



***Protecting and Educating Children
on the Move in UNICEF and UNHCR Documents
Ochrona i edukacja dzieci w ruchu
w dokumentach UNICEF i UNHCR***

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this article is to show, based on UNICEF and UNHCR documents, the problems of migrant children that hinder/impede their inclusion in the education of the host community and to identify ways to deal with these problems.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: Using document analysis, I will answer the following questions: What threats are children on the move exposed to? What are the priority areas for action? How can they be protected and integrated into the new education system?

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The paper presents the causes and risks associated with migration for children, important concepts for educational practice, recommendations and proposed solutions

RESEARCH RESULTS: The documents show the risks faced by children on the move. Such children are often marginalized and stigmatized in host communities. Ensuring their well-being (meeting their psychological needs and respecting their rights) is a priority and a necessary condition for them to be able to start education. The discussion shows the importance of education in dealing with difficult conditions or in counteracting negative phenomena (discrimination, xenophobia). Education is treated as capital that is supposed to give these children a chance for a better future.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: The following conclusions can be drawn for practice from UNICEF and UNHCR documents: children on the move should have the same rights and opportunities for education as their peers in host communities; they need friendly and safe places to live, play and learn; children have resources and experiences that should be considered when organizing educational environments.

→ **KEYWORDS:** CHILDREN ON THE MOVE, CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, WELL-BEING, EDUCATION, HOST COMMUNITY

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest pokazanie na podstawie dokumentów UNICEF i UNHCR problemów dzieci migrantów i uchodźców, które utrudniają/unieemożliwiają im włączenie się do edukacji społeczności przyjmujących, oraz podpowiedzi, jak im zaradzić.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Wykorzystując analizę dokumentów, odpowiem na pytania: Na jakie zagrożenia narażone są „dzieci w ruchu”? Jakie są obszary priorytetowych działań? W jaki sposób można je chronić oraz włączyć do nowego systemu edukacji?

PROCES WYWODU: Przedstawiono przyczyny oraz zagrożenia dla dzieci związane z migracją, ważne dla praktyki edukacyjnej pojęcia, zalecenia oraz propozycje rozwiązań.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: W dokumentach wskazano zagrożenia, na jakie narażone są „dzieci w ruchu”. W społecznościach przyjmujących są często marginalizowane i stygmatyzowane. Zapewnienie im dobrostanu (zaspokojenie potrzeb psychicznych, respektowanie ich praw) jest sprawą priorytetową i warunkiem koniecznym, aby mogły podjąć edukację. Prezentowane treści pokazują znaczenie edukacji w radzeniu sobie w trudnych warunkach czy w przeciwdziałaniu negatywnym zjawiskom (dyskryminacja, ksenofobia). Wykształcenie traktowane jest jak kapitał, który ma im dać szansę na lepszą przyszłość.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Z dokumentów UNICEF i UNHCR można wyprowadzić następujące wnioski dla praktyki: „dzieci w ruchu” powinny mieć takie same prawa i możliwości do edukacji jak ich rówieśnicy w społecznościach przyjmujących; potrzebują przyjaznych i bezpiecznych miejsc do życia, zabawy i nauki; dzieci posiadają zasoby i doświadczenia, które powinny być brane pod uwagę przy organizowaniu środowiska edukacji.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** „DZIECI W RUCHU”, PRAWA DZIECKA, DOBROSTAN, EDUKACJA, SPOŁECZNOŚĆ PRZYJMUJĄCA

Introduction

Migration and refugees are growing phenomena. They have negative consequences for entire families and their individual members, mainly children and young people. Being forced to leave one's home country and place of residence is a critical event. The prolonged duration of the difficult situation increases the chances of being uprooted from childhood and has negative consequences for adult life. Children experience the intersecting influences of strong stressors that disrupt their well-being. Episodes of leaving home or friends leave a lasting mark on their psyche. Even before leaving their home country, they functioned under extremely difficult conditions. They saw the death of people and animals, destroyed buildings, and the ruins of their own homes and schools. They witnessed violence against their parents and loved ones and became victims themselves.

They are exposed to various forms of discrimination and harassment during transit and at their final destination. Chaos, uncertainty about tomorrow, fear for loved ones and sometimes separation from them are experiences that take a heavy toll on their psyches. They have not developed coping mechanisms for dealing with traumatic experiences.

They experience culture shock in new environments. Migrant or refugee children have difficult or impossible access to education, which is treated as a luxury good in such situations. During a migration crisis, they are first deprived of access to education, and then this service is restored in the post-crisis reality.

The aim of this article is to draw attention to the problems of children on the move that disrupt their proper functioning, hinder their integration into host communities and their education systems, and to indicate solutions and recommendations. For this purpose, I will use UNICEF and UNCHR documents. By engaging a variety of actors in host societies to work "on the ground," monitoring the situation of children on the move in different parts of the world on an ongoing basis, and compiling the collected material by international experts in many fields, these organizations provide valuable knowledge for both theorists and practitioners of education. I asked three questions: What are the dangers for children on the move? What are their areas for action? What ways and means facilitate positive integration in the host community?

Document analysis (Rapley, 2022) included reports and other materials: articles, plans, programs, teaching aids and individual case histories from around the world. The content analyzed was related to child protection, care and education. Publications on the issue of "children on the move" include a paper by U. Markowska-Manista and K. Sawicki (2019), entitled "Migrant Children and Youth 'On the Move': Between the Legacy of the Past and Challenges of the Future."

UNICEF and UNHCR Activities for Children on the Move

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a humanitarian organization, which is part of the United Nations (UN). It operates in over 190 countries, working with governments and various local entities to benefit children, young people and their families. UNICEF's budget is funded by contributions from UN member states and private donors (GUS, n.d.). Its achievements include UNICEF's participation in the adoption of the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (UNICEF, 1989). Among its many programs in the field, it develops reports, action plans and programs, articles and teaching aids, and provides empirical research results. It collaborates with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, which is an office established in 1950 to protect refugees (UNICEF, n.d.-b; UNHCR, n.d.-a; UNHCR Polska, n.d.), working on behalf of migrant, refugee and internally displaced children.

Data cited in the reports show that by the end of 2021, 36.5 million children were forcibly displaced, the highest rate since World War II. The phenomenon is intensifying year after year. Reasons for migration include economic difficulties (67%); safety concerns

(war, violence) (40%); seeking better educational opportunities (32%); family problems (23%); and lack of basic services (22%) (UNICEF, 2022a).

Migration crises in many parts of the world make it necessary to undertake numerous initiatives to protect the physical and mental health of migrant children and enable their integration into host societies, including access to new education systems. A 6-point action plan has been developed, including protecting refugee and migrant children, especially unaccompanied children, from abuse and violence; ending the detention of asylum-seeking or migrant children; keeping families together as the best way to protect children and give them legal status; ensuring that all refugee and migrant children continue their education and have access to health care and other quality services; pushing for action on the underlying causes of large-scale displacement of refugees and migrants; and promoting measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries and areas of transit and destination (UNICEF, 2017).

These points identify priority areas of action for host communities, together with proposals for intervention programs and measures. Host governments are also encouraged to secure funding for these purposes and to integrate the efforts of as many individuals, institutions and organizations (religious groups, educational institutions) as possible to implement this plan.

Basic Concepts of Inclusive Education for Children on the Move

For educational purposes and effective action during migration, there is a need for a uniform understanding of terms. The term “refugee” is distinguished from the term “migrant” who crosses/crossed the border to be able to move outside their home country and back. The reason may be to seek better conditions for living, working, development, etc. A refugee lives outside the country of his or her citizenship and cannot return – due to his or her race, religion, nationality, political views or membership in a particular social group (Knezevic et al., 2022). Refugees cannot be extradited or returned to places where their lives or freedom were threatened, and the state will be responsible for their care. The concept of origin refers to external law, which naturally determines refugee treatment (1951 Convention). These rights of each individual are recalled, among others, by the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or leave their homes or places of residence; in each case due to armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, human rights violations or natural or man-made disasters, and who have done so, but have not crossed the recognition of an international state border (Knezevic et al., 2022).

To protect all children, regardless of the cause, UNICEF and UNHCR documents use the term children on the move. “international or internal child migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as internally displaced children or returnees” (Knezevic et al., 2022).

Host community refers to the country of asylum and to the local, regional, governmental, social and economic structures in which refugees live. Refugees living in cities may or may not have legal status or status in the host community. In the context of refugee camps, the host community may include or simply be adjacent to the camp, interacting with or otherwise influencing refugees living in the camp (UNHCR, 2011).

Protecting the Rights of Children on the Move

The problem of the growing number of children on the move is associated with an increase in negative consequences for their life and health. Migrant children's well-being is determined by the presence or absence of parents, the quality of relationships with others, their physical and psychosocial situation in the educational environment, and the security provided. All refugee children deserve equal opportunities in life: they should be safe from harm and exploitation, live in a clean and healthy environment, be given the chance to learn and look forward to a future with equal opportunities as their peers in the host societies (UNHCR, n.d.-a).

It is urged that especially unaccompanied children who have been separated from their parents should not be detained in centers for adults but should be provided with alternative placements, such as foster care (UNICEF, n.d.-a). The UN documents also stress the timeliness and necessity of complying with the provisions of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* under conditions of shortened childhood, forced participation in warfare, dangerous work, and abandonment or shortening of education (UNHCR, n.d.-b).

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNICEF, 1989) distinguishes childhood as a phase in the human life cycle and separates it from adulthood, taking the age of 18 as the cut-off date, and thus indicates that due to their level of development, children need protection. They have their rights, including the right to adequate living conditions, development, education, and preservation of their own identity (citizenship and name). The choice of solutions should take into account in particular: "indications for maintaining the continuity of the child's upbringing and ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic identity." Article 22 indicates the need to guarantee the child and his or her parents/guardians adequate protection and humanitarian assistance. Articles 32 through 40, in turn, call for the protection of children from dangers such as economic exploitation, abduction, sale and trafficking of children, and sexual abuse. Particularly relevant today are also the provisions that talk about protecting children from armed conflict, from being recruited into the army, and from all the possible consequences of war: lack of access to adequate living conditions, education and development.

The active attitude of children, who should be important actors of change, is clearly indicated. They have skills, experiences and ideas that should not be ignored; they are competent partners in developing optimal solutions (UNICEF, n.d.-c).

Protecting the Well-Being of Children on the Move

Well-being is described as a positive state that ensures the full and harmonious development of the child in all areas: physical, mental, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual. It is understood in three dimensions, i.e. personal well-being (positive thoughts and emotions, such as hope, peace, self-esteem, and self-confidence); interpersonal well-being (nurturing relationships, responsive care, sense of belonging, and ability to be close to others); skills and knowledge: the ability to learn, make positive decisions, respond effectively to life challenges and express oneself (Hijazi & Carvalho Eriksson, 2019).

Governments, institutions and individuals should pursue integrated actions to prevent and protect migrant children against secondary victimization, bearing in mind that: The suffering and exclusion of migrant and displaced children is not only unacceptable, but also preventable. A child is a child, no matter why s/he leaves home, where s/he comes from, where s/he is, or how s/he got there. Every child deserves protection, care, and all the support and services s/he needs to thrive (UNICEF, n.d.-c).

It is crucial that children should feel at home in host societies. Despite the difficulties and threats that they experience, they are flexible and able to adapt quickly to new conditions, establish relationships, master new languages, and more: "Children are incredibly resilient. By learning, playing and exploring their skills, they can find ways to cope, drawing strength from their families and communities" (UNHCR, n.d.-c).

Children are active agents, they have abundant resources to help them adapt to their new circumstances, and host communities should provide opportunities for positive integration, including facilitating their integration into the new education system.

Integrating Migrant Children Into the Host Community's Education System

Data shows that a migrant/refugee child is five times more likely to miss school than any other child. Half of children on the move are enrolled in primary school, and less than a quarter in secondary school. The gap is even greater in higher education (colleges, universities), where only one percent of "kids on the move" are enrolled. The situation is particularly unfavorable for those with special educational needs, as well as for girls and young women who are retained as caregivers at home to care for younger siblings or who were previously married (UNICEF, n.d.-b).

The list of proposed measures to facilitate the process of positive integration of migrant children into the educational system of host communities includes hiring teachers and support staff from among migrants/refugees. Their role is to overcome language barriers and cultural differences, help overcome discrimination and prejudice, and create a safe and supportive school environment by developing tolerance, cooperation and conflict resolution. Sports (self-defense), recreational activities, art, storytelling, etc. are recommended for these tasks (UNICEF, 2019; Knezevic et al., 2022).

UNHCR's teaching materials for children and adolescents develop social and emotional skills, enabling students and teachers to co-create a peaceful school environment in which they can celebrate their differences. Each age group is referenced with specific examples: stories of a refugee/migrant who is the same age as the students. They are encouraged to use active methods, such as joint discussions on interesting and optimistic topics related to daily life, hobbies, their new environment and dreams for the future. For adolescents, activities are additionally focused on developing critical thinking. Access to facts and statistics from credible sources is intended to develop critical thinking about issues, enabling a better understanding of refugee and migration issues (UNHCR, n.d.-d, n.d.-e, n.d.-f, n.d.-g).

Counteracting Discrimination and Xenophobia

Respect for children's rights is inextricably linked to their protection from discrimination and xenophobia and ensuring a safe, healthy and full development in the home environment and in educational institutions (UNHCR, 2021). Children on the move need to be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. They need education so they can better understand their situation and develop coping skills (Hijazi & Carvalho Eriksson, 2019).

Children in new settings avoid going to educational institutions because of poor health (physical and mental), language and administrative barriers, and discrimination and xenophobia. Children on the move face discrimination from peers in host societies and teachers who are guided by prejudices, stereotypes, low expectations and intimidation (Knezevic et al., 2022). They treat them as "strangers" and "others," stigmatize and marginalize them. One in four children and young people feel that they are mistreated because of their nationality (57%) or economic situation (21%). They also experience gender discrimination, 17% of women and 7% of men (Aslanishvili et al., 2022). Attention is drawn to the unfavorable situation of migrant girls and young women, for example, in terms of access to education. Kotak presents individual cases of girls on the move and proposes solutions (Kotak, 2022; U-Report, n.d.; UNICEF, 2022b).

Manifestations of discrimination and xenophobia antagonize relations between newcomers and representatives of host communities, which often generate new ones. Among the recommended suggestions for addressing such situations are examples of intervention programs (Knezevic et al., 2022), exercises to develop problem-solving skills, the ability to create and maintain relationships, developing teachers' social and emotional learning skills (Hijazi & Carvalho Eriksson, 2019); examples of lesson plans, and diagnostic and teaching tools for overcoming discrimination and prejudice (UNICEF, 2019; Skovbye et al., 2021).

The local community, religious groups and institutions, the media and the private sector should all engage in activities to integrate displaced children and build understanding with them and their families. It is recommended to collect data on attitudes towards

ethnic or religious minorities, and identify those attitudes; promote social solidarity, trust and exchange between discriminated groups and host communities; build support networks to promote a positive image of the migrant and refugee child, creating an atmosphere of dialogue; strongly and publicly condemn xenophobia and discrimination; and build social support for migrant and refugee children (UNICEF, 2017).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The migration crisis is a serious challenge for the modern world. Documents of international organizations are a reliable source of knowledge for theoreticians and practitioners in terms of education. Drawing from them, we learn from the experiences of others and are open to international cooperation.

Document analysis shows that we must take care of migrant children's welfare, and that they must have the same opportunities for development, in terms of access to education, as their peers in the host community. This will ensure their future in the long term. In educational institutions, special attention should be paid to respect for these children's rights and protection of migrant children from violence, discrimination, xenophobia, stigmatization and marginalization. These are conditions that enable positive integration and inclusion in the educational system. Children on the move should be listened to carefully, as they are active subjects capable of identifying their needs and finding optimal solutions in crisis situations.

For educational practice, it is useful to standardize the definitions of important terms we use in migration crises. This facilitates communication and provides the possibility of integrating the actions of various local and global actors. In turn, familiarizing children with these terms is an important part of inter-/transcultural education, fostering the development of cooperation, tolerance, respect and kindness.

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