worked together to analyse the data using a framework developed specifically for this evaluation. The analysis process included extracting evidence (quotes and data) from all programme documents, field notes, interview transcripts and available databases. The qualitative evidence was entered into the template developed, systematised by criterion and evaluation question and each one was assigned codes to guide the analysis.

As this evaluation did not rely on extensive quantitative databases, only on data relating to the achievement of outcomes and survey data, all quantitative data was used to inform analysis of results that were achieved and were only subjected to descriptive analysis processes.

3.2.4 Norms and standards

The evaluation was informed by the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and was conducted in accordance with the guidelines outlined in UNICEF's Ethical Research Involving Children and Procedures for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and analysis, alongside other relevant EU and UN guidelines[44]. The research team

[44] ALNAP guidance for evaluation of humanitarian action; UNEG Ethical Guidelines for UN Evaluations; EU Ethics and data protection guidelines; UNEG guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality; UN System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality; UNICEF adapted evaluation report standards and GEROS; Guidance Note: Adolescent participation in UNICEF monitoring and evaluation; UNICEF Guidance on Gender Integration in Evaluation; UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (2020); UNSDG Human Rights-Based Approach; UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis (2021), Document Number: PROCEDURE/OOR/2021/001.

abided by EU General Data Protection Regulations and the Brazilian Personal Data Protection Act guidelines for collecting and using human subject's data and followed Plan Eval's Primary Data Collection Protocol (Annex 8.5). The evaluation followed an ethical review approval process: accordingly, all guidelines, data collection tools, and consent forms (see annexes 8.10, 8.11 and 8.14) were reviewed and approved by UNICEF's HML Ethics Review Board before field level data collection commenced.

The overall approach was grounded on the principles of impartiality, credibility, responsibility, honesty and integrity to produce an independent evaluation that meets the highest ethical standards. Table 4 outlines how ethical considerations were integrated into the evaluation.

Table 4: Ethical approaches and obligations

Approach	Obligation to participants as per UNEG guidelines
Adherence to international guidelines and standards: Adults provided verbal informed consent prior to participating in KIIs or FGDs. Regarding discussions with children and youths, the evaluation team received written informed consent from a parent, guardian, social worker or centre lead (who also accompanied them during the discussion) prior to conducting FGDs. In Mexico, most adolescents were unaccompanied, and they themselves provided written informed consent.	▪ Compliance with codes for vulnerable groups ▪ Avoidance of harm
Ethical approval: The evaluation methodology was approved by external independent institutional review boards[45] during the Inception Phase.	▪ Compliance with codes for vulnerable groups ▪ Respect for dignity and diversity
Privacy and confidentiality: All evaluation participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected, and information fully kept private as allowable by law.	▪ Confidentiality ▪ Avoidance of harm ▪ Fair representation
Anonymity: The names and other identifiable features of any person involved with the evaluation process are not referenced or attributed in the main evaluation report and all participants were made aware of this in advance of their participation.	▪ Confidentiality ▪ Avoidance of harm
Consent: All participants were provided with clear information about the evaluation process in their local language. Verbal consent was sought regarding their participation and their right to withdraw at any time.	▪ Respect for dignity and diversity ▪ Fair representation

[45] For El Salvador, Mexico, and South Africa, this review was conducted by HML's Institutional Review Board (IRB) www.healthmedialabirb.com. Zambia required national ethical clearance. Please see appendix 8.14 for both the HML and Zambian approval forms.

Approach	Obligation to participants as per UNEG guidelines
Compensation: Participants were not provided with financial compensation and were informed of the ways the evaluation might be used prior to data collection and are given acknowledgement (by stakeholder group) in this report, as well as having access to the final report once it is made publicly available by UNICEF/UNHCR.	▪ Redress
Referral process and post interview support: Any persons who felt uneasy or uncomfortable taking part in discussions, or who demonstrated distress or repeatedly refused to answer questions, were referred to the UNICEF CO team, as per predetermined PSEA protocols, for appropriate support and/ or referral to services.	▪ Avoidance of harm ▪ Confidentiality

Photo - "El Desierto" shelter, Mexicali, Mexico

4. Findings

The evaluation findings are presented in line with the evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and coherence. Information is grouped thematically according to the evaluation questions and contains both global and country level findings. The only official financial data that is referenced in this report was contained in the Second Interim Report that was submitted to the EU on 31 May 2023, which contained financial data up to December 2022. Any references to aggregate outputs/ outcome results in the findings below—see relevant footnotes—are the most up-to-date data that was available at the time of the drafting of this report. However, these may not be the final figures, and may include outdated, incomplete or missing data, which will be finalized and validated by the final programme report due in January 2024.

4.1 Relevance

This section addresses the extent to which the programme was found to be relevant to the needs and priorities of children on the move and the groups and institutions that supported them. Under this criterion, the evaluation also assessed the extent to which programme was able to adapt as necessary.

Q1 | To what extent was a justification for the programme design provided and valid (i.e. aligned with the country's priorities, the priorities of key partners, donor policies, UNICEF's and UNHCR's programme niche and positioning at the nexus of humanitarian aid, development and peace)? To what extent has adaptability to context, risk and changing circumstances been integrated into the design?

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.

In **Mexico**, KIIs and documents reviewed illustrated that the rationale of the programme was aligned to country priorities. All interventions contributed to fulfilling the provisions of the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Children's Law) (2014); they also provided ongoing technical assistance required to implement the *Protocol for the Comprehensive Protection of Children on the Move* (2020). The CotM programme contributed to the implementation of the 2020 amendment to the Migration and Refugee Laws, as well as to the National Development Plan 2019-2024, which emphasised support for migrants, especially children and adolescents.

In **El Salvador**, the programme addressed the country's priorities related to the "*Crecer Juntos*"[46] Law and its "*Brazos Abiertos*"[47] Policy.

In **Zambia**, the CotM programme contributed to reviewing the policy and legal framework concerning child protection systems, including the enactment of the Children's Code Act in 2022 that aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of children on the move.

In **South Africa**, the CotM programme strengthened existing steering committees at the provincial and national levels. The CotM programme became a standing agenda item at the meetings of these steering committees in order to advance government priorities related to Education, GBV and Child Protection Systems.

In all four countries, the CotM programme was aligned to key partners' priorities. Interviews with relevant stakeholders showed that UNICEF and UNHCR worked closely with government institutions and key actors to support national authorities and build their capacities. The programme also trained frontline staff, officials, and partners to improve systems for coordinated care. Moreover, the CotM programme increased the gender responsiveness of child protection systems and improved the quality of the integrated services offered in reception and care centres.

In **Mexico**, the programme collaborated closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the development of the Binational Memorandum of Understanding for the protection of CotM. The programme also coordinated with a variety of other agencies involved in child protection: the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (*Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* (COMAR)); the National Welfare System (*Sistema Nacional para el Desarrolo Integral de la*

[46] Grow Together.
[47] Open Arms.

Familia, (SNDIF)); and the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (*Sistema Nacional de Protección Integral de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes* (SIPINNA)).

> "I learnt that the challenges we were facing in working with children on the move and the challenges faced by the children were uniform across the country. […] we managed to share ideas and best practices that we use and that work to achieve success in the work we do. The other impact was the support and guidance we managed to get from peers." Key Stakeholder

In **El Salvador**, the CotM programme was aligned with both the National Council for Children and Adolescents (*Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y Adolescencia* (CONNA)) and the Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (*Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia*, ISNA), and the Office of the First Lady.

In **Zambia**, the CotM programme worked with national child protection systems, as well as with its national and community-level structures.

In **South Africa,** the CotM programme was aligned with the Department of Social Development (DSD), and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).

In all four countries, the evaluation found interventions to be pitched to the needs of CotM based on demographics, existing risks, common violations of children's rights and the existing services landscape. Additionally, the programme targeted institutional practices that were not aligned with a respect for children's rights. The CotM programme was aligned to UNICEF's and UNHCR's respected programmatic niches,[48] their work within the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus and interventions were designed according to each country's specific needs.

All four countries included Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) interventions using an emergency approach and directed significant efforts to address the specific structural needs required to protect CotM in each country.

In **Mexico**, the programme strengthened the determination of children's best interests carried out by child protection authorities and improved and expanded alternative care models. In **El Salvador**, the programme addressed priorities related to migration, internal displacement, and child protection: it focussed on preventing detention, promoting children's rights, and protecting children during the deportation process. In **Zambia**, the programme focused on crucial aspects to protecting CotM, such as clarifying the age of criminal responsibility, child diversion, mixed migration, and ending child marriages. In **South Africa**, the programme addressed CotM's needs for alternative care and access to registration and documentation.

Programme adaptability was key to its success: Survey respondents indicated that the CotM programme demonstrated very high (15%), high (45%), or moderate (33%) levels of adaptability—only 6% considered the CotM programme to demonstrate low or very low adaptability. Implementing Partners (IPs) also adapted their methodologies to COVID-19-related lockdowns.

In **Mexico**, UNICEF and UNHCR established field offices, which enabled them to better protect children on the move and establish local connections. This move, in turn, both catalysed and

[48] UNHCR, with its mandate to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to a third country; UNICEF, with its responsibility for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.

facilitated context-specific adaptation of interventions. UNICEF transitioned from being predominantly focused on advocacy and technical assistance to actively implementing a more comprehensive approach that involved direct intervention: field offices are now engaged in case management, conducting monitoring visits and the provision of psychosocial support (PSS) and humanitarian assistance to children and adolescents who are on the move. Similarly, UNHCR has begun to work directly with COMAR regarding case management and the provision of assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

In **South Africa** the CotM programme expanded from principally supporting children on the move to cross borders to covering other types of mobility, such as internal forced displacement, as well as addressing issues related to CotM such as targeting host communities.

In **El Salvador,** as part of a broader strategy to make migration safer, the programme focused on GBV and the economic inclusion of displaced families, while also building on the existing projects of IPs and governmental agencies.

Zambia adapted programme methodologies to COVID-19-related lockdowns: social workers were deployed to children's safe homes or facilities, and, with the support of Lifeline/ Childline,[49] the CotM programme offered remote, child-friendly counselling and psychosocial support services.

Q2 | How did programme design expand on existing projects and partnerships? To what extent were the interventions designed for child protection systems strengthening and ending detention (e.g., including hand over and transition plans)?

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.[50]

Programme activities took into consideration, not only the contextual factors of migration, but also existing systems, structures, and activities (or lack thereof). Most stakeholders who participated in this evaluation agreed that the CotM programme facilitated the expansion of existing projects.[51] In some instances, new approaches were developed. In **Mexico**, the CotM programme was based on existing UNICEF/ UNHCR CotM strategies, in particular the six policies developed for the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* (2017) and the *Protection Route for the Rights of Migrant Children* (2020). In **El Salvador**, the programme built upon and expanded existing projects and partnerships with key government agencies,[52] developing a focused action plan for deported child migrants. In **Zambia**, the programme expanded existing partnerships with government entities that enabled reviews and updates of national legislation and policies. In **South Africa**, the strategic use of existing partnerships enhanced on going interventions.

In both regions, the CotM funding model allowed IPs to integrate the needs of CotM into ongoing interventions and to capitalize on existing expertise when addressing issues involving MHPSS and GBV.

In **Mexico**, even though child detention is officially forbidden, challenges remain in eradicating

[49] Lifeline/Childline Zambia is a toll-free telephone counselling and guidance service. The service aims to promote child protection and prevent gender-based violence: https://clzambia.org/childline-116/.
[50] This position was restated and tested over multiple KIIs and FGDs involving both internal and external stakeholders across the four countries.
[51] 88% of survey respondents agreed with that statement, and 63% strongly agreed. See Annex 8.15.
[52] Such as the First Lady's Office.

this practice, including informal practices that evince clear characteristics of detention under a different name (such as closed doors shelters and long wait times in migration facilities). The CotM programme supported national child protection authorities to adopt a *Comprehensive Protection Protocol of Children on the Move* and strengthened the referral of CotM by immigration authorities to open door shelters and other alternative care options. UNICEF and UNHCR also promoted the formation of multidisciplinary teams (e.g., lawyer, psychologist, social services, etc.) to review CotM cases. Pre-existing multidisciplinary teams amongst child protection authorities were a key enabling factor in reporting/ referral mechanisms and strengthening alternative care models.

In **El Salvador**—a country of origin and of return—the CotM programme targeted preventing detention and safeguarding children throughout the entire deportation process. This was done through capacity building of staff working directly with CotM (e.g., consulate and CANAF staff), as well as creating a transferral route for cases involving CotM. The programme also focused on strengthening child protection and ending family separation.

In **Zambia**, pre-existing structures at sub-national levels were key to sensitizing and raising the awareness of communities and relevant stakeholders as to the needs of CotM; this included community- and district-level child protection structures, such as Community Welfare Assistance Welfare Committees (CWAC) and District Child Protection Committees. Accordingly, the CotM programme worked to strengthen the Best Interest Determination (BID) Child Protection panels in priority districts (which included refugee-hosting districts). In districts where UNHCR and IOM had previously set up such structures, with the development of the Statutory Case management system, BID panels were led by the Department of Social Welfare and linked to the national child protection system. The participation of frontline institutions and other stakeholders on BID panels also ensured that CotM, once intercepted, could receive hospital care and access safe homes (in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare). The programme also conducted rapid assessments of correctional facilities and checked on detained CotM.

In **South Africa**, the CotM programme was designed around existing projects and partnerships. This allowed for the integration of child protection systems strengthening efforts into funded projects addressing issues of HIV and AIDS, GBV, as well as sexual and reproductive health. These programmes were expanded to include advocacy and awareness-raising activities for the integration of the CotM, and to include the provision of PSS and attend to issues related to documentation, education, and social cohesion.

Q3 | During implementation, to what extent and how has the program ensured that it remained relevant to the needs of rights-holders and to systems-strengthening objectives in the four countries and/or adapted as needed to contextual changes (including, but not limited to, COVID19 pandemic and changes in migratory fluxes and trends)? How has the programme ensured accountability to children on the move and other affected populations? To what extent the programme response was tailored to the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls?

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.

In both regions, actions were taken to ensure that the programme remained relevant to accomplish systems strengthening objectives. This included maintaining open lines of communication and ongoing dialogue with local authorities (El Salvador, South Africa), child protection working groups and field offices or teams (Mexico), as well as with committees such as the BID Panel, community structures like CWACs[53] (Zambia), and through the creation of the DSD's national and local committees (South Africa).

Previous evaluations[54] highlighted that the CotM programme needed to incorporate the voices of children/rights' holders more systematically in programming, monitoring, and evaluation. Subsequently, the U-Report platform enabled children and youth participation in the CotM programmes in **South Africa and Mexico**. Lifeline/ Childline was instrumental in programme implementation and provided free psycho-social support, translation, and referral services to CotM in **Zambia**. Other initiatives aimed to increase accountability towards children included the partnership with Children's Radio Foundation (CRF) for the implementation of youth-led research, dialogue, and broadcasting and the support to youth-led interactive community radio initiatives on peacebuilding (South Africa). The evaluation and subsequent report, *Results of the Participation Mechanism on the Protection Route Comprehensive Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents in Migration Status*, conducted by SIPINNA with UNICEF's support, is another example of such initiatives.

Previous evaluations also recommended the need to better integrate gender from the inception of programme design to assess specific areas of vulnerability and balance and interconnect systems to protect girls and young women. The evaluation finds that these lessons were reflected in the current CotM programme. In all four countries the CotM programme included specific interventions that addressed GBV and related-health issues. Nevertheless, the evaluation finds that efforts to integrate gender across the programme were only partially successful. Less than half of survey respondents partially (45%) or strongly (42%) agreed with the statement that "the CotM programme was adapted to the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls." This may be due to the possibility that the programme did not fully identify or address gender-related risks and needs beyond GBV. Most interviewees indicated that a greater focus on gender, disabilities, and root causes of vulnerability would have made the CotM programme more responsive to the needs of especially vulnerable groups of CotM. Tellingly, only 27% of survey respondents considered that the programme contributed "significantly" to place the needs of most vulnerable CotM[55] on the agenda of national governments and/or regional governance bodies; 33% of respondents considered that the programme brought "some" contributions and 24% identified "very few." Overall, the programme showed low levels of visibility regarding: the needs of girls beyond the context of GBV, the needs of children who identify as LGBTQI+, and the needs of children living with disabilities. Apart from GBV, it is not obvious that the CotM programme contained strategies specifically targeting especially vulnerable cohorts of CotM. Disaggregated data representing the needs of such cohorts of CotM was largely unavailable to UNHCR and UNICEF country office (CO) personnel and their partners who were implementing the CotM

[53] Coordinated by the District Social Welfare Office at district level.

[54] Nexus Consultores. (2021) Evaluación de las intervenciones en materia de migración en México, Guatemala, Honduras y El Salvador: Informe País: El Salvador y México.

[55] E.g., Children who identified as LGBTQI+, children with disabilities, girls, etc.

programme.

The CotM programme design did not fully develop an intersectional approach. When paired with monitoring systems that were unable to clearly identify and distinguish the needs of especially vulnerable cohorts of CotM, the result was that insufficient attention was paid to assisting particularly vulnerable CotM. Many governments' conservative positions vis-à-vis sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) was a negative compounding factor. Not only were governments largely unsupportive of efforts to recognize LGBTQI+ children, but there were instances where governments actively blocked programme efforts to incorporate LGBTQI+ identities and issues. In **El Salvador**, when a book[56] that included a LGBTQI+ story was presented to government agencies and staff (these books were to be placed in government reception centres), government officials indicated that the story had to be removed because of its LGBTQI+ storyline. (The story was subsequently rewritten in a manner that elided these themes.) In **Mexico**, government authorities indicated that LGBTQI+ should not be a category in data disaggregation. Nor did **Zambia or South Africa** COs use LGBTQI+ indicators for their data monitoring.

> "All the registers have an important level of disaggregation of data for visibility. For example, if you have a disability, you put which one you have and the level. Also, if the person is indigenous, Afro-descendant, etc. We have not reached the point of disaggregating LGBTIQ+ data. We are thinking about how to include it." *Child Protection Authority.*
>
> "One of the challenges for data disaggregation is the issue of the LGBTQI+ population. It has been an accompanying issue so [they can] collect that data without assuming it [based on stereotypes]." *UNICEF Staff*

4.2 Coherence

This section addresses the extent to which the programme approach, designs and systems were consistent with and fit in with other interventions addressing the same affected groups.

Q4 | To what extent is the programme in synchrony with relevant coordination systems in each setting (e.g., sector working groups, UN Network on Migration, regional fora, Opportunities and Issue Based Coalitions on Human Mobility, the Regional Conference on Migration, The Risk Emergency Disaster Working Group for Latin America, and the Caribbean (REDLAC)) and with the efforts of other key actors at national and regional levels?

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.

At regional level, the programme contributed to cross-border collaboration and strengthened coordination systems such as: the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) and REDLAC (Latin America and Caribbean Environmental Fund Network), the Migration Dialogue for East African Countries (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the South African Development Community (SADC), the Migration Dialogue of Southern African Countries (MIDSA) and the Regional Child Protection Network (East and Southern Africa).

[56] Written by Aldeas Infantiles SoS with UNHCR.

Regionally, collaborations between country offices in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua indicated a commitment to cross-regional alignment and the sharing of best practices. The evaluation also found examples of south-south and bilateral cooperation such as occurred between the South Africa CotM programme with both Zimbabwe and Mexico. **Zambia** leveraged membership in both SADC and MIDSA to strengthen cross border collaboration and coordination structures to better address the needs of CotM moving between Zambia and Namibia.

At the national level, the CotM programme showed a highly satisfactory level of alignment with national coordination systems across the four countries. Coordination with governmental authorities and local stakeholders directly and effectively improved the welfare of migrant children. In **South Africa and Zambia**, partnerships with key organizations on the ground was instrumental in implementing activities related to the identification and tracking of detained children, addressing cases of GBV, assisting those with HIV, as well as actively working towards ending child marriage and sexual abuse. Information relating to national referral mechanisms and case management systems was exchanged between implementing countries. These exchanges were done virtually and via participation in regional level coordination structures (SADC, MIDSA). **Mexico** received a mission from the Salvadoran delegation (comprised of both UNICEF and UNHCR staff) to exchange best practices and support more coordinated work between Mexico and El Salvador.[57]

Though potentially more exchanges could have taken place, it is evident that practical exchanges between programme countries contributed positively to synergies and interlinkages, which in turn produced consistency in interventions implemented across the four countries.

Q5 | What were any barriers to and opportunities for synergies for partnerships, and how were these managed by the different country teams?

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.

Steps were taken to ensure complementarity with existing initiatives and to address gaps at national and regional levels. Despite the reported successes, the CotM programme encountered various obstacles establishing and strengthening partnerships. These differ in degree and nature from country to country:

> "I would have liked a better coordination thematically speaking between offices […] we missed out a bit on the possibility of generating joint knowledge."
>
> "…I think it wasn't really used [the interchange of good practices among countries and regions], […] exploring better the channels to share best practices with other countries could be interesting."
>
> *Child Protection Specialists LAC*

- **Mexico**: Programme synergies were specific rather than systematic. There were no sustained practices to promote mutual knowledge among IPs without the involvement of UN agencies. Limited sustained communication channels and a heavy workload constrained efforts to establish sustainable coordination mechanisms.
- **El Salvador:** IP's lack of awareness as to the full extent of collaboration between UNICEF and UNHCR presented an obstacle to establishing effective partnerships and coordination mechanisms with all partners involved in the CotM programme. An insufficient level cross-organizational coordination hindered unified planning and prevented an efficient allocation of human and financial resources.

[57] The three day "Global Promotion of Better Practices for Girls, Boys, and Teenagers in Migration in Africa and Latin America" event in Mexico was instrumental to identifying cross regional similarities common to both countries and presented an opportunity for further exchanges.

- **South Africa**: The programme was affected by the lack of reliable national statistics on CotM (where migration data exists, this data is not disaggregated by age). There were observed difficulties in assisting CotM to get legal documentation; this was compounded by insufficient human resources and a different capabilities levels between various government structures.
- **Zambia**: Inter-country coordination efforts were impeded the fact that neighbouring countries had not passed relevant and adequate legislation vis-à-vis children's rights and CotM. Language barriers were another obstacle. In terms of capacity, transfers within key frontline institutions and limited funding constrained efforts to implement case management systems and repatriate migrant children to their home countries.

Overall, the obstacles noted above were exacerbated by the limited financial and human resources that governments had at their disposal. In this regard, field offices played a critical role in overcoming some of the abovementioned coordination barriers, as they served as complementary resources for strengthening partnerships at the community and state levels and facilitated the referral process. Finally, the capacity building component of the CotM programme improved the child protection systems' ability to identify needs and to coordinate with relevant institutions.

Q6 | To what extent has the programme facilitated cross-regional, as well as inter-regional, learning and exchanges of good practices and inter-government peer learning initiatives?

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.

Many good practices were identified and documented, especially regarding processes, approaches, and methodologies. Analyses of these experiences facilitated adaption or replication of good gender-sensitive practices and lessons learned to better protect girls in other contexts. The three day "Global Promotion of Better Practices for Girls, Boys, and Teenagers in Migration in Africa and Latin America" event in Mexico was instrumental to identifying cross regional similarities and presented an opportunity for further exchanges.

Mexico, El Salvador, and Zambia implemented national child protection information management systems that captured data on migrant children, including those who were subject to child protection measures and therefore included in the National Child Protection/ Assistance System. In **South Africa**, CotM were integrated into the existing child protection system.

At the inter-regional level, in the LACR several collaborations occurred among CO in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, the United States, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Similar collaborations occurred between COs in Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, as well as between South Africa and Zimbabwe (ESAR). These extended and multiple exchanges indicate a common interest in aligning CotM programmes and sharing best practices.

The evaluation also found several examples of cross-regional collaboration, such as the state-to-state cross-regional exchange that occurred between **South Africa** and **Mexico**[58] as well as the regular regional technical committee meetings, the programme review (Nairobi, October 2022), and the CotM final event (Brussels, June 2023). As important as these exchanges have been, the evaluation finds that the CotM programme's efforts to promote learning, collaboration and exchange of good practices were not fully realized at either the inter- or intra-regional levels.

4.3 Effectiveness

This section addresses the extent to which the programme achieved its objectives and expected results.

[58] Which could arguably be considered a state-to-state exchange from country programmes located in different regions.

Q7 | How and to what extent have the programme activities resulted in children accessing quality integrated services, alternative care, mental health, and psychosocial support? To what extent, how and why did the programme's components achieve expected progress, within the expected timeframe? What does this tell us and future programming for migration about what works, how and why for children on the move with different characteristics and in different settings?

Finding 8:

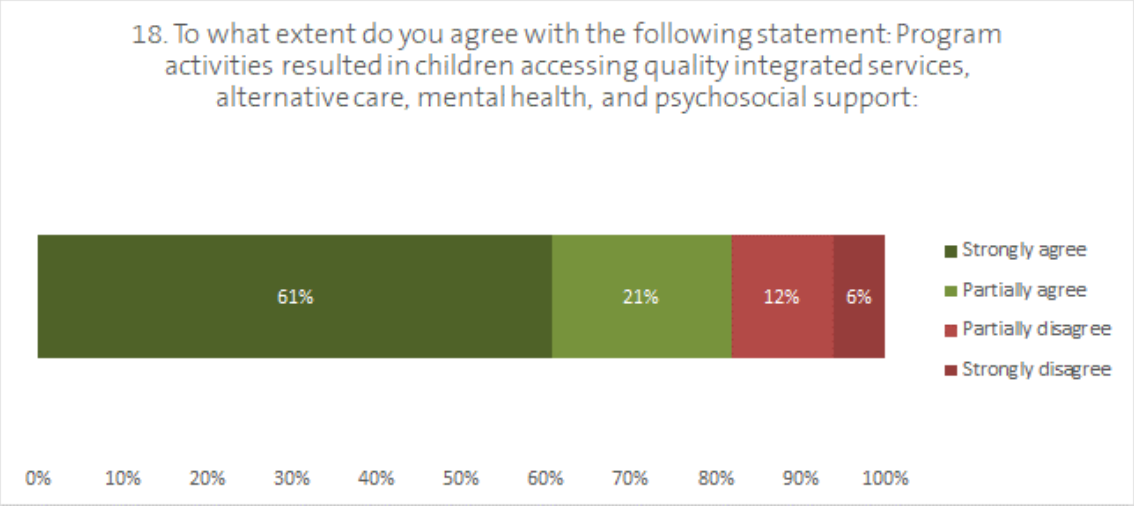
The CotM programme made significant strides in facilitating children's access to high-quality integrated services, including alternative care options and mental health and psychosocial support using a gender-sensitive lens.

The CotM programme contributed to UNICEF's and UNHCR's joint priorities to strengthen systems to protect CotM, recognizing the need for ensuring coherence and linkages between the social/child welfare system and the justice and immigration systems. The CotM programme also bolstered the role of civil society in providing a range of options to ensure that "alternatives to detention" were available, inclusive, and accessible to all CotM.

The programme largely achieved expected progress within the allotted time frame. This was accomplished primarily by focusing on effective coordination, capacity building, and through the utilization of participatory approaches. The programme achieved—and in many cases exceeded—expected targets by taking a systems-focused approach grounded on partnerships. These actions enabled the efficient delivery of activities by leveraging existing resources and strengths. While further work remains to strengthen monitoring and gender integration, the evaluation finds that significant milestones were met across all programme components.

Most qualitative and quantitative data gathered and reviewed over the course of the evaluation indicates that CotM programme achieved a high rate of effectiveness. 60% of online survey respondents strongly agreed with the statement that "Program activities resulted in children accessing quality integrated services, alternative care, mental health and psychosocial support."

Figure 2: Survey response



Analysis of programme records[59] confirms success in this respect. One of the principal outcomes the CotM programme was designed to bring about was for "Child protections systems to include integrated, high-quality gender-response services in reception centres and other care and

[59] All figures cited in the following section were taken from: UNICEF and UNHCR (2023). "EU_CotM_Logframe Final Report_121223." Internal unpublished document: Draft Version.

attention facilities." This outcome was measured by two indicators, the "Number of children who benefited from access to services",[60] and the "Number of returned children who, through individual case management, access support services."[61] With regard to the number of children who benefited from access to services, the programme assisted 126,065 CotM (52% boys, 48% girls) to access services, exceeding the initial target by 176%. The number of returned children who accessed support services through individual case management totalled 5,868 children (53% boys, 47% girls), exceeding the target by 227%.

149,555 children and adolescents received gender responsive psychosocial support and were referred to mental health services (50% boys, 50% girls), exceeding the preestablished target by 177%. 47,669 children were referred to specialised, gender responsive child protection and GBV services (42% boys, 58% girls), exceeding the target by 145%.

It is important to note that in all four programme countries services accessed by children were provided within the national child protection systems or through ongoing IP initiatives. These services and/ or interventions were specifically qualified, refined and expanded to serve CotM, either via training or by including supplementary CotM-specific services.

In **South Africa**, factors contributing to programme success included the programme's multi-sectoral approach and its capacity to engage with government authorities and IPs within different provinces. Investment made in capacity building, and the flexibility to adapt interventions to other partners' projects that were already in place, were both positive contributing factors to programme success.

In **El Salvador**, activities that expanded access, provided psychological care, and enabled community reintegration for CotM were highly effective. Key success factors included capable coordination, capacity building of institutions, and active participation of children in taking agency over their own lives.

In **Mexico**, the number of CotM who successfully accessed services exceeded established goals. The comprehensive attention to gender-responsive psychosocial services and gender-based violence prevention yielded positive results and exceeded initial service targets (by 162% and 219% respectively)[62]. Implementing partner organizations, such as *Futbol Más*, *La Jugarreta*, and *Granito de Arena*, actively contributed to the success of the programme. They did so by involving CotM in various activities and by promoting the regulation of emotions and building self-esteem. The CotM programme was also effective in reaching adolescent CotM: by using play- and sports-based approaches to provide MHPSS services to adolescents, they became more capable of controlling their emotions, overcoming frustrations, and identifying their own strengths.

The CotM programme made progress in integrating gender perspectives across interventions, although challenges remain to address issues such as gender orientation, sexual health, and sexual violence in shelters run by Faith-based Organizations (FBOs). The programme also addressed GBV through several training initiatives. These initiatives strengthened mechanisms for identification of potential instances of GBV, linked these cased to appropriate case management systems, and created a system for georeferencing sexual violence.[63] Despite the programmes many successes, in Mexico, recurrent violence in several regions presented a significant obstacle to responding to the complex needs of displaced and migrant children.[64]

[60] Broken down by country, type of service, age, and gender.
[61] Broken down by country, gender, and age.
[62] EU_CotM Logframe_final report_301023
[63] This was only done in Mexico.
[64] Michoacán and Guerrero.

In **El Salvador**, 2,505 children received services through the CotM programme (102% of target), (880 boys, 1,615 girls). The establishment of child-friendly spaces in shelters (such as in FUNDAMISIONEROS) and care centres facilitated access to MHPSS. Protocols for inter-agency case transfer expanded the accessibility of these services. Child-centred components of the programme achieved expected outcomes by involving CotM in composing their own *Plan de Vida* (life plan), while choosing future goals and paths. This practice empowered both CotM and their families.

In **Zambia**, the CotM programme served 14,425 CotM (8,011 boys, 6,234 girls) with gender-responsive protection services and PSS, exceeding the target by 158%. The implementation of the Child Safeguarding Framework by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (2023) represented a significant milestone. One-Stop Centres played a crucial role in providing MHPSS and essential health services to GBV survivors. On-site counsellors in refugee settlements (under the aegis of Lifeline/ Childline), provided vital face-to-face counselling services to refugee children. Community sensitization initiatives orchestrated by the Child Protection Committees (CPCs) were instrumental in educating communities about identifying and reporting cases of GBV and sexual abuse. By leveraging the expertise of Lifeline/ ChildLine, the CotM programme successfully bridged communication and language barriers, ensuring that translation services were readily accessible for those in need. The CotM programme was supported by and dependent upon IPs; however, many services introduced by the programme became anchored in child protection systems. This was done by working within existing national frameworks while also providing new services through alternative partnerships. The CotM programme enhanced the capabilities of government-run institutions, such as One-Stop Centres and Child Protection Committees, while also establishing complementary child-friendly spaces, case management services, and psychosocial support activities. The combination of improvements to pre-established state protection services, along with the direct delivery of supplemental program interventions, led to an increase in the availability and accessibility of services to CotM.

Q8 | To what degree has the programme contributed to prevent and end immigration detention? To what extent has the programme strengthened the capacity of child protection systems to protect children on the move?

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.

While approximate numbers of children in detention are difficult to come by, there was a quantifiable increase in the number of policies, frameworks, and enacted legislation on alternative care systems across the programme countries that contributed to bringing about alternatives to detention. The CotM programme contributed to the development of sixteen new public policies/laws on alternative care systems with a focus on CotM were developed[65] (320% above the established target). These included: **Zambia's** National Referral Mechanism (developed by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services); **El Salvador**'s *Crecer Juntos* Law and Policy (overseen by the National Council for Early Childhood, Children and Adolescents, CONAPINA); amendments to **Mexico**'s Migration and Refugee Laws implemented by the Child Protection Authorities and national and state Welfare Agencies; and **South Africa**'s guidelines and protocols for unaccompanied migrant children, developed alongside the National Steering Committee on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) and the DSD. Moreover, twelve

[65] EU_CotM_Logframe_final report_121223.

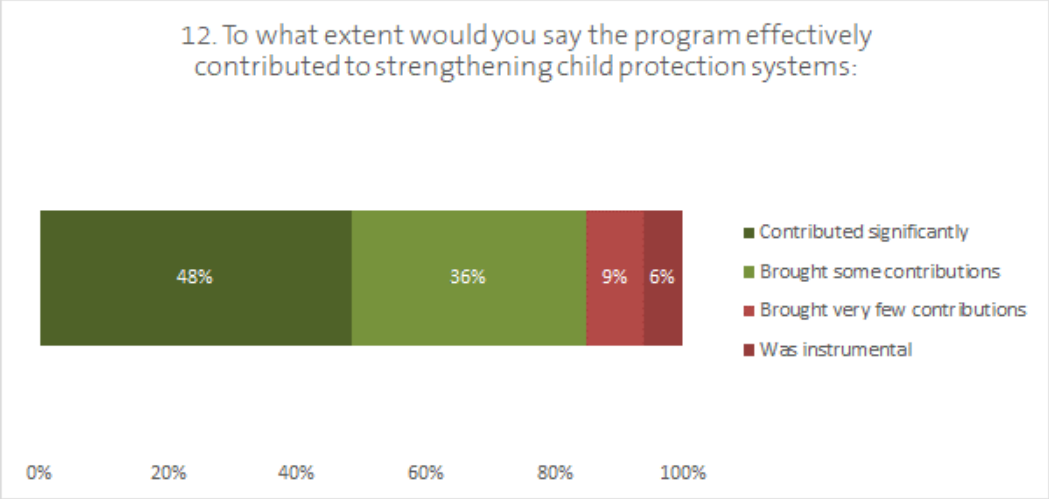
alternative care models with a focus on CotM were operating (109% above the target), and 33,475 children were referred to alternative care options, exceeding the target by 217%. Evaluation team members observed that strong participation and collaboration channels have been established with immigration and justice services and which are starting to become embedded within child protection structures around the provision of services to CotM.

The four countries exceeded their targets to improve systems and increase the capacity of child protection service providers and increase availability to family and community-based care for CotM. This was accomplished through trainings, improved information systems and referral mechanisms, and the increasing availability of services for CotM. In **South Africa** this was achieved through a review of national laws[66] that resulted in CotM being placed in Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCC). In **Zambia**, alongside the review of legislation relating to children in conflict, rapid assessments were undertaken by BID panels and committees at district level: this was done in collaboration with the Social Welfare department. These assessments played a crucial role in preventing CotM from ending up in detention facilities and being placed in safe houses or refugee centres.

Mexico overachieved in this regard: during 2022, UNICEF changed its strategy to work in close partnership with the Federal Child Protection Authorities to strengthen alternative care options for CotM and ensure sustainability.[67] The first step was the publication of the National Care Model for Children and Adolescents on the move. This document established general lines of action for appropriate alternative care and individualized case management, targeting children sheltered in Public Social Assistance Centres or other authorized centres and prioritized their right to live in a family. During the first semester of 2023, 20,849 CotM (11,426 boys, 9,423 girls) received care in 63 Social Assistance Centres (CAS). These centres are participating in the technical transferral process of the National Care Model, which is expected to continue to expand to other CAS at the national level.

Child protection systems were strengthened through a variety of interventions, including trainings and capacity development activities (**South Africa, Mexico, and El Salvador**), the development of the Statutory and Integrated Case Management Information System (SCMIMS), and the strengthening of national referral mechanisms (**Zambia and El Salvador**). Survey respondents found these efforts to be impactful: 85% of the respondents reported that the CotM programme either "contributed significantly" or brought "some contribution" to strengthening CP systems across all four countries.

Figure 3: Survey response



[66] Under South Africa's "No Encampment Policy", there are no refugee camps in South Africa. UNHCR. (2023) South Africa. https://www.unhcr.org/countries/south-africa. Accessed 21 November 2023.
[67] Previously, the aim was to improve the care model in close collaboration with child protection state and municipal authorities, by strengthening capacities directly with the service providers, which generated a greater reach in terms of beneficiaries.

Q9 | How did the monitoring system within countries and across regions contribute to programme effectiveness? How does it demonstrate results for the most vulnerable children (e.g., girls and children with disabilities) and on human rights, gender, and equity dimensions more generally?

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.

The CotM programme's monitoring systems operated effectively at the country level, despite operating within a complex landscape of diverse monitoring components. Each country's programme was a collection of various entities with differing reporting processes, platforms, formats, and schedules (e.g., UNHCR, UNICEF, government ministries, registration officials, and implementing partners). The programme's logical framework initially struggled with clearly defining baselines, targets, and indicators; and missing or inaccurate baselines at the programme's inception presented additional challenges. These issues collectively made accurately tracking and demonstrating the programme's progress and achievements a complex task.

Across the four countries, government administrative data systems lack crucial disaggregation, hindering efforts to accurately track CotM in administrative detention. Existing monitoring systems reveal inconsistencies and gaps in government efforts and paint an incomplete picture of the situation. Entities like child protection authorities, police, immigration, and human rights institutions collect relevant fragments of data; however, no single entity consolidates this information. Consequently, no clear mandate exists for transparently monitoring the well-being and rights of detained children.

Accessibility of data on child immigration detention across different countries presents numerous challenges, extending beyond jurisdictional complexities and sensitive information concerns. Availability and data quality also pose significant hurdles. For example, in **Zambia**, the lack of age-disaggregated data makes it difficult to identify the true number of children held in detention.

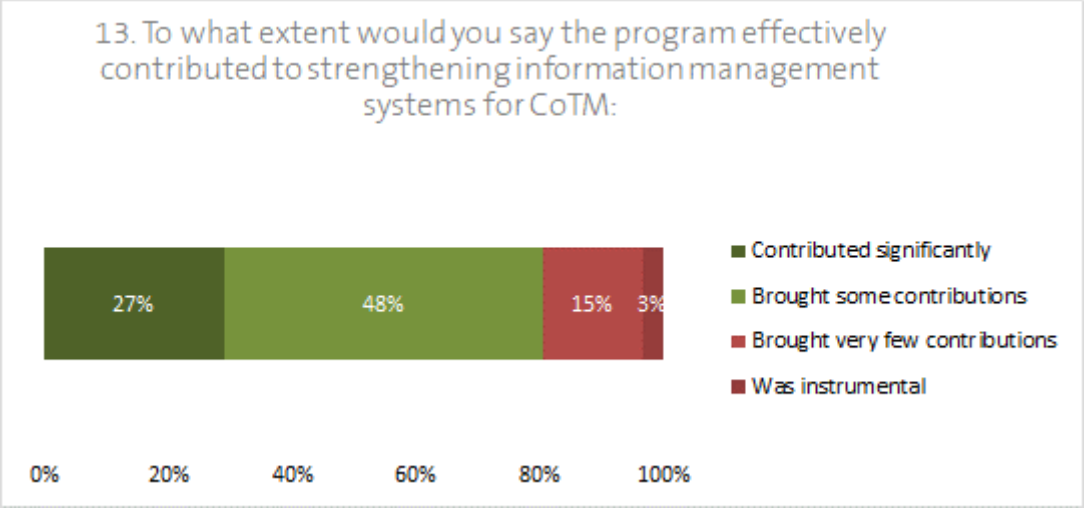
Furthermore, in all four countries, despite the existence of laws prohibiting detention for migration reasons or the detainment of minors, children still may find themselves in detention centres or similar settings. Monitoring capacity in these countries is often limited or fragmented across different levels and agencies. Conversely, in Mexico, independent oversight bodies have taken charge of monitoring conditions and ensuring accountability.

The above-mentioned challenges reflect the existence of multiple parallel information systems that could not be easily aggregated. Reporting formats between UN and government agencies and other relevant stakeholders differed, making it challenging to assess programme progress and communicate effectively with donors. Under 50% of survey respondents opined that the programme effectively contributed to strengthening information management systems, while 27% thought that it contributed significantly (See Figure 4).

While stakeholders generally lauded the monitoring processes established during the CotM programme, these processes should be viewed as a foundation for further development. Enhancing, harmonizing, and standardizing monitoring tools and processes, particularly in terms of data collection for vulnerable CotM, is crucial. Consistent data disaggregation and dissemination also require significant improvement.

The example of Mexico shows that this can be accomplished. In **Mexico**, UNICEF and UNHCR utilized customized monitoring platforms that enabled various aspects of case management, such as GBV, child protection, WASH, and education. They trained IPs to use their M&E platform and despite differences between their M&E systems, reports and information were regularly shared during meetings.

Figure 4: Survey response



Overall, despite 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 efforts to quantify the program's impact.

It must be noted that opportunities for improvement exist: unified information management systems, formal data-sharing agreements between agencies, capacity building of social service officers and improved disaggregation of data would all improve the monitoring and data management component of the CotM programme. Comprehensive accurate tracking and public reporting would enable stronger accountability and oversight.

4.4 Efficiency

This section examines programme efficiency in terms of resource allocation and the utilization of cost-effective approaches, as well as the establishment of systems that cover the joint intervention in all countries.

Q10 | To what extent has the programme applied a cost-effective approach to building the capacity of the child protection systems to protect children on the move? How effectively have resources been used to complement existing capacities and achieve results in the four country-specific interventions within the two regions? To what extent has the availability of resources enabled interventions implemented by different country offices and regional offices?

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.

Shared implementation (UNHCR & UNICEF) allowed for an effective allocation of EU funds in manners that strengthened joint institutional strategies. However, the CotM programme was heavily dependent on EU institutional funding. This dependence was partially mitigated by contributions to the CotM programme by various partners and national authorities. This required the programme to adapt and make use of ongoing interventions by incorporating complementary human and financial resources[68]. These actions were vital to ensuring the viability and success of

[68] Though exact figures were not made available, the evaluation team was told that the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) provided funding to the Mexico programme more than the one provided by the EU.

the programme.

The CotM programme managed its resources efficiently through a strategic use of existing structures to avoid redundancies and maximize the utilization of available resources. This practice included using preexisting complementarity between established programmes and partnerships, as well as by creating new partnerships. For example, in **South Africa**, the programme integrated with IP's existing HIV, GBV, and child protection initiatives to increase reach and impact. In **El Salvador**, the programme focused on targeted capacity building of current child protection systems staff to efficiently improve capacities. **Zambia** facilitated the prudent use of resources by relying on existing safe spaces rather building than new infrastructure. **Mexico** employed a co-funding strategy between UNICEF and UNHCR to promote unified interventions toward common goals and prevent overlap of efforts across different projects.

Considering the totals allocated to all countries, the total committed, as of December 2022 was 61% of the overall budget, with slight variations between countries.[69]

For the **Regional Offices**, considering both ESA and LAC, UNICEF had a budget of $1,838,202 and committed $886,269, or 48% of its budget.[70] This reflects a moderate level of commitment relative to the total budget allocated for the region.

In **El Salvador**, UNICEF's total budget was $1,154,308, with $459,819 (40%) incurred or committed. In contrast, UNHCR outperformed its budget of $344,030 by committing $498,666, or 145% of its allocated budget.[71] This indicates a significant over-commitment by UNHCR, while UNICEF has committed a substantial portion of its budget.

For **Mexico**, UNICEF had a budget of $1,459,956, with $957,208 (66%) committed. UNHCR, with a budget of $1,134,338, committed $874,609 (77%) of its budget.[72] Both UNICEF and UNHCR have committed a significant portion of their budgets, with UNHCR showing a slightly higher commitment rate compared to UNICEF.

In **South Africa**, UNICEF allocated a budget of $1,503,024 and committed $785,217 (52%) of its budget.[73] UNHCR did not have a separate budget or commitments in South Africa, indicating that all the financial responsibilities and activities were undertaken solely by UNICEF.

Zambia saw UNICEF committing $777,122 (69%) of its $1,123,034 budget. UNHCR, with a smaller budget of $379,359, committed $194,965 (51%) of its budget.[74] Both organizations have shown a strong commitment to their financial responsibilities in Zambia, with UNICEF leading in terms of the percentage of budget committed.

Table 5: Global budget as of December 2022.

	Reporting in USD		%	%
Source	**Total Budget**	**Incurred/ Committed**	**Committed of budget**	**Committed of total budget (UNICEF + UNHCR)**
El Salvador CO				
UNICEF	1.154.308	459.819	40%	64%

[69] UNICEF, UNHCR. (2023) "Consolidated Financial Report." *Second Interim Report, as of December 2022*. Nb. These are not the final figures and should be taken as representing a snapshot in time; it is to be expected that the percentages of monies either incurred or committed to the CotM programme will increase once the final accounting has been completed.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

	Reporting in USD		%	%
Source	**Total Budget**	**Incurred/ Committed**	**Committed of budget**	**Committed of total budget (UNICEF + UNHCR)**
UNHCR	344.030	498.666	145%	
Mexico CO				
UNICEF	1.459.956	957.208	66%	71%
UNHCR	1.134.338	874.609	77%	
South Africa CO				
UNICEF	1.503.024	785.217	52%	52%
UNHCR	-	-	-	
Zambia CO				
UNICEF	1.123.034	777.122	69%	65%
UNHCR	379.359	194.965	51%	
Regional Office (ESA + LAC)				
UNICEF	1.838.202	886.269	48%	48%
TOTALS				
UNICEF	7.078.524	3.865.634	55%	61%
UNHCR	1.857.726	1.568.240	84%	

Q11 | Have the intervention processes, including programme monitoring, evaluation and learning been inclusive and participatory? Is the monitoring system built/ inter-operable with government systems or is it standalone?

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.

The CotM programme's monitoring systems, while interfacing with existing government systems in areas like child protection and migration, exhibited limited interoperability and inconsistent data sharing across countries. This lack of uniformity was further highlighted by variations in stakeholder participation, with Mexico showcasing successful initiatives like child consultations through the SIPINNA commission, while other countries primarily relied on training implementing partners and joint monitoring. Despite these inconsistencies, many intervention processes remained inclusive and collaborative, emphasizing joint efforts with government institutions.

The programme's commitment to integrating monitoring initiatives with existing government systems was evidenced by joint field visits, multi-stakeholder coordination committees, and data sharing exercises. However, approaches varied considerably across countries. For example,

Mexico implemented concrete child consultations through SIPINNA, and **South Africa** and **Mexico** conducted cross-information exercises. **Zambia** focused on high-level coordination meetings, while **El Salvador** prioritized participatory monitoring with partners and government stakeholders. These variations reflected the diverse capacities and priorities of each country context.

While overall the CotM programme's M&E systems were not fully interoperable with government systems, isolated instances of cross-information exercises in **Mexico** involving UNICEF and government data demonstrated a degree of effort towards interoperability. Efforts are underway to improve system alignment and identify opportunities to strengthen the framework and interoperability of CotM M&E systems with government systems. Technical support played a crucial role in strengthening existing systems and/ or developing robust data management systems, which contributed to improved monitoring and data analysis.

Photo 2 - Mural in "El Desierto", Mexicali, Mexico

4.5 Sustainability

This section addresses the extent to which the benefits of the programme will last. Under this criterion, the evaluation assessed the extent to which the net benefits of the CotM programme would or would likely continue, as well as the extent to which the CotM programme was able to adapt as necessary.

Q12 | To what extent has the programme succeeded in placing children on the move on the agenda of national governments and regional governance bodies, in particular the needs of most vulnerable children (e.g., girls, LGBTQI+, and children with disabilities)?

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.

Through sustained advocacy efforts, formal agreements, capacity-building initiatives, and the

strengthening of legislative/ policy frameworks, CotM are now better recognized in national agendas across the four programme countries. This progress indicates a promising degree of sustainability via the institutionalization of efforts to protect and assist children on the move.

Notable achievements include the advocacy strategy (**Mexico**) that helped institutionalize interventions such as the National Care Model, which recognizes the needs of vulnerable groups (e.g., LBTQI+, children with disabilities, etc.). In **El Salvador**, the programme placed forced internal displacement on the agenda of national bodies through formal cooperation agreements and supported and promoted a new model for migrant children returnees. In **Zambia**, the legislative framework now reflects children's rights, including those of migrant children: this is a result of the institutional strengthening and awareness initiatives carried out by the CotM programme. In **South Africa** the CotM programme strengthened (through capacity-building initiatives) the understanding of relevant stakeholders at both the local and provincial levels as to the needs of migrant children. The CotM programme also supported policy development around documentation and education, as well as promoting grants for CotM. These efforts increased the system's capacity to protect children's rights.

However, across all countries, the most vulnerable groups of CotM (such as children who may identify as LGBTQI+ or who live with disabilities, etc.) are insufficiently prioritized at national levels. The potential disappearance of independent oversight bodies is a risk that remains to be addressed.

Q13 | To what extent are results of the child protection systems-strengthening working (e.g., improving case management systems, strengthening data, promoting care and alternatives to detention; access to MHPSS and GBV services) and sustainable and resilient to risk once UNICEF/UNHCR support ends? How likely are those results to continue once the programme resources cease?

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.

Progress was made through improvements in the areas of case management and case transfers, data systems, establishing alternatives to detention, and improved access to services. The evaluation also finds that headway was made in the institutionalization of protocols, models, training, curricula, and coordination mechanisms with relevant actors (e.g., IP, COs, government institutions, et al.).

In **South Africa**, the programme strengthened case management protocols, ensuring a more streamlined process for addressing the needs of CotM. In **El Salvador**, the focus on alternatives to detention has been impactful, with the national authorities consistently adopting and supporting these models, improving access to services. In **Zambia**, the programme's efforts to institutionalize protocols, models, and coordination mechanisms are indicative of a comprehensive and enduring approach. In **Mexico** the strong regulatory framework is a promising sign of the sustainability of the CotM programme. These mechanisms exhibit the potential for maintaining the tangible progress that has been achieved over the course of the CotM progamme and indicate a path towards ensuring the continuity of measurable achievements.

However, despite the progress achieved, significant challenges persist. Legal and policy frameworks, while strengthened, still face gaps in practical implementation due to financial and human resource limitations at the individual stakeholder level; this is especially true of government agencies and IPs. Limited funding and human resources threaten the sustainability of advances that have been made over the years of the CotM programme. Inadequate funding

could hinder the further implementation of crucial initiatives, while a shortage of skilled personnel could disrupt the consistent delivery of services and effective execution of protocols, ultimately jeopardizing the continuity of progress achieved through the CotM programme. There are other significant challenges that endanger the long-term viability of the CotM programme: governments, IPs, COs, and other relevant CotM actors face persistent issues around adequate resourcing, staff capacity, and staff turnover. Lastly, the full adoption of legal and policy frameworks remains an ongoing challenge.

Q14 | What systems and partnerships have been put in place to build stakeholder ownership, capacity, and resources and ensure that child protection systems-strengthening work is inclusive of children on the move and can be scaled up by governments and complemented by civil society and other UNICEF/UNHCR partners?

Finding 15:

The CotM programme successfully developed and strengthened systems and partnerships. [75] 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.

The programme made important strides in establishing systems and partnerships aligned with UNICEF's CP Strengthening framework across the four countries. This included creating national and local coordination bodies, advisory structures, civil society networks, multi-sectoral teams, and building government capacity: such efforts lay the groundwork to advance local and national ownership. Specifically, new legislation, protocols, policies, national referral systems, and cooperation agreements were institutionalized to extend protection and services for migrant children. Coordination platforms, like interagency groups, and mental health networks were also initiated.

In **Mexico**, the programme contributed to the development of key legislation and protocols for protecting CotM, including continued advocacy. In **El Salvador**, there was progress in raising awareness and building capacity to protect the rights of internally displaced children. **Zambia** has worked to create a strong political and legislative framework supporting children's rights, including migrant children, although full implementation of policies is still needed. **South Africa** has also advanced in strengthening institutions and improving understanding of vulnerable groups, though more focus on this area is needed.

Formal agreements and advocacy campaigns with national authorities helped to institutionalize key mechanisms, like national referral systems and cooperation protocols. These represent crucial building blocks. In **Mexico**, advisory boards, migration commissions, the UN Interagency Group on Human Mobility (GIMH), and the establishment of 2 specialized mental health networks were established. In **Zambia**, national- (NAB), provincial-, and district-level structures and networks were established.

However, significant gaps remain to fully consolidate these systems and partnerships once direct support from UNICEF/ UNHCR ends. Issues around staff turnover, resource mobilization, and

[75] Aligned with the seven domains of UNICEF's Child Protection Systems Strengthening (CPSS) approach: 1. Legal and policy framework; 2. Governance and coordination structures; 3. A continuum of services; 4. Minimum standards and oversight mechanisms; 5. Human, financial and infrastructure resources; 6. Mechanisms for child participation and community engagement; 7. Data collection and monitoring systems. UNICEF. (2021). *Child Protection Systems Strengthening: Approach, Benchmarks, Interventions.* https://www.unicef.org/media/110876/file/Child%20Protection%20Systems%20Strengthening%20.pdf. Accessed 25 November 2023.

government transparency may jeopardize the long-term resilience of existing systems and partnerships. Cross-sectoral coordination and true ownership by government institutions is still limited in practice. Gaps persist around upholding standards, monitoring programs, ensuring adequate resourcing and financing, facilitating ongoing coordination, and transitioning full leadership and ownership to national stakeholders.

While the CotM programme both laid the groundwork for and solidified partnerships within child protection systems, continued effort is essential to maintain national leadership and stakeholder capacity, reinforce the commitment to protecting and assisting Cot, ensure adequate and sustainable financing, and facilitate coordination.

4.6 Unexpected outcomes

While "unexpected outcomes" remains an area yet to be fully explored across the programme, some noteworthy occurrences merit attention.

In **El Salvador,** IPs reported that families who participated in the initiatives formed their own local networks. Thus, even after the completion of the programme, these families continue to stay in touch, forming a support network and helping each other in various situations without the need for support from implementing partners.

In **Mexico**, IPs reported that foster families had a very positive impact on children that went beyond their general wellness. In their experience, among CotM who were adopted, those who had previously spent time with foster families had a higher rate of remaining with their adopted families than those CotM adoptees who had not previously spent time with foster families.[76]

In **Zambia**, a positive unexpected outcome of the CotM programme was the sensitization and awareness outreach initiative to identify CotM in communities by the child protection committees at the grassroots level, in collaboration with MCDSS. This fostered reporting of incidents to the frontline officials (including MCDSS) for case management referrals to the BID panel.

In **South Africa**, the CotM programme was felicitously integrated into existing projects being run by implementing partners related to children and HIV/ AIDS, education, and child protection and which had other funding sources (e.g., South African Red Cross and Save the Children).

5. Conclusions

Relevance

Conclusion 1:

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

[76] This was highlighted during a KII with an internal stakeholder.

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:

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)

Coherence

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)

Effectiveness

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)

Efficiency

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)

Sustainability

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)

6. Lessons learned and good practices

6.1 Lessons learned

The evaluation found five valuable initiatives that are worth focusing attention on. These lessons are relevant not only to UNICEF, UNHCR and the EU, but to the implementing partners and the various government agencies and academic institutions with which the CotM programme was assembled.

Lesson 1: Strong and coordinated national monitoring systems are essential for evidence-based programming.

Strengthening national data systems and coordinating data collection efforts within countries is essential for increasing the availability of disaggregated data about children on the move (CotM). Clear frameworks and data source monitoring are critical for ensuring the accuracy, comprehensiveness, and accessibility of this crucial information.

In situations where existing data is lacking or difficult to access, developing a CotM-specific data harvesting system may be necessary. This was found to be a work in progress across all four countries evaluated. In some instances, data was not readily available in national systems or UNHCR and UNICEF monitoring frameworks. Other cases lacked transparency regarding available data, existing gaps, and steps to address them.

Promoting stronger, innovative, and interoperable national monitoring systems for disaggregated data mining across all CotM groups is a critical step towards understanding their diverse needs and the impact of targeted programs. This information is essential for designing and implementing effective interventions that ensure the well-being of children on the move.

Lesson 2: Integration of especially vulnerable groups of children into future child protection programmes.

Our understanding of the most vulnerable children on the move (CotM), such as girls, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, and children with disabilities, remains limited due to the scarcity of statistics, evidence, and research. This lack of data hinders the development of targeted interventions that address their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

The CotM program has made strides in recognizing and supporting vulnerable groups. However, a crucial first step towards a truly inclusive program lies in generating comprehensive evidence on their specific needs and challenges. This knowledge is essential for designing effective interventions that leave no child behind.

To establish a comprehensive and inclusive approach, the integration process must include practices such as: defining concepts, identifying strategies, highlighting best practices, and including them in MEAL systems with specific targets. By incorporating these practices into future CotM programme design, the awareness of governments and partners to the needs of especially vulnerable CotM can be raised, which will enable effective ways of designing activities to address the needs of this cohort of CotM.

Lesson 3: Strong national child protection and immigration systems are cornerstones for ensuring the safety and well-being of children on the move (CotM).

Robust national protection systems are essential for safeguarding the rights and well-being of children and adolescents in migration. The CotM programme has made commendable progress in various countries, recognizing CotM and their specific needs. This progress was further strengthened by policy reforms and national programmes aimed at acknowledging and addressing their protection requirements. To ensure sustainability, it is vital to source funds for and

implement a strategy that includes a jurisprudential framework informed by a "child protection systems strengthening" approach by which strategic plans, accompanied by rigorous monitoring and training components, actualize on a case-by case basis the rights of the child. In countries with stronger child protection systems, it will be necessary to replicate and build up experiences gained from the CotM interventions that have already been implemented. For example, in Mexico, even though MHPSS and GBV strategies are classified as emergency measures, they are recognized as integral to the right to health and are mandated within the legal framework for child protection. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance national, long-term capacities to ensure that these policies and strategies can be consistently and transversally implemented, allowing CotM to benefit from this.

Lesson 4: Strengthening knowledge exchange and cross-learning within UN agencies and implementing partners is critical for improving program outcomes.

One of the invaluable lessons learned from the program is the critical role of information sharing and the exchange of lessons between countries. While the program design envisioned this exchange, it did not occur consistently or in a structured manner. This highlights the need to establish more formalized mechanisms and platforms to systematically facilitate bilateral and multilateral learning. Purposeful structures and processes are required to facilitate robust country-to-country and inter- and cross-regional exchanges that create opportunities for programme adaptation based on other countries' experiences. A consistent structure of exchange is essential for translating information into improved practices and outcomes.

Lesson 5: Securing sufficient national budget allocation to fund child protection systems is crucial to sustaining progress and ensuring the long-term success of interventions.

While technical assistance plays a crucial role in strengthening government capacity to protect CotM, long-term sustainability hinges on adequate national budget allocation. Once external funding ends, under-resourcing poses a significant obstacle to continued programme implementation and scaling up successful interventions. Securing dedicated national funding is therefore essential for achieving lasting impact. National ownership and commitment are demonstrated by allocating sufficient resources to CotM interventions in national budgets. This allows governments to replicate and expand on effective approaches, ensuring their long-term viability. Evidence-based advocacy efforts play a crucial role in this process. By targeting budgetary decision-makers across government with compelling data and case studies, stakeholders can drive increased funding allocation for CotM interventions.

6.2 Good practices

The evaluation identified five good practices across the CotM programme that have wider applicability.

Good Practice 1: Building strong partnerships and engaging key stakeholders is fundamental to ensuring success and sustainability.

The evaluation underscores the critical role of cross-sectoral coalitions in addressing the needs of CotM. Strong partnerships involving governments, international and regional organizations, NGOs, think tanks, academics, and civil society were identified as both the foundation *and* the driving force behind successful CotM interventions across all four countries. The effective collaboration between international agencies and organizations (e.g., EU, UNICEF, UNHCR) involved in the CotM program, alongside strong coordination with national governments, was instrumental in achieving the programme's objectives. This demonstrates the power of collective action in addressing complex challenges and ensuring the well-being of CotM.

Strengthening collaboration among CotM stakeholders offers a wealth of benefits. By combining resources, expertise, and diverse perspectives, cross-sectoral partnerships can unlock a new level of comprehensiveness and effectiveness in interventions, reaching a significantly wider range of children on the move. This enhanced reach ensures that CotM have access to the essential services and support they need, bridging existing gaps in service provision. Moreover, collaborative efforts foster knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and innovation, contributing to the long-term sustainability of programs. Finally, strong coalitions lend a powerful voice to advocacy efforts, influencing policies and practices to better protect and support CotM, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

Good Practice 2: Programme flexibility to accommodate evolving contexts embedded within a multi-year, cross-border strategy for the protection of CotM.

One of the CotM programme's key strengths was its inherent flexibility. This design feature allowed for adapting objectives, strategies, and activities based on the specific context and evolving circumstances of each country. As realities and contexts shifted, the program could modify its approaches to align with emerging needs and opportunities. This adaptability ultimately enabled more effective and responsive programming throughout the multi-year initiative.

Integrating flexibility into the comprehensive protection strategy proved critical to achieving impact across diverse contexts. By tailoring program elements to each country's unique situation, the CotM programme ensured its interventions were relevant, effective, and sustainable. This adaptability allowed for a more nuanced and context-specific approach, ultimately enhancing the program's overall impact on children on the move.

Additionally, the in-built flexibility facilitated context-specific customization of goals and activities. This allowed stakeholders to design and implement interventions that addressed the unique challenges and opportunities faced by CotM in each country. As the programme progressed, it could adapt its goals and activities to align with changing realities and emerging needs, ensuring it remained responsive and effective throughout its lifespan.

Good Practice 3: Building government capacity for applying the "Best Interest Principle".

Building government capacity to apply the Best Interest Principle (BIP) effectively has proven a critical approach to protecting CotM. The core elements of this approach include fostering a common understanding of children's rights, grounding efforts in a robust legal framework, tailoring strategies to specific contexts, and ensuring non-discriminatory application of the best interest principle. Strengthening these capacities has been an effective strategy across the multi-country programme, leading to better protection of CotM in diverse contexts. For instance, in Mexico it led to improved plans for restoring CotM's rights, avoiding automatic deportation. In El Salvador it enhanced procedures for assisting returned and displaced children. In Zambia it enabled better handling of children in conflict with the law. Finally, in South Africa, it streamlined the issuing of documentation necessary to access healthcare, education, and other services. When moulded to local contexts, overall, this approach has proven to be effective.

Good practice 4: Investing in capacity building for frontline teams generated a ripple effect of positive change.

A key takeaway from the CotM programme emphasizes the critical role of fostering a supportive environment where frontline teams can effectively assist migrant children. This was achieved through comprehensive training activities designed to build the capacity of social workers, shelter staff, and other caregivers. These activities fostered a collaborative learning environment where participants not only enhanced their individual skills but also built a supportive network.

Investing in personnel and systems supporting migrant children created favourable conditions for accessing essential services. The programme's focus on standardized competencies through training processes led to immediate improvements in care practices and contributed to a more sustainable long-term response. This ensures that acquired knowledge and skills can be replicated and disseminated across diverse contexts, laying the groundwork for a more sustainable future.

Good practice 5: Active participation empowers children on the move to express their needs and aspirations, leading to greater agency and well-being.

This best practice highlights the significant advantages of involving CotM in program design, research, and decision-making processes. Providing a platform for children to express their views, needs, and concerns fosters a sense of empowerment and self-confidence, enhancing their understanding of and awareness about their rights. Ultimately, elevating and amplifying CotM voices not only leads to more responsive programming but also improves their overall agency, protection, and well-being.

Multiple implementing partners recognized that when meaningfully engaged, children become powerful drivers of change rather than passive recipients of support. Several successful examples illustrate this: U-report Platforms and PSS activities with children (both regions), youth-led interactive community radio programmes (South Africa), and consultations with children concerning the services provided (Mexico).

By prioritizing CotM participation, programs can be created that are truly responsive to their needs and aspirations. This fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, empowering children to become active agents in shaping their own future and driving positive change within their communities.

7. Recommendations

These recommendations build on efforts to date by UNHCR and UNICEF country and regional offices, as well as those of government and implementing partners to ensure that children on the move are effectively protected and that their rights are progressively realized. All recommendations were developed from a logical causal analysis between each of the findings and their conclusions, but with proposals that often encompass more than one conclusion, given the proximity of some themes. Efforts were made to develop practical, actionable recommendations that address the major challenges identified.

Table 6: Recommendations

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
1	**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.** ▪ **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.	UNICEF/ UNHCR All ROs and COs with CotM programmes	Structural	COs and ROs	Before start of next CotM programme	**C** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15 **SA CB** R1
2	**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.** ▪ **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.	UNICEF/ UNHCR COs in ESAR & LAC	Operational	COs	Before & during implementation	**C** 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15 **LL** 3, 5 **ES CB** R7, R10 **M CB** R3, R5 **Z CB** R4, R6

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
	▪ **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.					**SA CB** R3, R7, R9
3	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.** ▪ **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 implementation	**C** 7, 10, 12, 13 **LL** 1, 2, 3 **ES CB** R1, R5, R6, R8 **M CB** R2 **Z CB** R3, R5 **SA CB** R4, R5
4	Recommendation 4: **As part of broader child protection systems strengthening efforts, UNICEF and UNHCR will advocate for interoperability with and within administrative data**	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
	systems. This includes promoting the inclusion of CotM-specific indicators across government and civil society datasets to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis. ▪ **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	**LL** 1, 2, 3 **ES CB** R1, R5, R8 **M CB** R8 **Z CB** R3, R5 **SA CB** R4, R5
5	**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.** ▪ **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	**C** 6, 14, 15 **LL** 5 **M CB** R8

#	Recommendations (listed in order of priority)	Target (region, country, agency)	Structural or Operational	Responsible	Timeline	Relates to Conclusions, LL, CB
	▪ **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	**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.** ▪ **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 implementation	**C** 14, 15 **LL** 5
7	**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.**	UNICEF/ UNHCR COs in ESAR & LACR	Operational	COs	Before and during implementation	**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
	▪ **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

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