

POLICY FOR ACTION: PROTECTING AND ASSISTING CHILD VICTIMS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- » In 2019, an estimated number of 1,884 men, women and children have either died or are missing in the dangerous Mediterranean crossing journey while attempting to reach Europe.
- » Egyptian children migrate in pursuit of better economic conditions, enhanced education, and decent employment opportunities, which should be addressed as a priority to protect children.
- » A child is faced with psychological/physical abuse, lack of access to basic needs, theft and even life-threatening risks by venturing out on perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. About two-thirds (65%) of migrating Egyptian children reported to have experienced psychological and/or physical harm at the hands of smugglers.
- » When a child arrives to their destination, they may be held in detention facilities, unable to communicate their needs or facing difficulty in doing so, and hence experience verbal abuse, persecution, and racism.



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I. EGYPTIAN CHILDREN ON THE MOVE: THE CONTEXT



“Children on the Move” is an umbrella term used to describe children who have voluntarily or involuntarily migrated or have been forcibly displaced between or within countries for a variety of reasons. Migration or displacement can take place with or without the children’s parents or other caregivers. These movements, while potentially opportune, might also place them at increased risk of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect, or violence. Egypt is a source, destination and transit country for many children on the move. As of February 2019, Egypt was host to over 200 thousand (254,726) registered refugees and asylum seekers, over 50% of whom are from Syria¹. Egypt was considered as the alternative and safest stopover on the way to Europe². Between January 2017 and March 2018, 124,711 people crossed the Central Mediterranean Route and entered Europe by sea. 2,873 people died in the process or were reported missing at sea³ in the central Mediterranean in 2017. In 2019, the number of people reported to be missing or dead while crossing the Mediterranean sea on their way to Europe⁴ were estimated to be 1,884. Although Egyptians don’t constitute a high proportion of migrants worldwide, as of June 2018, Egyptian Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) represented around 8.6% of the total UASC population in Italy⁵.

As of February 2019, Egypt was host to

254,726 registered refugees and asylum seekers, over **50%**



of whom are from



¹ Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) (2020). IAWG Meeting Minutes. Cairo.

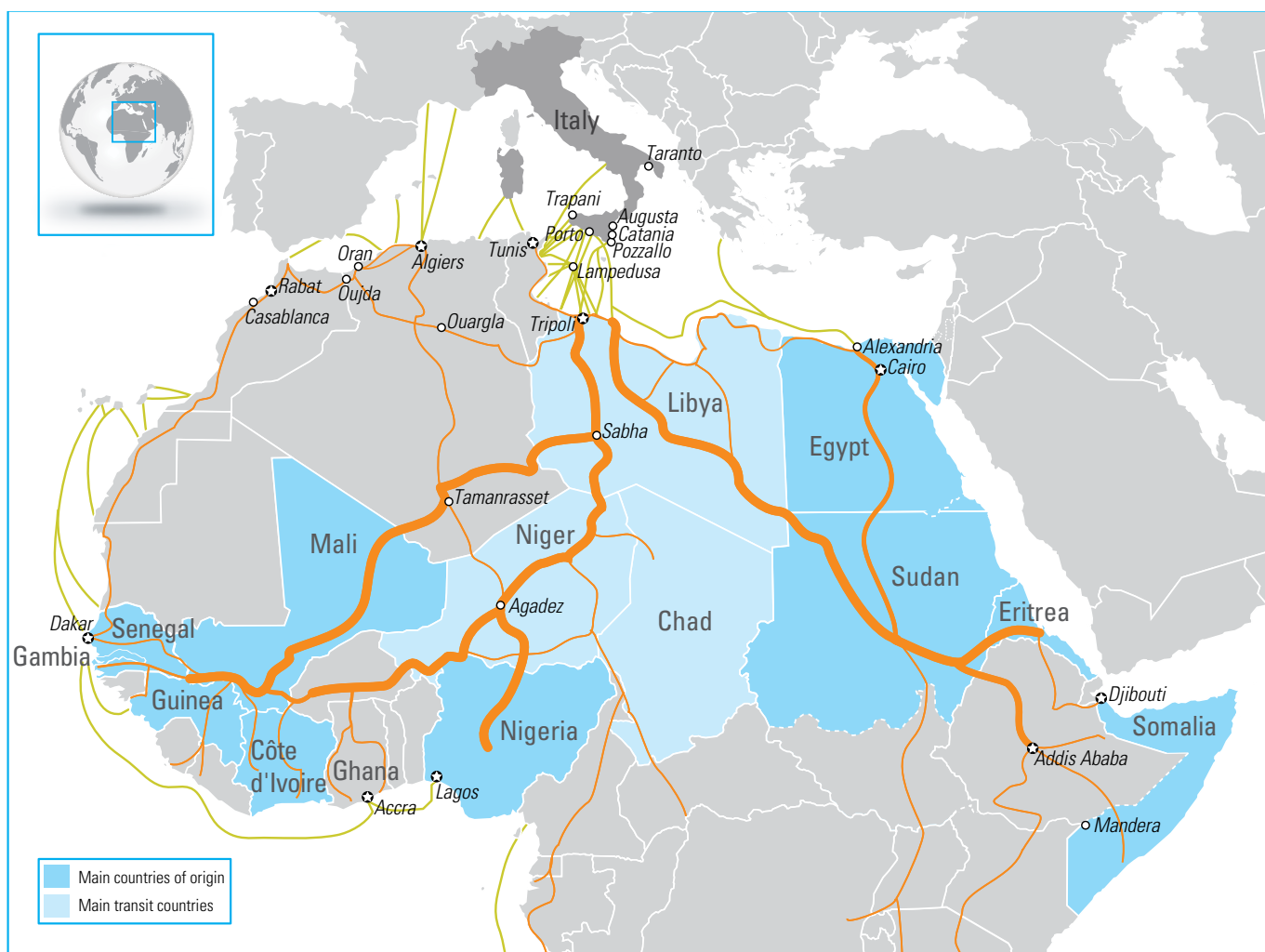
² IOM, Youth on the Move, August 2017

³ UNHCR, Central Mediterranean Route Situation – Supplementary Appeal Jan-Dec 2018

⁴ UNHCR (2020) Europe Dead and Missing at Sea. (Accessed: 20 February 20, 2020)

⁵ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2018) Report di Monitoraggio – I minori stranieri non accompagnati (MSNA) in Italia.

Figure 1: Central Mediterranean migration routes



Source: A Deadly Journey for Children: The Central Mediterranean Migration Route, UNICEF, February 2017

The National Coordinating Committee for Preventing and Combating Illegal Migration (NCCPIM) in Egypt suggests that irregular migration of Egyptian children is strongly observed in the age group of 16 to 17 years between childhood and adulthood, with lesser child migrants between the ages of 9 to 15 years⁶. This also seems to be the case for non-Egyptian child migrants, where in the first half of 2017, boys aged 15-17 years old made up 93% of UASC who arrived to Europe⁷. This is driven by the search for job opportunities, peer pressure, the prospects of better living from remittances for the family, and poor quality of education, all of which are prevalent, especially in rural areas⁸.

II. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRATING EGYPTIAN CHILDREN?



Italy is the key destination country for Egyptians and is host to a significant number of Egyptian children. UNICEF Sicily's Egyptian Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) in Italy assessment confirmed several characteristics to Egyptian UASC, that are enlisted below.

Low levels of education among migrating children

The UNICEF assessment of children migrating to Italy shows that 9 out of every 10 (91%) of children had reportedly been enrolled in school in Egypt. Among children who had attended school, 59% attended middle school, 28% attended high school and 15% attended primary school. Even though most children had attended school, about 9% of children could not read or write⁹. This might be a result of the children's limited access to high quality education or due to dropping out of school to start work from an early age.

⁶ NCCPIM and the National Council for Human Rights and National Center for Social & Criminological Research, Irregular Migration of Unaccompanied and Separated Children in the Egyptian Society, 2016.

⁷ UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM (2017). Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated. p.3.

⁸ International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2016). Egyptian Unaccompanied Migrant Children: A case study on irregular migration. Cairo: IOM.

⁹ UNICEF, Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Egypt in Italy, Sicily, May 2017

Child labor is also a joint characteristic among migrants

Nearly two-thirds (59%) of children reportedly worked prior to arriving in Italy¹⁰. The work reported were most often professions that are either in the agriculture or carpentry sectors¹¹. This might demonstrate the limited economic opportunities of individuals who migrate from poor rural areas.

Child migration is the highest in poor rural areas of the Nile Delta region

In Egypt, the governorates from which the highest number of child migrants originate, lie in the poor rural areas of the Nile Delta region in the country's north, particularly from Gharbia, Sharkia, Kafr El-Sheikh, Behera, and Menoufia. High sending governorates located in the south (i.e. Upper Egypt) include Asyout, Menia, and Fayoum¹².

III. WHY DO EGYPTIAN CHILDREN MIGRATE?



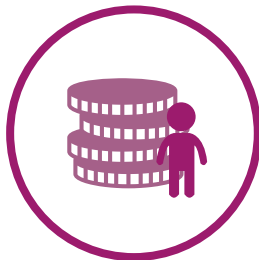
Migration is driven by a number of push and pull factors, primarily related to the search for better living conditions. These factors are often multiple and intertwined. Among the top reasons for the thousands of Egyptian UASC migration are to escape poverty, aspiration for a better education and to be able to sustain their most basic needs.



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Push Factors:



Poor economic conditions and limited work opportunities

Children at risk of migrating and their families often live in poor economic conditions with limited access to job opportunities. According to IOM's study conducted with UASC in Greece, among the sample interviewed, 85% of all UASC cited seeking job opportunities as a driving force for irregular migration to Europe¹³. Similarly, UNICEF Italy's assessment conducted on UASC in dedicated reception facilities across Sicily shows that 81% of UASC leave Egypt due to lack of economic opportunities¹⁴.

¹⁰ UNICEF, Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Egypt in Italy, Sicily, May 2017

¹¹ ISMU Foundation (2019), At a Crossroad. Unaccompanied and Separated Children in their Transition to Adulthood in Italy. UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Rome, pp.44-45

¹² UNICEF Egypt Children on the Move Strategy, 2018 - 2022

¹³ International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2016). Egyptian Unaccompanied Migrant Children: A case study on irregular migration. Cairo: IOM.

¹⁴ UNICEF, Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Egypt in Italy, Sicily, May 2017



Access to quality education

Among the reasons that push children to migrate is the deteriorating quality of education, which correlates with the lack of access to decent economic opportunities. This limited access to quality education constrains access to employment opportunities outside the agricultural sector and other types of manual labour. One-third of interviewed UASC (32%) stated lack of access to education services as a specific reason to migrate. This is also confirmed by UNICEF Sicily's assessment with over half (53%) of UASC migrating because of the limited access to education¹⁵.



Lack of access to the most basic needs, including food, water and shelter

According to UNICEF Sicily's assessment, 2 out of every 10 Egyptian children in Italy (22%) reported that they lacked access to the most basic needs, including food, water and shelter¹⁶. Although Egypt has made significant progress in child well-being, the secondary analysis of the Household Income, Expenditure, and Consumption Survey shows that 38% of children fell below the poverty line in 2017/18. Child poverty rates were significantly higher in frontier governorates (57%) and rural Upper Egypt (56%). Moreover, 10 million children were considered to be multi-dimensionally poor in Egypt in 2017¹⁷. A child is considered multidimensionally poor in Egypt when he/she is severely deprived in at least 2 child well-being dimensions of the 8 considered for the study, 1) access to water; 2) access to sanitation; 3) access to information (including devices); 4) housing conditions; 5) health; 6) nutrition; 7) education, and 8) protection¹⁸. Several challenges persist in realizing the rights of every child to a fair chance in life and to satisfy their basic needs.



Pull Factors:




Influence by friends, family and acquaintances who have successfully migrated

Although migration is considered to be an individual choice, friends and family can have an influence on a child's decision to migrate when the child is seen as a means to financially support the family. The majority of Egyptian UASC make the decision to migrate individually. The proportion of children who reported that they had taken the decision to migrate by themselves ranged from 91%¹⁹ to 97%²⁰. Only a third (32%) stated that their decision was taken or influenced by their families, and 9% by friends. Others who have successfully migrated to Europe also contribute to the migration decision with two-thirds (65%) of children reported peer pressure as a driver²¹.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ UNICEF, Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Egypt in Italy, Sicily, May 2017

¹⁷ CAPMAS, Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) and UNICEF, Understanding Child Multidimensional Poverty in Egypt, 2017

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2016). Egyptian Unaccompanied Migrant Children: A case study on irregular migration. Cairo: IOM.

²⁰ UNICEF, Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Egypt in Italy, Sicily, May 2017

²¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2016). Egyptian Unaccompanied Migrant Children: A case study on irregular migration. Cairo: IOM.



Aspiration of a high-quality of life in Europe influenced by social media

Social media platforms play a major role in publicizing the higher standards of living enjoyed by migrant children, who serve as role models for others. Moreover, social media is used by traffickers to tempt migrants into migrating to Europe. Brokers publicize their contact details, prices and schedules on social media platforms to reach out to potential customers.



Aspiration for work opportunities and higher quality of education

In search of a better life, migrants perceive living in Europe as being characterized by economic security, social class mobility, and access to quality education and employment opportunities. 32% of unaccompanied migrant children reported that they perceive migration to Europe to be an opportunity to receive additional and higher-quality education, which some reported being deprived of in Egypt. It can cause great disappointment when perceived quality of life does not meet their expectations, considering the amount of money and family saving invested in the journey.

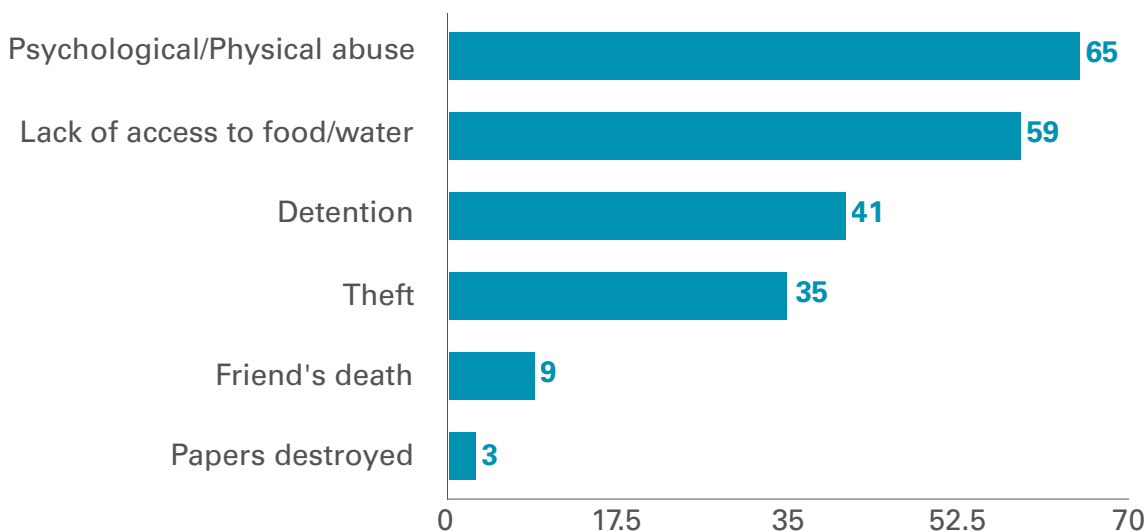
IV. WHAT ARE THE RISKS CHILDREN FACE DURING THEIR JOURNEY?



CHILDREN ARE DEPRIVED OF THEIR BASIC NEEDS AND FACE FACTORS THAT ENDANGER THEIR LIVES

According to IOM’s study, nearly two-thirds (59%) of children interviewed in Greece reported that the supply of water on board was scarce, and only small amounts of edible food was available. Additionally, 65% also reported to have experienced psychological and/or physical abuse at the hands of smugglers, while over a third (35%) were robbed of some of their belongings. Besides the absence of these basic needs, another 9% witnessed the death of another migrant. Other risk factors include children’s exposure to harsh conditions at sea including exposure to waves and cold temperatures during night hours which results in low body temperature and at times hypothermia, with significant risks for their physical health.

Figure 2: Hardships faced by UASC during their migration journey

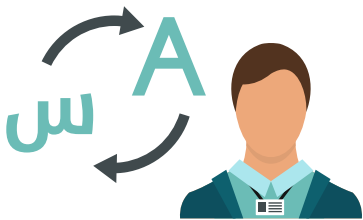


Source: IOM, Egyptian unaccompanied migrant children: A case study on irregular migration

V. ONCE CHILDREN ARRIVE, WHAT ARE THEIR CONDITIONS?



UASC prefer countries where they enjoy special rights and protection, such as Italy, where the Immigration Act does not allow for the expulsion of minors, unless they voluntarily elect to do so, unlike other European States. Nonetheless, immigration systems and border protection structures are often inadequately prepared to guarantee fair legal procedures for children. Children face a range of specific protection issues, including, being held in detention facilities, inability or difficulty in communicating their needs, verbal abuse and racism. All these issues add more distress on the children rather than providing protection upon reception. Below are some of difficulties and risks that children may face outside and within the protective facilities²²:



The general lack of Arabic interpreters and trained psychologists have the most fundamental impact on the minors;



Some children are unable to obtain information about their status and possibilities;



In some shelters, children were only provided with one basic clothing item of poor condition. Minors thus had to wear the same clothes over a prolonged period of time with implications for the child's hygiene;



Children outside of shelter might work against their will under poor and exploitative conditions.

²² IOM, Egyptian unaccompanied migrant children: A case study on irregular migration, 2016

VI. POLICY RESPONSE



Since the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Government of Egypt has exerted major efforts to establish a comprehensive child protection system. The Child Law (2008) mandated the leading and formation of a Child Protection system in Egypt. The Egyptian Constitution adopted in 2014 introduced Article 80 on rights of the child and it includes the provision that the state shall endeavor to achieve the best interest of children in all measures taken against them. The government of Egypt in 2014 set up a National Coordinating Committee on Preventing and Combating Irregular Migration as an inter-ministerial entity. This brings together 21 relevant ministries and human rights, child and women's agencies to coordinate national efforts to combat irregular migration, and to recommend legislations and policies aiming at strengthening these efforts. The committee is mandated to lead governmental efforts on preventing and combating irregular migration to, through and from Egypt. Under Article 3 of law 82 in 2016, NCCM is prescribed as the legal representative of the families of unaccompanied children, whose families or legal representatives cannot be identified within the efforts to combat illegal migration and smuggling of migrants. Effectively, this mandates the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) as the legal guardian of all unaccompanied children, both Egyptian and foreign nationals on Egyptian territory. One of the main outcomes to national task force on children on the move, chaired by NCCM and with participation from UNICEF, are the SOPs on the Protection and Assistance of Child Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Victims of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons. The SOPs on Dealing with Children at Risk, along with the Child Law, and Law No. 82 of 2016 on Combating Illegal Migration and Smuggling of Migrants, offers referrals into the national child protection system as an alternative measure to detaining children in relation to migration. NCCM is the authority in Egypt mandated to policymaking, planning, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating activities of all child wellbeing dimensions.

1. Address families' basic needs and economic challenges

- » Seeing as poor economic conditions are among the factors that motivate a child to migrate, it is crucial to address them by providing protection for marginalized Egyptian families, including those with children at risk of irregular migration. A component of the national Social Safety Net (SSN), Takaful and Karama Programme, which is a conditional cash transfers (CCT) programme, aims to protect the poor and vulnerable, and promoting the investment in human capital. This programme through its vast coverage not only can uplift the families' economic conditions, but also can be used to reach out to those who are considering child migration as an option.



2. Provide employment opportunities and life skills training

- » Bilateral agreement with countries in need of seasonal/regular labor could also reduce the risk of irregular migration through providing more safe and formal alternatives for those at the appropriate age to work. Reaching and creating practical and safe alternatives, along with collaborating with host countries, can be effective in putting an end to detention of migrant children and the risk endured throughout the journey.
- » In order to keep young Egyptians from considering migration and be able to appropriately reintegrate returnees, efforts need to be exerted to improve skills identification and matching. This can be done through providing 'life skills training' skills and job training opportunities for adolescents and youth to equip them with the skills needed in the job market for those at working age.

3. Develop a strategy for social and behavioral change communication

- » A child is faced with psychological/ physical abuse, lack of access to basic need, theft and even death during the Mediterranean's deadly journey of migration. This calls for awareness raising on the realities of irregular migration, detention and destination conditions. A communication strategy on social and behavioral change also helps to identify a clear and consistent approach achieving social and behavioral change in relation to migration and displacement, including messaging around the social integration of refugees and returnees.

4. Raise awareness on the role of parents on the risks of irregular migration

- » Children often are influenced by their peers who have successfully made it to Europe without understanding the risks and challenges that come with irregular migration. Offering positive parenting programmes with a migration lens to Egyptian families might help in influencing children's decisions. Social and health workers who have a wide outreach to families, could assist in awareness raising of parents on the risks of irregular migration, and the role of parents in supporting their children to make well-informed choices.

5. Strengthen national child protection systems

- » Working with major host countries for assisted voluntary return of unaccompanied children and reintegrating them within the society is needed. No child should be held in any detention facilities, which can be harmful for their health, well-being, and can potentially undermine their development. Practical alternatives should be investigated within the host countries to achieve decent living arrangements. The National Coordinating Committee for Preventing and Combating Illegal migration (NCCPIM) is mandated to respond to children on the move through strengthening the capacity of governmental authorities to provide alternative care for children in detention, those released, and Egyptian returnees.
- » NCCM works to establish a child protection system that is more sensitive to the needs of children on the move through the child helpline (16000) is a national tool that can help in dealing with the child victims of human trafficking and illegal migration and in providing them with all necessary services. Moreover, the Child Protection Committees (CPC) at the District and Governorate levels play a leading role to ensure that migrant and refugee children are part of its mandate, as per the Child Law No. 126 of 2008 and the national SOPs on protecting and assisting child asylum seekers, refugees, and victims of smuggling and trafficking. Children returning to Egypt should be provided support with a close follow up on their cases, including efforts of family reunification. This work is already being implemented successfully in a number of governorates including Aswan and Damietta. The model can be scaled up on the national level to supporting child returnees.

6. Inform programming through timely data and quality evidence

- » As migration trends are constantly changing, recent and periodic data is required in order to understand new trends, dynamics and needs in mixed migration flows. Investments in quality research, data collection, and analysis can build up a stronger evidence base to inform program design and monitoring. To deliver evidence-based planning and policy making, it is important to study the profiles of migrating families and children, the main concentration areas, the route and the effect of migration. This should be coupled with addressing information gaps on the issue where there remains a significant gap in knowledge.