



Pocket Manual  
on Child-Specific  
Data for Children  
on the Move



**IDAC**  
international data alliance  
for children on the move





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## Pocket Manual on Child-Specific Data for Children on the Move



## Acknowledgements

This Pocket Manual is inspired by the Manual on Child-Specific Data Capacity Strengthening on Children on the Move, published in 2023 by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) within the framework of the International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC).

IDAC is a global, cross-sectoral coalition jointly led by UNICEF (Chair), Eurostat, IOM, OECD and UNHCR. It brings together national statistical offices, governments, international and regional organizations, academia and civil society with the shared objective of improving data and statistics on migrant and displaced children, so that every child is visible in policy and practice.

This pocket version was prepared under the guidance of **Apostolos Kasapis**, Director at ELSTAT and Chair of IDAC Working Group 1, with the support and encouragement of **Athanasios C. Thanopoulos**, President of ELSTAT. It offers a concise and accessible synthesis of the key concepts, messages and recommendations of the original manual. Designed as a practical reference tool, it provides quick access to essential ideas for professionals, policymakers and statisticians working with data on children on the move. Readers seeking comprehensive methodological guidance and country practices are encouraged to consult the full manual, which remains the primary reference.

Finally, we would like to credit the **Phototypesetting and Typographical Formatting of Publications Section of ELSTAT** and especially **Stavriлена Dimitrakopoulou** for the layout and graphic design.

IDAC Secretariat

## Introduction

# 1

Children on the move are among the most vulnerable groups globally. Whether they have crossed borders seeking asylum, are internally displaced due to conflict or disaster, or have been separated from their families, their lives are often marked by instability, risk, and limited access to basic rights and services. Reliable and timely data about these children are essential for ensuring that their needs are understood and that no child is left behind in policy and programme responses.

The availability of high-quality, disaggregated data allows governments and partners to monitor child rights, inform decision-making, plan services, and evaluate outcomes. Disaggregated data highlight hidden patterns, give visibility to marginalized groups, and provide the foundation for more inclusive and equitable interventions.

This pocket manual aims to support national statistical systems and relevant stakeholders in improving the collection, analysis and use of data on children on the move. It provides a concise reference to the key concepts, data needs, ethical principles, and coordination practices necessary to ensure that migrant and displaced children are properly counted and protected in national data ecosystems. While simplified in format, the guidance herein aligns with international principles and builds on the full Manual on Child-Specific Data developed by IDAC and ELSTAT.

*On 23 March 2022,  
a child walks  
though Moldexpo  
«Blue Dot» centre  
in Chisinau,  
Moldova  
with a blue  
heart-shaped balloon.*



## Who Are Children on the Move?

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On 20 June 2023, students sit together during a visit by UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell and World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director Cindy McCain to a UNICEF- and WFP-supported school in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The term “children on the move” is used to describe children who are affected, directly or indirectly, by migration or displacement - either across borders or within their own country. This includes migrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, internally displaced children, stateless children, and children left behind by migrating caregivers. It also encompasses children who have been trafficked across borders or who are at risk of exploitation, abuse, or neglect due to mobility-related circumstances.

This is an operational concept rather than a legal definition. It reflects the diversity of experiences and vulnerabilities that children may face before, during or after displacement or migration. The grouping is inclusive of both children with legal status and those in irregular situations.

From a legal standpoint, multiple international instruments recognize the rights of migrant and displaced children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, among others, all reaffirm the obligation of States to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all children, regardless of status.

Operationally, it is crucial for data producers and users to understand these categories in order to ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection. Inclusive data practices help ensure that all children on the move - particularly the most invisible, such as unaccompanied minors or those without documentation - are counted, considered, and protected.

## What Data Do We Need?

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Collecting the right data on children on the move is fundamental to understanding their needs and circumstances. Data should reflect both the demographic characteristics and the lived experiences of these children, in a way that supports evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions.

Key variables to be collected include:

- Age and sex
- Country of birth and country of previous and current residence
- Legal status (e.g., asylum-seeker, refugee, undocumented, stateless)
- Family status (e.g., accompanied, unaccompanied, separated)
- School enrolment and attendance
- Access to health care and other basic services
- Living conditions, including housing and security
- Disabilities or other protection concerns

Disaggregation is critical. Data should, where feasible, be disaggregated by age groups (e.g., 0–4, 5–11, 12–17), sex, migratory status, and other relevant characteristics. Disaggregated data provide insights into inequities and help make vulnerable children more visible in national statistics.

Special attention is needed for unaccompanied and separated children, as well as children in detention, in informal housing, or affected by trafficking. Their data may be particularly hard to capture, yet they often face the greatest risks. Understanding these profiles is key to ensuring their inclusion in services and protections.



Zarghuneh, 10, claps along to a song while playing with friends in a UNICEF-supported child-friendly space in Gayan District, Paktika Province, Afghanistan.



## Principles of Data Collection and Use

# 4

On 8th August 2022, a girl draws at the UNICEF-supported CBE in Ainak Nawa, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.



The collection and use of data on children on the move must be grounded in international and national legal frameworks, uphold the highest ethical standards, and protect children's rights at all times. This is especially important given the sensitive nature of such data and the vulnerability of the population concerned.

**Lawfulness and purpose limitation:** Data should only be collected and used where there is a clear legal basis to do so. The purpose of data collection must be specified, legitimate and relevant. Data should not be reused for other purposes unless there is a compatible legal and ethical justification.

**Data minimization and proportionality:** Only the minimum data necessary to achieve the stated purpose should be collected. Excessive or intrusive data collection should be avoided.

**Ethical safeguards:** Particular care must be taken to ensure that data collection respects the dignity, rights and best interests of the child. Parental or guardian consent is typically required, while child assent should also be sought when appropriate.

**Confidentiality and security:** Data must be stored and processed securely to prevent unauthorized access, loss or misuse. Personal data should be anonymized or pseudonymized wherever possible.

**Respect for the rights of the data subject:** Children and their families should be informed about what data is being collected, how it will be used, and what rights they have in relation to their data, including the right to access, rectify, or (in some cases) erase personal data. These principles apply across all stages of the data life cycle - from collection and processing to storage, analysis, sharing and eventual disposal - and are essential to ensuring that data serve to protect, not endanger, children on the move.

## Data Sources

# 5

Reliable data on children on the move can come from a variety of sources. Each source has its own strengths and limitations and combining them can provide a fuller picture of children's circumstances. It is essential to understand how different sources complement each other and how to use them responsibly and effectively.

**Official statistics:** These include population and housing censuses, household surveys, labour force surveys, and education or health surveys. While not always designed specifically to capture children on the move, they can provide key disaggregated indicators when appropriately adapted or analysed. Oversampling of migrant and displaced populations can help improve data quality.

**Administrative data:** These are collected routinely by public authorities or service providers, such as immigration, education, health, social welfare, or justice systems. Administrative records can provide longitudinal data and cover hard-to-reach populations. However, they may be fragmented across agencies and may lack standard definitions or consistent data quality.

**Integrating new sources:** Emerging technologies and alternative sources of data - such as mobile phone data, satellite imagery, or social media - can help identify movement patterns, assess access to services, or monitor border areas in near real time. While promising, these sources must be used with caution due to concerns about accuracy, ethics, and privacy.

**Combining multiple sources through data linkage or triangulation** enhances the overall utility and reliability of information, while also allowing for the identification of gaps or inconsistencies. Coordination among data producers and users is critical to ensure that sources are used in a coherent, child-sensitive manner.

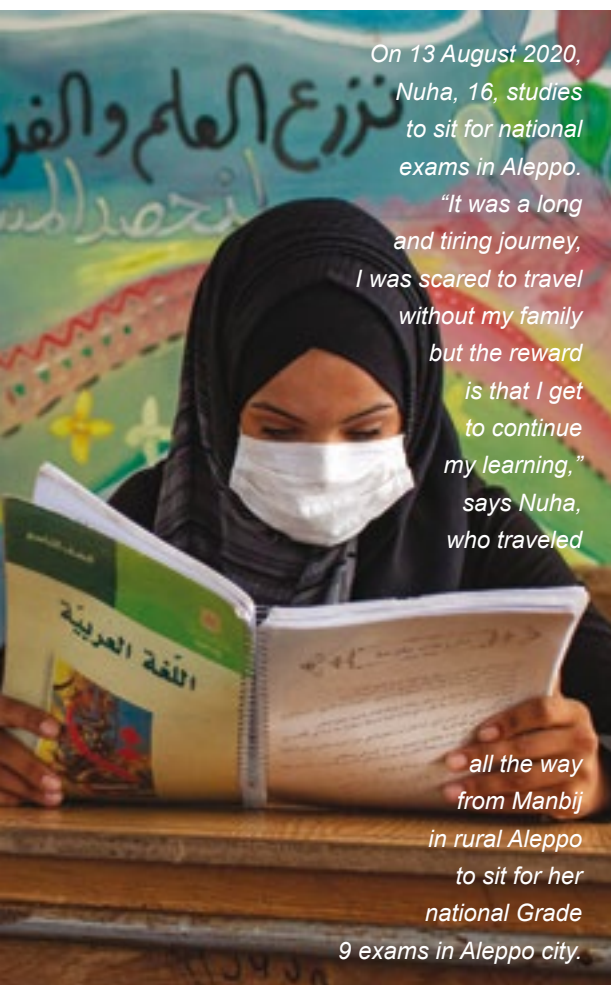


Adolescent girls skills outside the UNICEF social hub in Cox's Bazar.



## Challenges and Considerations

# 6



On 13 August 2020, Nuha, 16, studies to sit for national exams in Aleppo.

"It was a long and tiring journey, I was scared to travel without my family but the reward is that I get to continue my learning," says Nuha, who traveled

all the way from Manbij

in rural Aleppo to sit for her national Grade 9 exams in Aleppo city.

Collecting and using data on children on the move presents several challenges. These must be addressed to ensure that data systems are inclusive, ethical, and effective.

**Fragmentation and inconsistency:** Data are often scattered across institutions and collected using different definitions, formats, and methodologies. This hampers data comparability and integration. Strengthening coordination and standardization is essential.

**Legal and institutional barriers:** Legal constraints around data sharing and protection may limit the ability to compile and use data effectively. Lack of clarity on mandates or responsibilities can further weaken collaboration between agencies.

**Limited capacity and resources:** Many countries face shortages in skilled personnel, funding, and technical infrastructure needed for comprehensive and reliable data collection on children in mobility contexts.

**Challenges in age assessment and documentation:** Determining a child's age is often difficult in the absence of documentation, leading to inconsistencies in categorization and service provision. This has implications for both data accuracy and child protection.

**Visibility and inclusion:** Some children are systematically excluded from data systems, including those in informal or undocumented situations, those in transit, or those unwilling to engage with authorities due to fear or mistrust. Special strategies are needed to reach and include them.

Tackling these challenges requires a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach that puts children's rights and well-being at the centre of data practices.

## Key Messages and Action Points

# 7

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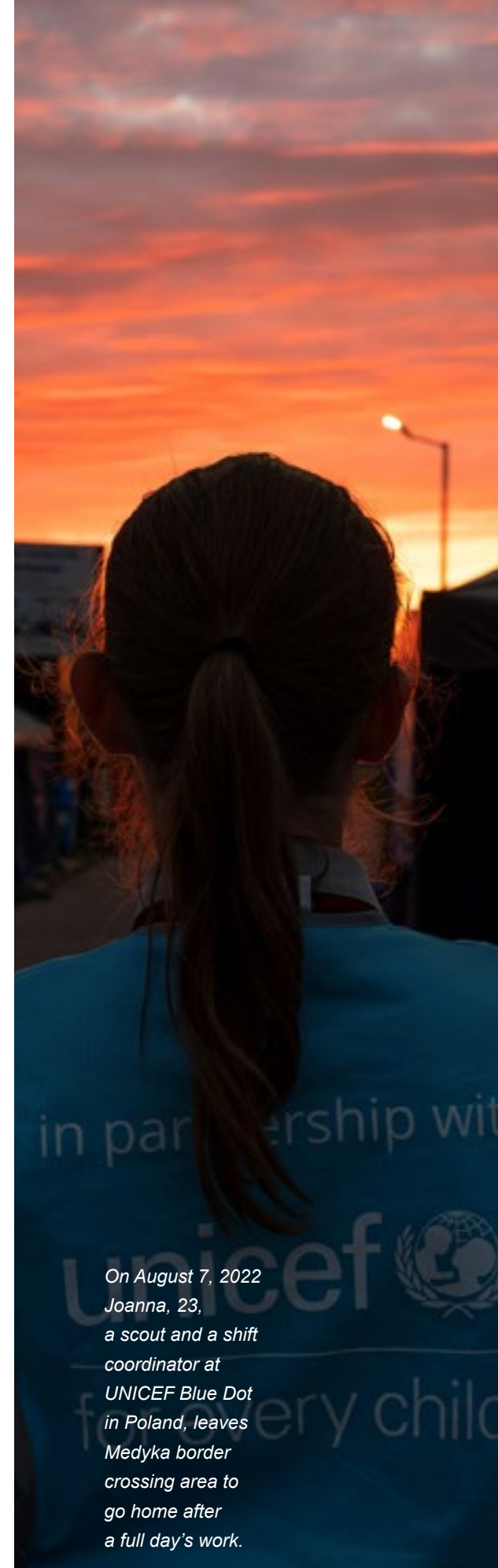
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On August 7, 2022 Joanna, 23, a scout and a shift coordinator at UNICEF Blue Dot in Poland, leaves Medyka border crossing area to go home after a full day's work.



## Further Reading and Resources

# 8



*Eight-year-old Sasha holding toys in his hands in local modular town for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Borodianka, Ukraine.*

For more detailed guidance, data frameworks, and operational tools, the following resources offer additional support:

- **Manual on Child-Specific Data Collection and Dissemination for Migrant and Displaced Children** (IDAC & ELSTAT, 2023): The comprehensive reference guide on which this pocket manual is based.
- **UNICEF Data for Children on the Move Hub**: A central resource for data, tools, and publications related to children affected by migration and displacement.
- **International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS)** and **International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS)** by the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS).
- **Global Compact for Migration (GCM)** and **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)**: International frameworks with principles and commitments on data and evidence.
- **UNHCR Statistical Yearbooks and Population Data Portals**: Authoritative data on forced displacement and refugee populations.
- **IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)**: A global system for tracking and monitoring displacement and mobility trends.
- **SDG Indicator Metadata and Databases**: Tools for aligning child-specific data with the Sustainable Development Goals, including disaggregation by migratory status.

These and other relevant tools can help reinforce national efforts to collect, analyse and share data on children on the move in an ethical, coordinated and effective manner.

## Case Study: Responding to a Refugee Crisis - A Data Strategy for Children on the Move

# 9

Following the outbreak of armed conflict in a neighboring country, Country X experiences a sudden influx of refugees and migrants, including a significant number of children. The national statistical system must respond rapidly to ensure the visibility and protection of these children in both data and policy.

### Initial Coordination and Mobilization

The National Statistical Office (NSO), in collaboration with the line ministries (ex. Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Child Protection Authority, and Ministry of Health and Education), establishes an inter-agency task force.

This task force includes representation from:

- Police and border authorities (e.g., Coast Guard, Border Patrol)
- Asylum and refugee registration services
- Social welfare and accommodation services
- UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM)
- NGOs managing shelters and community centers

The task force agrees on a minimum core set of variables to be collected for all incoming children, based on international standards. The NSO leads the development of metadata guidelines and data collection protocols.

### Use of Administrative Data

At the onset of the crisis, administrative records become the primary source of information. Key data are drawn from:

- Arrival and registration forms at entry points
- Temporary accommodation databases
- Health and vaccination records from clinics and hospitals
- School enrolment data from local education authorities



*On 22 January 2022, 3-year-old Kawthar wears her new woollen hat and scarf, received as part of the winter clothing kits UNICEF distributed in Alzhourieyh makeshift camp, east rural Homs. "These came just in time," says her mother Turkiyeh, 39, about the winter clothes.*

- ties
- Case management systems used by child protection services

The NSO issues guidance on standardizing definitions, applying anonymization techniques, and harmonizing formats across agencies. Technical training is offered to frontline staff on data quality and ethical handling of children’s information.

**Transforming Data into Statistics**

To produce statistics, the NSO integrates data from multiple sources and addresses inconsistencies. For instance:

- Deduplication algorithms are applied across different registries
- Data linkage is used to assess school attendance and vaccination coverage by migration status
- Indicators are disaggregated by age, sex, country of origin, and accompaniment status

The NSO publishes regular situation briefs and dashboards for policymakers and child-focused agencies.

**Launching Targeted Statistical Surveys**

Once the initial wave of displacement stabilizes, the NSO designs sample surveys to gather deeper insights. These may include:

- A rapid assessment survey in reception centers
- A child vulnerability module added to an ongoing labour force or household survey
- A school-based survey to assess learning gaps and psychosocial needs

These instruments are designed with support from international partners and build national capacity.

**Protecting Rights and Upholding Principles**

Throughout the response, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics guide all actions:

- **Relevance and impartiality:** Data serve the needs of children and policymakers, without political interference
- **Professional standards:** The NSO ensures methodological soundness
- **Confidentiality:** No identifiable information is published
- **Coordination and accountability:** Stakeholders work under clear roles and mandates

This approach enables the country to respond not only with immediate humanitarian support, but also with a longer-term strategy for inclusion and protection, anchored in evidence and child rights.

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On 29 June 2022, 2-year-old Mahjaben is at a UNICEF-supported mobile health clinic in Gayan District, Paktika Province, Afghanistan, where she is being treated for acute watery diarrhoea - cholera. Luckily, she is nearly fully recovered.

