

GIRLS ON THE MOVE IN NORTH AFRICA



Save the Children

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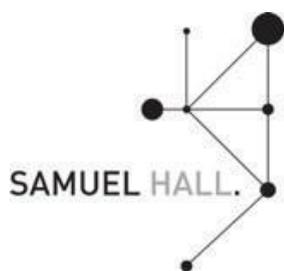
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* All respondent names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants



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- ARCOM:** Association of Refugees and Migrant Communities in Morocco
- CEAR:** Spanish Commission for Refugees
- CMR:** Central Mediterranean Route
- CNDH:** The National Human Rights Council of Morocco
- COVID-19:** Coronavirus Disease 2019
- CS:** Case Study
- CSO:** Civil Society Organisation
- EMR:** Eastern Mediterranean Route
- FGM:** Female Genital Mutilation
- GBV:** Gender-Based Violence
- INLTP:** The National Commission for the Fight Against Human Trafficking
- IOM:** International Organization for Migration
- KII:** Key Informant Interview
- LGBTIQ+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
- MENA:** Middle East and North Africa
- MHPSS:** Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- NGO:** Non-Governmental Organisation
- SGBV:** Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- SOGIESC:** Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, Gender Expressions, and Sex Characteristics
- UASC:** Unaccompanied or Separated Children
- UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund
- WAAR:** Western Africa-Atlantic route
- WASH:** Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- WMR:** Western Mediterranean Route

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“
Girls on the move in North Africa face a multitude of risks and challenges that encroach upon their capacity for survival. These include sexual and gender-based violence, physical attacks, deprivation of liberty, trafficking and exploitation, and forced marriage.”



Even though girls and women make up increasing proportions of the international migrant population of North Africa, and despite the prevalence of studies on migration in, through, and to North Africa, there is limited research focusing specifically on the experiences of women and girls. Girls who migrate face exposure to intersecting risks that can interfere with their ability to realise their human rights and fulfil their potential as individuals. Restrictive gender norms and gender inequalities affect critical aspects of girls’ migration journeys, influencing their motivations and decisions prior to departure, their experiences in transit, and the challenges they face integrating within their countries of destination.

This study aims to address this gap in migration research, by developing a holistic and gender-specific understanding of the migratory patterns and experiences of girls in, through, and to North Africa. To do so, the research team employed a qualitative research approach, informed by child- and gender-sensitive practices, to collect data from girls and boys in Italy, Spain, Morocco, and Tunisia. The participants ranged in age from 9–24-years-old and came primarily from sub-Saharan African countries including Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Guinea, as well as Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Libya. Additional data was collected remotely with selected key informants in Libya. In total 68 girls and young women and 24 boys and young men were interviewed. The inclusion of boys in the sample, while small, was necessary to ensure a gender-inclusive perspective. All participants were at various stages in their migratory journeys and provided unique, contextualised information regarding the challenges and opportunities faced by migrant girls and boys.

The research finds that migration drivers often take on a gendered and age-related dimension. Girls and women interviewed identified conflict, violence, or lack of job prospects in home countries as well as more gendered drivers such as family conflicts – including exposure to abuse in some cases – and child and forced marriage and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Although girls interviewed generally reported active involvement in at least some aspect of the migration decision-making process, age nuanced this: across contexts, younger girls (aged 10-14) were far less involved in decision-making than older girls (aged 15-24) or boys. In cases where parents or other family members were responsible for migration decisions, they undertook much of the planning, often leaving younger girls with little practical information regarding their travel plans. Conversely, older girls were more frequently the drivers of the migration process, often initiating the planning and encouraging their peers to join them in the journey.

While there are many common threads driving girls’ migration, some trends emerged in decision-making processes by country of origin. Girls from Morocco often described migration as a “rite of passage,” while girls from sub-Saharan Africa were most likely to describe SGBV as a factor driving their migration.

Autonomy in migration and decision making also varied by country of origin. In general, Moroccan girls appeared the most well-informed and well-prepared. Their migratory path was heavily influenced by societal norms and expectations within their communities; most Moroccan girls maintained strong connections with friends and family members in Europe. While there was strong societal pressure to migrate in some cases, Moroccan girls expressed an active, participatory role in the decision-making and planning process. In contrast, girls of sub-Saharan African origin – many of whom migrated to escape forced marriages, violence, conflict, and SGBV – were often less prepared and faced greater challenges in transit, as well as at their destination. These challenges were often related to limited opportunities for advance planning. That being said, in many cases, the act of leaving itself demonstrated agency.

In transit, girls adopted a variety of protective and coping measures to minimise risks; the most common measures included travelling in groups (particularly in groups with men), hiring smugglers, and paying or bartering for protection. Girls identified sexual and gender-based violence, pregnancy, robbery and assault, detention, and lack of shelter as some of the key risks for which they needed protection. Sexual and gender-based violence was common; many girls spoke of witnessing or experiencing rape or sexual assault. Another common risk during migration in and through North Africa was arrest or detention.

Because they were aware of the inherent risks of traveling as a girl, common practices included dressing as boys to blend in, travelling with peers or adults for protection and travelling without identifying documents. Girls frequently mentioned sexual abuse for access to basic necessities along the journey including housing, protection, and money. A lack of alternatives, options, and choice led to such sexual exploitation and abuse.

These varied coping measures and strategies did not always protect girls from protection threats; some strategies (e.g., recourse to smugglers and exploitative sexual relationships) heightened them. While girls seemed to view sexual abuse as a strategic way to navigate their situation, this further emphasizes the critically urgent need to provide other alternatives through policy and programming so that the 'best option' is not one where abuse is experienced for access to the most basic of services/protection/needs. That some girls seem compelled to turn to these harmful measures as coping strategies poses an evident challenge to providing them with responsive child protection services.

Girls reported multiple challenges when they reached their country of destination. Specialised mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services were limited in most research locations, despite many girls identifying these services as critical, particularly the need for counselling support to address the trauma sustained throughout the journeys. Although various local organisations and NGOs across contexts offered general healthcare services, girls had limited access, in part due to a lack of awareness and lack of documentation. In addition to general healthcare services, gaps in accessing maternal health services and birth registration are a key challenge for young women, due to the lack of awareness of available services, language barriers in accessing them, the distrust of medical facilities and fear of penalties for being undocumented, as well as the associated costs. Housing was a further challenge, particularly for girls not considered vulnerable.

Despite being a major driver in migration decisions, access to education on arrival varied, often dependent on age, language(s) spoken, nationality, as well as location. Many children found themselves unable to attend school as they had aged-out, while others reported the language of instruction to be a barrier.

These findings underline not just the common challenges that girls and boys face at each stage of their migration journey, but also the highly gendered nature of some of the barriers, risks, and violations girls encounter and the responses they use to protect themselves. At the same time, the findings highlight the remarkable levels of agency and resilience they demonstrate. They further demonstrate the urgent imperative to develop programming to protect and advance the rights of girls and young women in complex migratory contexts.

Recommendations

The findings from this study highlight the critical need to engage with relevant stakeholders to guide gender-sensitive programming and policy development to support girls on the move. Broadly, in countries of origin, transit, as well as destination, strategies should include strengthening outreach and awareness efforts through targeted interventions at the local level to more directly engage vulnerable populations of girls, particularly those who may otherwise attempt to remain invisible or "fly under the radar" or who may be unaware of services available. In addition, the results of this study underscore the need to strengthen the voices of migrant girls by creating inclu-



sive spaces and representation in decision-making positions, to ensure their specific needs are being met.

In countries of origin, advocacy efforts through engagement with local and national governments and other key actors to address the underlying causes of forced and child marriage and combat sexual and gender-based violence are key. Additionally, programs and policies should be strengthened to promote improved and equitable access to education for vulnerable and at-risk populations. Finally, collaborative efforts between governments and other stakeholders to implement programmes that work to promote positive social norms to help prevent violence against children, including Parenting without Violence, are especially critical to address the various forms of gender-based violence.

The findings highlight the need to identify and engage community leaders and to strengthen community-based programming to promote honest discourse about migration experiences and realities. Of critical importance is the need to increase access to migration-related information both for girls considering migration as well as those who influence their journeys, with particular attention to young girls at risk of separation.

In transit locations, urgent targeted interventions are recommended to identify and support migrant girls in need of medical care, and to ensure their basic needs are met for hygiene, dignity, and nutrition. Interventions should focus on improved emergency humanitarian service provision, prioritising access to and continuity of education, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Programming should also focus on coordinated efforts with key partners to identify and provide safe accommodation, as well as to improve communication networks, ensuring mobile connectivity and digital literacy in transit.

Finally, in countries of destination, a focus on MHPSS and outreach should be a priority, for example: increased MHPSS staffing in reception centres and engagement with local governments and key authorities to support the development of migrant networks to link new migrants with existing support mechanisms. Migrant access to social protection systems, including social assistance and labour market programmes should be embedded as a basic right into national legislations. As in transit locations, programming supporting safe accommodation, improved communication networks including mobile connectivity, and digital literacy skills should be prioritised. Providing improved access to education services, including for those who have 'aged out' of traditional systems, and building child migrants' awareness of their rights will contribute to enabling girls to realise their aspirations.

1. INTRODUCTION



Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“ They face risks ranging from sexual and gender-based violence, physical attacks and deprivation of liberty, and trafficking and exploitation, to forced marriage. ”

“I will say it is not an easy journey, but if you think you can handle it, take it. [...] Because I'll give you the conditions, can you face them? Rape, sexual harassment, locked up in house for two to three months and you have no freedom to go out. Different men come and have their way with you and go out. You don't even know them; you don't even... you don't even know what is inside them. So, if you can take all of that, you can take the journey.” (Mariama, age 24, Sierra Leonean origin, interviewed in Tunisia)

Migrating and displaced girls in North Africa face a multitude of risks and challenges that hamper their capacity to survive, learn, and be protected. These are often gendered, and include sexual and gender-based violence, physical attacks and deprivation of liberty, trafficking and exploitation, and child marriage. Many girls view migrating as an opportunity to gain control over their lives and their futures, yet on their journeys they are vulnerable. In addition to harmful social and cultural practices which put them in danger of physical and psychological harm, they are also likely to encounter barriers to accessing core social services including education, healthcare, legal and protection mechanisms, and to experience economic disenfranchisement. All of these factors deepen girls' vulnerabilities and prevent their empowerment.

These girls are at pivotal moments in their cognitive, physical, and emotional development – entering puberty, and exploring their identity and autonomy. It is a time when severe trauma, isolation and deprivation can leave a lasting mark on their development¹.

Despite the abundance of studies on migration in the North African and southern European context, there is very limited research focusing on the intersection between gender, risks faced and coping responses adopted by girls and young women. Key research and knowledge gaps include the patterns and combinations of factors driving migration, protective factors while on the move, and gendered barriers to basic services and human rights.

Lack of knowledge of the experience and perspectives of migrating girls and young women has direct consequences for girls who migrate, leaving them more likely to fall through the cracks in both policy and programmatic decision-making which means their specific needs are neither recognised nor met².

Following other reports in the Save the Children Girls on the Move series, the present study examined the migration choices, decision-making processes and protection risks and vulnerabilities of migrant girls originating from, and migrating in, to, and through three target countries – Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco – as well as arriving in Italy and Spain, usually via the former as transit countries.

This study aims to contribute to closing knowledge gaps and to broaden awareness of gender and age dimensions of migration, by providing contextualised information on the current situation of girls' migration in and through North Africa. More specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- **UNDERSTAND GIRLS' JOURNEYS** by examining existing information and trends pertaining to girls and young women transiting through, originating from, and settling in the three identified countries, the challenges they face, and potential risk factors.

1 Natalie Colich, et al., “Biological Aging in Childhood and Adolescence Following Experiences of Threat and Deprivation: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” American Psychological Association, (2020).

2 Save the Children [PowerPoint presentation]. “Girls on the Move in the Balkans,” (2020).

- **UNPACK JOURNEYS** through further understanding of decision making, agency and protection risks.
- **IMPROVE INTERVENTIONS** by helping to inform gender-sensitive, transformative approaches.

The project falls within the framework of Save the Children's Tunisia-based North Africa Migration Initiative (NAMI), which aims to address the "sustained and systemic protection concerns of migrating and displaced children." The study adopted child-friendly methods to elevate the voices of young girls, in particular. Capturing their experiences and current needs informed the development of recommendations to shape future interventions and programming that can promote the realisation of the rights of migrant girls and young women.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Approach

This research uses a qualitative approach to gather testimonies regarding the challenges, opportunities, and experiences of migrant girls and boys at different stages of their migration journeys. It draws on current literature around migration in this context as well as fieldwork involving case studies (CSs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with migrant girls, boys and young adults in Italy, Morocco, Spain, and Tunisia. Key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders in migration and child protection across these contexts, including government and ministry staff, NGOs and civil society actors, completed this research. The Samuel Hall research team developed this methodology in close collaboration with Save the Children, to ensure alignment with the research of the Girls on the Move Series.³

Prior to commencing fieldwork, and to ensure an evidenced-based research design and approach, the research team conducted a targeted literature review. The review examined existing data sets and academic literature on migration flows and trends, risk factors and opportunities for girls on the move, as well as the legal and protection frameworks in the countries of focus. This preliminary research enabled the team to produce a tailored research approach and tools adapted to the specificities of each context and differentiate the approach for age groups and genders.

The study was heavily informed by a child- and gender-sensitive approach to interviewing (see Section 2.4) placing particular emphasis on understanding migration experiences through the voices of children themselves. To capture qualitative data from origin, transit, and destination countries in North Africa and southern Europe, the research team interviewed girls and boys from countries in Africa and the Middle East who had travelled through North Africa and were located in Italy, Morocco, Spain, or Tunisia at the time of the interview. Remote key informant interviews were conducted to capture the migratory experiences of children in Libya. These countries were selected based on the scale of child migratory flows and the relevance of Save the Children and partners' programming priorities.

Though they were a smaller proportion of research participants, the inclusion of boys in the sampling was an important component of the analysis, allowing researchers to capture a broader perspective of the situation.

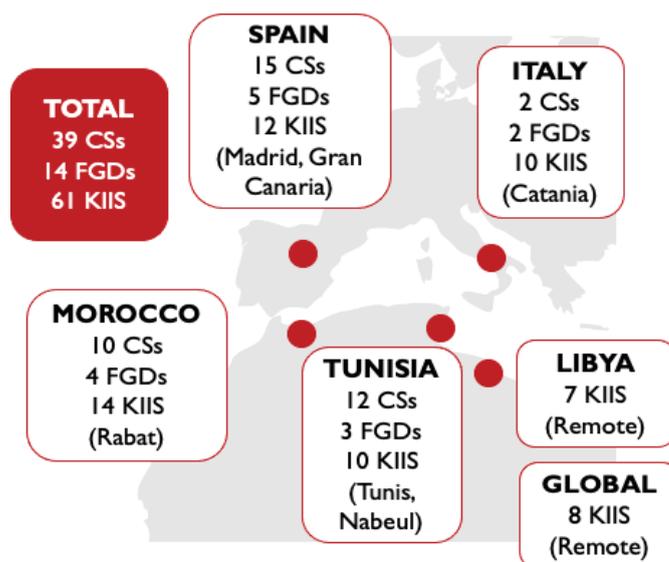
2.2. Sampling

Sampling approaches and targeting differed by country, depending on the accessibility of target populations and the presence of Save the Children and other partners to facilitate participant identification and interviewing processes. All in-person interviews were conducted from late April to May 2022, however high-level key informant interviews (KIIs) began in November 2021 as part of fieldwork scoping and preparation.



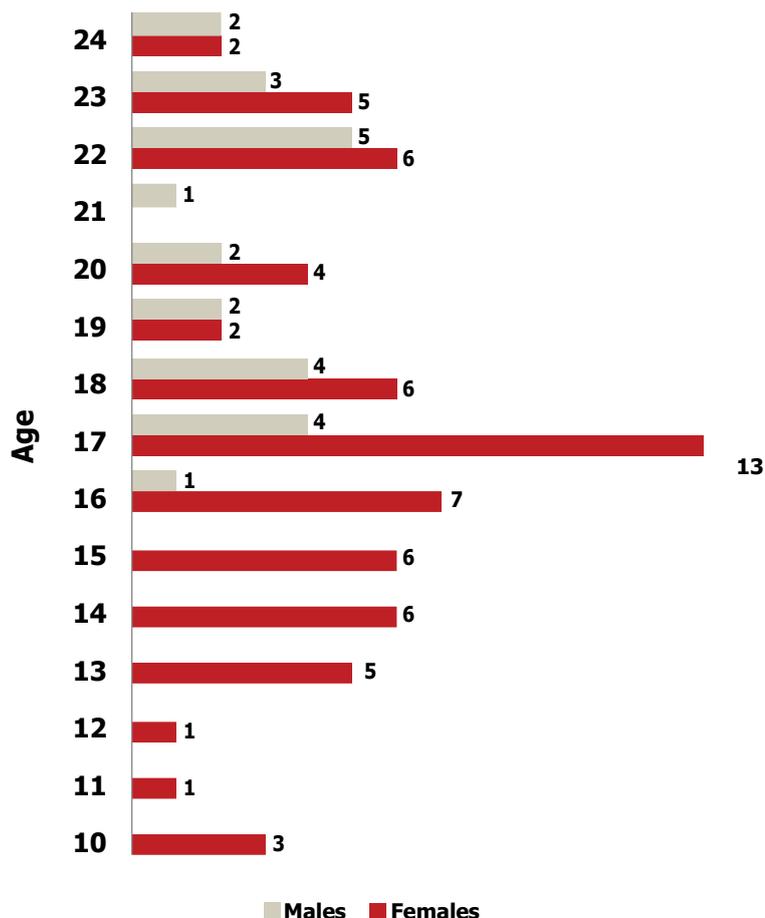
“The study was heavily informed by a child- and gender-sensitive approach to interviewing, which places particular emphasis on understanding migration experiences through the voices of children themselves,”

Figure 1. Sampling approach and research locations by country



³ This includes Girls on the Move research in Southern Africa, Venezuela and Columbia, the Balkans and Central America and Mexico. For the full list of resources in this series, see: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/girls-move-research-series/>.

Figure 2. Migrant population by age and gender

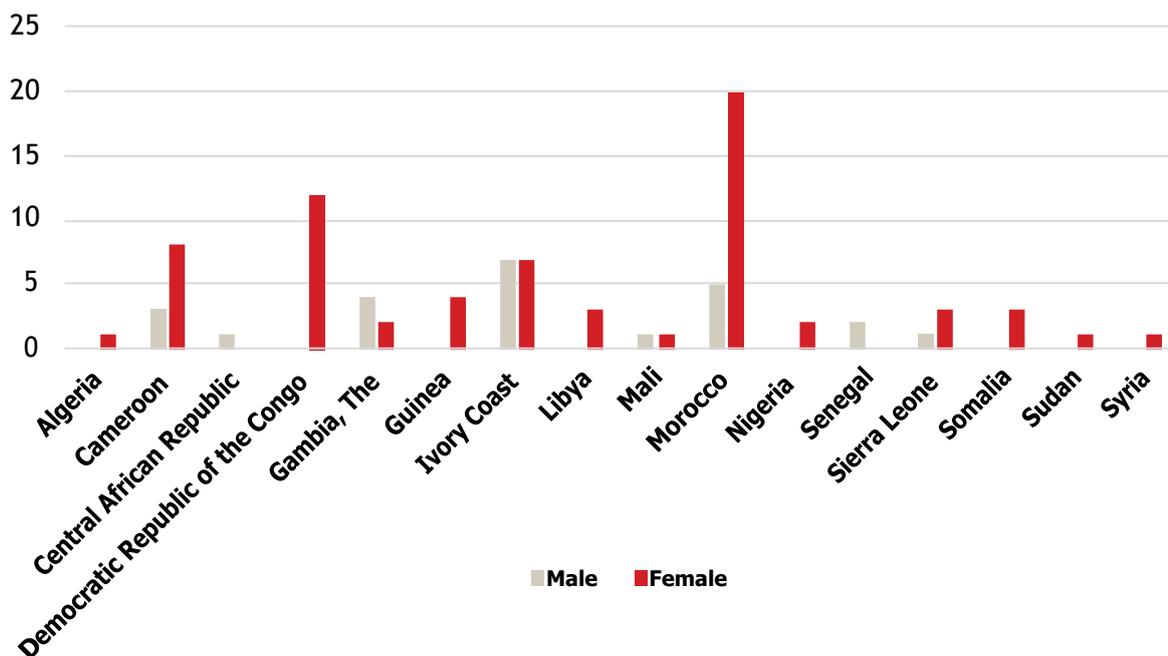


In total, 92 migrant children and youth were interviewed (68 girls and young women; 24 boys and young men) representing 16 different countries of origin. Girls and boys were interviewed separately and for focus groups they were grouped by age where possible (10–13, 14–17, 18–24). In some cases, there were not sufficient respondents to create three separate age groups, and the participants were included in expanded age groups as appropriate (i.e., 10–15-year-olds).

The majority of respondents were between 14 to 17 years old (Figure 2). Boys interviewed were between 16 to 24 years old, given the more limited sample size as well as the age-appropriateness and complexity of questions asked.⁴

Figure 3 illustrates self-reported countries of origin of migrant respondents. It is worth noting that in certain cases, this is different from the respondents' nationality, (e.g., one respondent was born in Somalia but raised in Guinea), and several respondents interviewed were stateless.

Figure 3. Self-reported countries of origin, by gender



⁴ As part of the comparative analysis, boys were asked to think more reflexively and critically on the gender dimensions of their experiences and observed differences between girls and boys. These questions were judged to be best suited for boys aged 15 and above.

2.3. Research Locations

The research locations for each country (see Figure 1 above) were selected in close coordination with Save the Children, taking into consideration the importance and diversity of routes under consideration as well as the ability of Save the Children and other partners and researchers to facilitate interviews in those locations.⁵

2.4. Research Tools

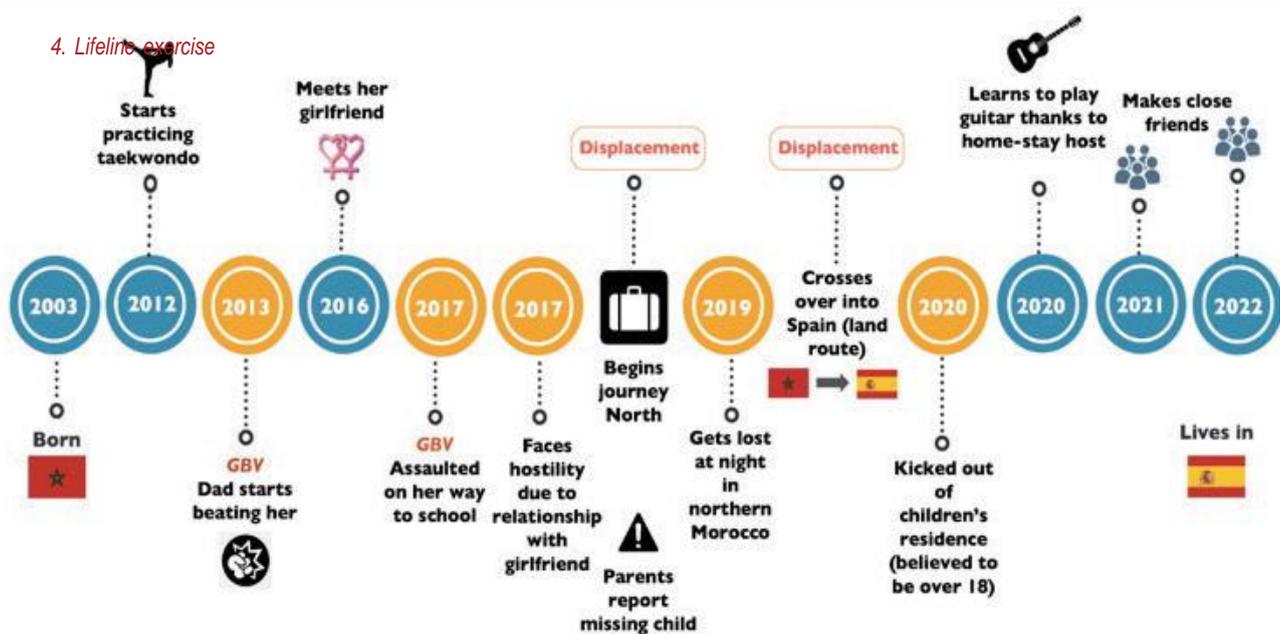
Four tools were used to conduct the research:

Case studies

These were conducted with individual migrant girls and boys, in some cases in the presence of a parent or guardian. They combined regular narrative questions with interactive tools strategically designed for the topic, such as lifeline and drawing exercises. Child-friendly interviewing techniques were employed, including several breaks and opportunities for drawing, and allowing children to communicate both verbally and non-verbally, through writing and drawing.

The lifeline exercise (Figure 4 below), based on one Moroccan girl's migratory journey, helped understand the 'tipping points' in the child's migratory experience, for instance identifying key threats or risks (enablers and obstacles) to wellbeing and agency, as well as the key dynamics, and actors and partners involved in providing assistance. Participants were asked to trace their journey on a timeline for a given period of their lives, underlining the highs and lows, and highlighting key positive and negative events and decision-making around their migration journeys.

Figure 4. Lifeline exercise



⁵ Specific information on each research location can be found in Annex 7.2.

Key informant interviews

In total, 61 KIIs were conducted by the research team both in-person and remotely. A post-fieldwork key findings workshop was held with members of the Save the Children project steering committee to provide initial feedback on findings and analysis.

Focus group discussions

These were conducted with groups of up to five migrant girls or boys. The discussions centred on their decision-making capacities in migration journeys, understanding of the most common migration routes, and awareness of risks along migration routes. Groups were divided by age (10–13, 14–17, 18–24) and gender, and questions were adapted to relevant age groups and gender.



An FGD with girls in Morocco
Photo: Jihane Najim

2.5. Safeguarding and Research Ethics

The research team employed a trauma-informed, child-adapted research approach that places the voices of girls and boys at the centre of the research. This approach is informed by Save the Children's Child Safeguarding Policy and prioritised the comfort and safety of the child respondents at all times, taking into account their school schedules and preferred times (particularly during the month of Ramadan). Further details on the safeguarding approach can be found in Annex 7.2.

2.6. Limitations and Challenges

Sensitive research involves several conceptual and practical challenges, largely related to the process of identification, categorisation and inclusion of research participants. Because too little is known about the population of migrating and displaced girls in the research locations, the study could not aim to provide representative findings, but rather sought to include perspectives and experiences of girls and young women of diverse regions and profiles.

- **Defining 'destination':** In some cases, girls interviewed considered themselves to be in their places of destination, whereas in others they were only temporarily settled. This analysis considers Italy, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia as potential destination countries, but acknowledges that migrant children may end up continuing their journeys. As such, it is difficult to categorically distinguish between experiences 'in transit' and 'upon arrival'.

• **Some girls were difficult to reach:** As child participants identified in Morocco and Tunisia were mostly beneficiaries of local associations, the sample may not adequately reflect the experiences of children who do not receive support from any organisations and may be more vulnerable. In Spain and Italy, a couple of potential respondents wanted to participate but were not able to, due to the lack of common language with researchers and absence of interpreters. As a result, the experiences of certain groups of children may be somewhat overrepresented; for example, children interviewed in Spain and Italy were already associated with child protection systems and were selected because of their relative stability (newly arrived children and children in acute crisis situations were not asked to participate). In addition, many girls choose to remain invisible as a self-protective mechanism.

• **Time constraints:** the research team grappled with the inherent trade-off between deepening the research and respecting the limited time of vulnerable participants. Given the extensive range of topics explored, the semi-structured interviews, case study interviews and focus group discussions generally focused on the key topics of interest to the participants within the allotted time. Case studies ran between 1.5 and 2 hours and FGDs between 2 and 3.5 hours.

3. CONTEXT

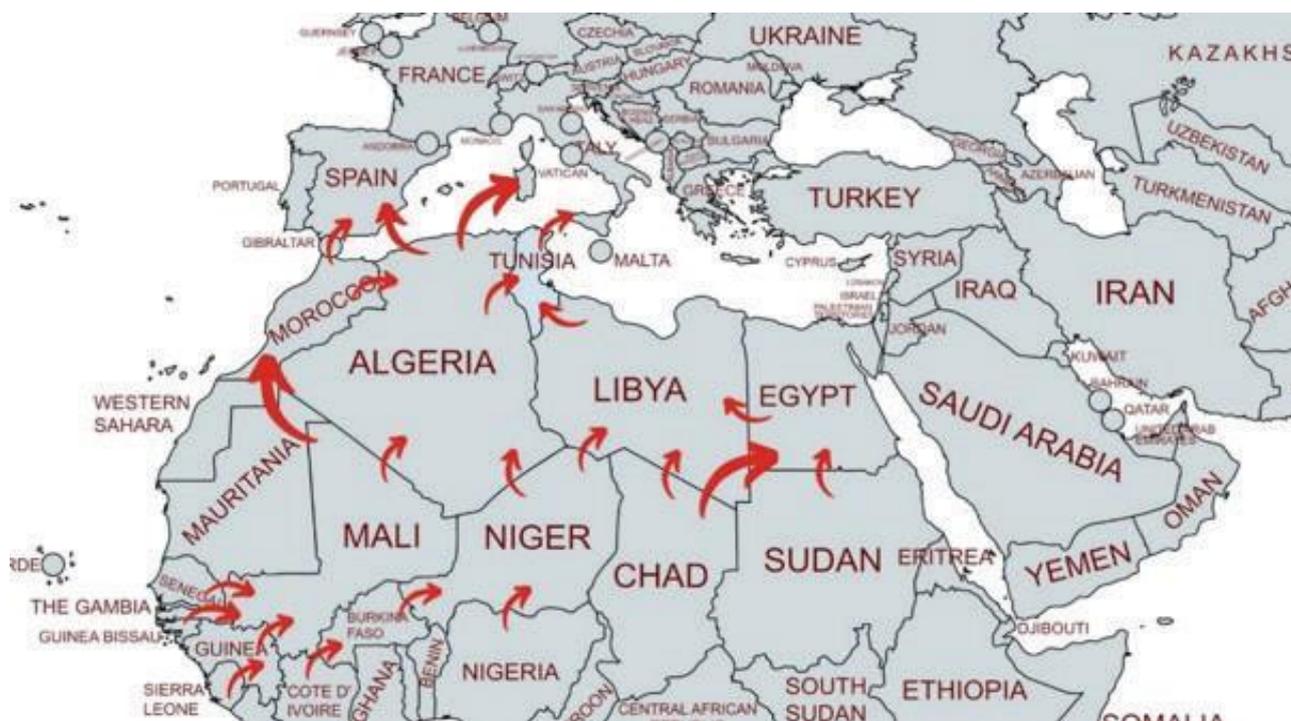


Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

CHAPTER 3. CONTEXT

The research team conducted an extensive literature review on migration in and through North Africa and southern Europe to situate this study around the existing evidence base of girls on the move through these regions, and target research to knowledge gaps. While a broad base of information exists on migration in the region, that specific to girls' and women's experiences is much more limited.

Figure 5. Movement through North Africa and the Mediterranean (Based on data from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2019)



(This map of migratory patterns in North Africa is based on information gathered during data collection and reflective of the migratory patterns of girls interviewed in early 2022, many of whom had begun their migratory journeys years prior. While migratory patterns may have since shifted, this map is indicative of paths taken by research participants.)

3.1 Regional trends in migration

The North African countries of Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya are countries of origin, transit, and destination for migrants; the region has the continent's largest number of migrants.⁶ Girls and women make up approximately 43% of the international migrant population in North Africa, slightly lower than the continental average (47%), though strong variances can be noted between North African countries (47.7% in Tunisia, 48.5% in Morocco, and 28.2% in Libya).⁷

As elsewhere on the continent, migration in North Africa is predominantly intracontinental and characterised by temporary, circular and permanent movement.⁸ Migrants choose North Africa as a destination – seeking safety, employment, and educational

6 IOM, "World Migration Report 2022," (Geneva: IOM, 2021), <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/74322>.

7 IOM and African Union Commission (AUC), "Africa Migration Report. Challenging the Narrative" (2020), 43.; UNDESA, "World Social Report 2020" (2020); UNICEF, "Uncertain Pathways: How gender shapes the experiences of children on the move," (2021), 14.

8 IOM and AUC, "Africa Migration Report," 5.

Box 1: COVID-19 effects on migration

From spring 2020, border closures, lockdowns and travel bans aiming to control the spread of COVID-19 affected migration trends. For instance, in April 2020, flows observed at IOM's Flow Monitoring Points in West and Central Africa were 48 percent lower than just three months prior.⁹ Yet, some destinations saw arrivals of irregular migrants soar in 2020, particularly in the Canary Islands, which may be explained by the global economic downturn and COVID-19 measures impeding movement along traditional migration routes.^{10, 11} Restrictions have lessened, however; as of June 2022, more than 70 percent of the points of entry in the region are now fully operational. This is a marked improvement over April 2022, when 13 of 17 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continue to have partial mobility restrictions in place to limit the spread of COVID-19.¹²

COVID-19 has also had a significant socio-economic impact on migrant populations.¹³ Many migrant youths face increased financial strain due to broader economic downturn as well as reduced options for mobility – making them more likely to bypass the legal barriers inhibiting movement between countries and resort to irregular means of migration to continue their journeys.¹⁴

Some evidence points to intersecting impacts because of the COVID-19 pandemic that have resulted to increased vulnerabilities for migrant girls and women. These include a lack of survivor services, increased risk of trafficking and exploitation, and a risk of extended exposure to the immigrant detention system.¹⁵

opportunities – or use it as a point of transit to Europe. Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco are the main countries of transit and departure.¹⁶

Although it accounts for just 6% of all migration between North Africa and Europe, migration across the central, eastern and western Mediterranean Sea routes has garnered visibility in many policy circles due to the surge of perilous sea and land crossings occurring since 2012.¹⁷

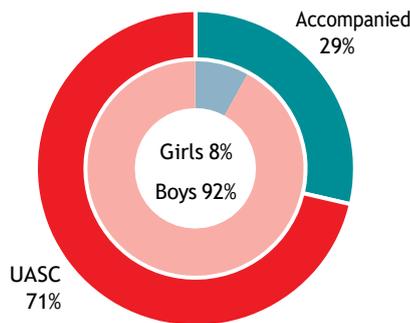
Flows have been historically highest along the eastern Mediterranean route (EMR) (usually via Turkey to Greece) and the CMR (Libya/Tunisia to Italy or Malta). While arrivals of migrants through the CMR and EMR trended downward from 2015 to 2017, arrivals to Spain via the western Mediterranean route (WMR) and the Western African Atlantic route (WAAR) rose during the same timeframe.¹⁸ The number of North Africans using the three Mediterranean routes has increased since 2017, driven in part by regional and political instability.¹⁹

In 2021, refugee and migrant arrivals to Italy (by sea) and Spain (by sea or land) through the central and western Mediterranean routes were up 65% compared to 2020 arrivals, while between January and March 2022, a 13% increase was reported over 2021 during the same months.^{20, 21}

The ripple effects of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have had a disruptive effect on migration flows, upsetting traditional pathways and creating blockages that place migrants at risk (see Box 1 above). This is in addition to continuing insecurity and conflict, notably in the Sahel but also in other regions of sub-Saharan Africa, which have caused mass forced population displacement.^{22, 23}

As of May 2022, 34,351 arrivals had been recorded for the year with the most common nationalities of arrivals to Europe being Afghans, Moroccans, and Egyptians.²⁴ The first months of 2022 have shown significant increases in migrant flows to Europe through North Africa.²⁵

Over 2021, an estimated 24,100 children (8% girls and 92% boys) including 17,200 unaccompanied or separated children arrived in Europe via the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic Routes, more than half arrived in Italy.²⁶ This is an increase of 44% compared to 2020, during which 16,700 children (17% girls, and 83% boys) were estimated to have entered Europe via the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic routes. Unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) accounted for 62% (10,343), with particularly high proportions in Spain (86%) and Italy (75%) in 2020.²⁷ 2020 child arrivals were 50% fewer than in 2019, which saw 33,200 arrive (38% girls and 62% boys, 27% UASC).



Migrants along the sea and land routes towards Europe face countless challenges including trafficking, detention, and death, and it is estimated that as of mid-June 2022, nearly 700 people have died or gone missing since the start of the year.²⁸ Children, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ migrants experience further protection risks.²⁹

- 9 IOM, "West and Central Africa, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Monthly Regional Update," (April 2020).
- 10 In 2020, 23,023 irregular migrants arrived at the Canary Islands by sea – 757% more than in 2019 (2,687) – and arrivals decreased just slightly in 2021. See: European Commission, "Study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the outermost regions (OR)," (2021): https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/pdf/covid19_or_study_en.pdf; Deutsche Welle, "More African migrants eye the Canary Islands," (2022): <https://www.dw.com/en/more-african-migrants-eye-the-canary-islands/a-61096472>
- 11 European Council, "Migration flows in the Western Mediterranean and Western African routes," (2022): <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/western-routes/>
- 12 IOM, "Tracking Mobility Impact- Points of Entry Analysis." (June 2022).
- 13 UNHCR, 'Routes Toward the Western and Central Mediterranean Sea: UNHCR Appeal'. (2021) <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/86069>. Mixed Migration Centre, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees and Migrants on the Move in North and West Africa," (2021).
- 14 Mixed Migration Centre, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees and Migrants on the Move in North and West Africa," (2021).
- 15 IOM, "The Impacts of COVID-19 on Migration and Migrants from a Gender Perspective," (2022).
- 16 Mixed Migration Centre. 'Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa' (2022). https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/225_QMMU_Q1_2022_NA.pdf
- 17 IOM and AUC, "Africa Migration Report," 2.
- 18 Arezo Malakooti and Chiara Fall, "Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean," Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, (2020): <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/migration-dynamics-mediterranean/>
- 19 IOM, "Tracking Mobility Impact- Points of Entry Analysis." (June 2022).
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 UNHCR, "Operations data portal: Mediterranean situation," (2022): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>
- 22 Some of this increase could be attributed to an ease in Covid-related travel restrictions in 2022. Mixed Migration Centre, "Quarterly Update: North Africa."
- 23 UNHCR, "Decade of Sahel conflict leaves 2.5 million people displaced." (2022): <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2022/1/61e137ac4/decade-sahel-conflict-leaves-25-million-people-displaced.html>
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 In January alone there was a 66% increase compared to January 2021 via the Mediterranean and Northwest African maritime routes: IOM, "Regional Snapshot: Middle East & North Africa," (2022): <https://migration.iom.int/reports/regional-snapshot-middle-east-north-africa-december-2021?close=true>.
- 26 UNHCR, "Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe." 2021
- 27 UNHCR, "Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe." 2020
- 28 Ibid.; UNHCR, "Operations data portal: Mediterranean situation," (2022): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>
- 29 UNHCR, "Routes Toward the Western and Central Mediterranean Sea."

3.2. Country-level migration overview

Key trends in migration across the target countries are summarised below (see Annex 7.3 for further information):



ITALY

- In Italy, as of June, 21,945 refugees and migrants had arrived in 2022, including 2,505 unaccompanied children.³⁰
- Of concern, a persistent proportion of around 75% of children arriving in Italy from North Africa are UASC, originating from Bangladesh, Egypt, and Tunisia.³¹



MOROCCO

- As of March 1, 2022, Morocco reported 9,342 refugees and 8,906 asylum seekers (18,248 total year-to-date).³² Of these, 54% originated from Syria, 16% from other Middle Eastern countries (Yemen, Iraq, and Palestine) and 25% from sub-Saharan countries (Guinea, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and South Sudan) and 5% others.³³



SPAIN

- As of May 2022, Spain recorded 12,161 arrivals in the year, up 19% from the same period in 2021, with 4,307 by the WMR and 7,854 by the WAAR (typically to the Canary Islands).³⁴
- In 2020, an estimated 3,890 migrant children arrived by boat, with 86% being UASC.³⁵ In December 2021, official figures recorded 3,048 UASC in Spanish child protection systems.³⁶



TUNISIA

- As of May 2022, there are 9,649 refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia, 38% female and 62% male; of the total counted, 14% are boys while 10.5% are girls.³⁷
- Refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia predominantly arrive from sub-Saharan Africa (Ivory Coast, Sudan, Cameroon and Guinea, among others) and the Middle East (Syria, Libya).



LIBYA

- Libya is home to North Africa's largest population of migrants: there are at least 635,051 migrants in Libya in 2022, of which just 13% are female and 14% children (with just over half (53%) unaccompanied).³⁸ Migrants in Libya typically come from sub-Saharan Africa (56%), with Niger (24%), Egypt (17%), Sudan (15%), and Chad (13%) being the top origin nations.³⁹

³⁰ Italian Ministry of Interior. "Cruscotto Statistico Giornaliero" (14 June 2022).

³¹ UNHCR, "UNHCR Sea arrivals dashboard – March 2022," (2022).

³² UNHCR, "UNHCR Morocco 2022 Appeal," (2022).

³³ Ibid; Mixed Migration Centre, "Understanding the Mixed Migration Landscape in Morocco," (2022).

³⁴ UNHCR, "Spain weekly snapshot - Week 20 (16-22 May 2022)," (2022): <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/esp>

³⁵ UNHCR, "Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe," (2021).

³⁶ Spanish Ombudsman's report

³⁷ UNHCR, "Operational Data Portal - Refugee situations: Tunisia," (2022): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/tun>

³⁸ IOM, "Displacement Tracking Matrix: Libya," (2022) <https://dtm.iom.int/libya>

³⁹ IOM, "Regional Snapshot: Middle East & North Africa," (2022):

<https://migration.iom.int/reports/regional-snapshot-middle-east-north-africa-december-2021?close=true>

4. FINDINGS



Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

“
Noella, a
16-year-old girl
from the Ivory
Coast did not
know anything
about the trip,
I saw a group of
people leaving
and I decided to
join them with-
out knowing
where they
were going ...
I knew these
people but not
that well. ”

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The research found many factors influencing children and young people’s decision to migrate. The perception that life would be better abroad was widespread – respondents in Spain, for example, reported anticipating opportunities to study, work, and have a career, to have access to healthcare, and to be able to make decisions about their own lives. The research also identified several factors which were specifically gendered, which included social norms surrounding education and jobs for women, family conflict and gender-based violence.

Although both boys and girls face shared challenges upon arrival, including accessing housing and other services, some challenges and risks are unique to girls’ migratory experiences. While most children and key informants recognised vulnerabilities specific to girls, many girls interviewed also reported some elements on which they felt better protected than their male peers, notably in their interactions with law enforcement. Boys, too, expressed feeling treated more roughly, or neglected by various actors, when compared to girls.⁴⁰

There were also some clear trends, by country and region of origin, which the research found in relation to people’s experiences and expectations of their migration journeys.

Migration as commonplace, Morocco. For some Moroccans, migration was described as almost a matter of course, with extensive networks abroad facilitating access to information and acting as a draw. One Moroccan girl whose brother had recently emigrated described following in the footsteps of her siblings:

“I was seeing why my brother left, to do his own life. And I saw that my sisters, who were working and studying abroad, had their own houses. I decided to do like them, and not wait for my mom to help me.” (Ouidad, age 17, Moroccan origin, Spain).

Two other Moroccan girls interviewed mentioned that “all” of their neighbours were in Spain. Wiam, 17, shared that she “didn’t look for much information, because the people in the neighbourhood, all of them are in Spain, all of them migrated.”

Lack of knowledge of the migration journey, West and sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, despite their journeys being longer and more complex in some regards, many girls from West and sub-Saharan Africa described much more unprepared trips, with less defined networks, and sometimes no connections at all. Rainatou, a Guinean teen, had not initially known that Spain was a country and knew virtually nothing about it, while Fatou, a 17-year-old Gambian girl, believed that the journey to Spain would be by bus – up until the moment of embarking on the boat journey across the Atlantic.

Gendered trends were noticed in the experiences of planning to migrate, and in the journey itself:

Age and decision-making. Across contexts, age was a determining factor in girls’ migration decision making and planning. Younger girls (aged 9-13) were consistently far less in control of the decision-making process than boys interviewed. In most cases, their journeys were decided by parents or other family members. In these cases, the adults also undertook much of the planning, often leaving younger girls with little practical information regarding their travel plans. Older girls (14-24) viewed themselves as driving the migration process. Some even pushed their partners or spouses to migrate.

40 Save the Children, “Global Research Series - Girls on the Move,” 25.

Migrant companions. While younger girls interviewed for this study reported migrating with a family member, boys generally reported setting off alone or with friends. Some older teen girls began their journeys alone; this was common for those fleeing child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence.

4.1 Prior to migration: drivers and decision making

Girls' migration decisions are often a direct result of the interlinkages between the ecosystem and the information around migration itself. Figure 6 illustrates the diverse sources of information that can influence the pre-migration decision-making phase. Within their microsystem, girls rely on information from friends, families, peers, and neighbours. The mesosystem and microsystem operate interconnectedly to assert influence. Further removed, but also influential in the process are the ecosystem (social structures not directly connected to the girls) and macrosystem, which include cultural norms and attitudes that can indirectly impact girls' decisions by influencing beliefs and practices.

The following sections highlight the most frequently cited factors driving girls to migrate.

Figure 6. Ecosystem model



4.1.1. Fleeing child marriage

Over half of the West African girls interviewed in Spain noted escaping marriage as the primary – or sole – reason for leaving home. For 15-year-old Adrienne from Cote d'Ivoire, it was her brother's initiative for her to fly to Morocco when her grandfather insisted on marrying her at age 12. For some older girls it was their own decision; they chose to migrate rather than be forced to marry, telling very few people, or no one, of their plans, fearing being caught and punished – or even beaten or tortured. Child marriage was seldom mentioned by Moroccan girls as being a motive for emigrating.

Figure 7 illustrates the experience of 20-year-old Rainatou, who fled her home in Cote d'Ivoire after her father beat her repeatedly and attempted to marry her to an older man with three wives.



4.1.2 Sexual and gender-based violence

Escaping violence was one of the most cited motivations for migrating. Girls spoke of exposure to multiple forms of violence in their countries of origin. Female genital mutilation (FGM), domestic violence, and intimate-partner violence were some of the most frequently mentioned. Rainatou, a 20-year-old girl living in Spain, described fleeing her abusive father:

“**Approximately 1 in 7 girls interviewed said they had fled their country of origin to escape marriage.**”

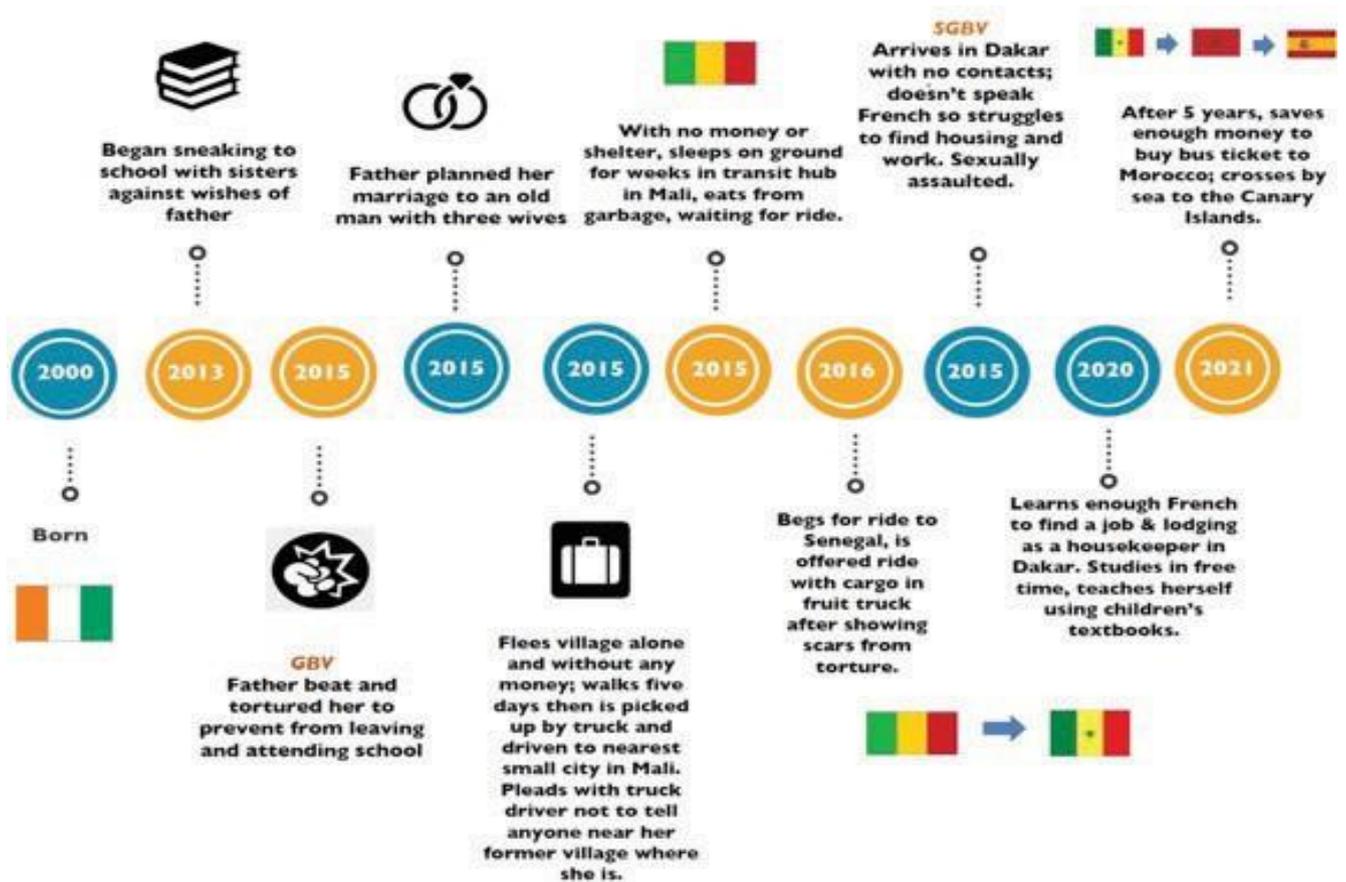
“My sisters fled home and we don’t have any news from them to this day. And when my dad found out, he burned my feet so that I couldn’t go outside. He said that if you don’t have feet, you can’t go out. He burned me with iron, he marked me with iron and fire so that I wouldn’t flee like my sisters... I fled my village to go to Dakar. [...] I didn’t want him to find me and do the same injuries to me or force me to marry. I wanted to be far from him.”

Key informants have also noted an increase in the migration of children with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) to escape repressive and discriminatory practices, violence, and abuse in their countries of origin. One NGO stakeholder in Spain observed: “From the north of Africa we have seen an increase in the applications for international protection from LGBTIQ+ people, who run away for that reason, and it’s what pushes them to migrate to Spain. They have really increased in recent years.”



“**More than one in five girls stated that violence at home was one of their reasons for migrating.**”

Figure 7. Rainatou's migration timeline



4.1.3 Access to education

Many boys and girls interviewed had not had any formal education or had dropped out of school. While for boys, schooling access was limited by a need to begin working to support their families, for girls it was most likely to be driven by social norms and adult family members' low appreciation of girls' schooling.⁴¹ In at least one case, school fees proved to be an insurmountable obstacle for a girl's family.

"The first thing that comes to my mind to leave my country is education. To pursue my dream of becoming a doctor when I go to school," (Mariama, age 24, Sierra Leonean origin, Tunisia)

⁴¹ UNICEF, "Adolescent Girls in West and Central Africa: Data Brief," (2019).

The desire to pursue education was a major factor in girls' decisions to migrate. Some girls described excelling in school in their countries of origin, but being pressured to quit, most often to get married, but sometimes to provide financial support for their families. Josephine, 18, of Somali and Guinean origin, explained:

"I was living in Somalia. [...] My uncle was pressuring my mom for me to get married, but I really wanted to go to school, and the guy was older than me. I was so stressed, and I was not going to school. All of that was bad. I met a friend who had the same issue of forced marriage. She advised me to leave. She said, 'we can have our freedom, we can go to school.' Some of my friends told me to go to the police, but I didn't want to do that to protect my mom. [...] So, I took my friends' advice to leave for a country where no one would be hurt. I came with my brother."

Zakia, 16, had excelled in school in her Moroccan village. Yet her older brothers insisted on pulling her out of school: "I was never late; I was always on time or early. The principal told me that he wanted my mom or brother to come talk about me, to tell them that they shouldn't take me out of school. My mom can't get up. My mom can't walk well, so she couldn't go to the school for the meeting. My brother didn't want to. I told the principal that I wanted to study, but they didn't want me to." This was a major driver of her decision to set off for Spain: "I wanted to come here to study and work, the most important thing, to be good in my life and help my mom live better. Even if my brothers were bad with me, I left all the bad things in Morocco and I came here to make a new life."

4.1.4 Fleeing war and violent conflict

Many girls, as well as boys, described fleeing war and conflict as prompting their migration, as the situation in their country became too unstable and dangerous. These migratory decisions were often precipitated by a sudden and traumatic act of violence, such as the death of a close family member, and the decision to leave made suddenly, without planning. Pauline, 23, from Cameroon, explained: "My objective, what triggered me to immigrate is war. I lived in a country where there is war." Many girls found it difficult to share these traumatic experiences, preferring instead to focus on describing the next phase of their journey. Those who were forced to flee suddenly and with little preparation often faced significant challenges as they travelled; their already vulnerable status was exacerbated by a lack of money, supplies or plans. Marie, a 23-year-old Cameroonian girl described her experience fleeing Cameroon: text box my father and two...

"The first thing that comes to my mind to leave my country is education. To pursue my dream of becoming a doctor when I go to school," (Mariama, age 24, Sierra Leonean origin, Tunisia)

4.1.5 Medical care

For several boys and girls interviewed, the prospect of better medical care was a major draw and, in one case, the sole factor motivating their move abroad. A boy interviewed in Italy explained how his journey started as a quest to obtain medical care for tuberculosis. Several Moroccan girls interviewed in Spain also described migrating for health concerns, as they believed they could receive better treatment in Spain.

4.1.6 Economic opportunities

The possibility of better economic opportunities weighed heavily in the decision to migrate for some girls, in line with findings of previous studies showing increasing numbers of African women and girls "migrating independently for work and education."⁴² When successful, migration "can be empowering for girls and young women, allowing them to access education and employment; can improve equality and norms around the capabilities and roles of women and men, girls and boys; and can enable them to make independent decisions and escape family control, which can entail harmful practises."⁴³ Migration can offer "adolescent girls the possibility and promise of opportunity...to fully enjoy their human rights as they enter adulthood."⁴⁴

Many girls spoke not only of their desire to better their own lives, but to support their families as well.

In some cases, young women, some forced into early marriages and with young children of their own, made the difficult decision to leave their children in the care of others and migrate. According to Pauline, 23, a young Cameroonian woman in Tunisia, women initiate the migration decision, driven by financial desperation and lack of opportunity in their home country.

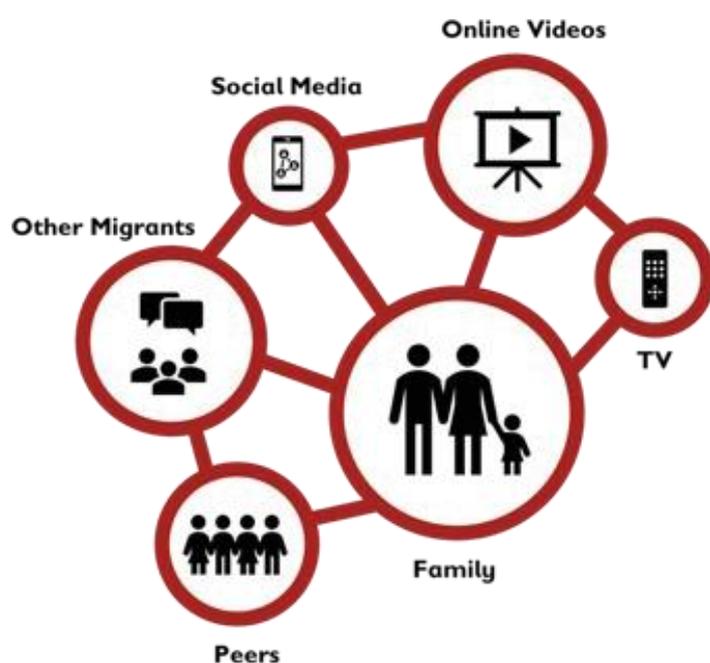
"When you are jobless, and you have nothing to do, you are obliged. I'm a warrior. I don't like to stand idly by when I have to fight – whether there is a need or not – because I have children, I have two kids. At home, all women are warriors; you must do something to feed your children."

42 IOM and AUC, "Africa Migration Report,"; Mirriam Temin et al. "Girls on the Move: Adolescent Girls & Migration in the Developing World," Population Council, (2013).

43 Save the Children, "Girls on the Move in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan," (2020), 2.

44 Temin et al., "Girls on the Move: Developing World," 1.

4.2 Socially-based information sharing, communication, and journey planning



Family and friends were a major source of information; many children had family, friends, and neighbours both at home and abroad who provided information and help. Ivorian teenager Amara, a 17-year-old girl interviewed in Gran Canaria said: "I heard my friends talk about Morocco, about Spain. That's why I told my grandmother I wanted to come here. [...] My grandma talked to me about Spain. She told me it was good, that I could earn a living." However, peers' descriptions of life in destination countries were not always accurate. This was true for boys as well, as one Moroccan boy attested: "My friends that came here before me, they tell you only about the good things. But the reality is very different." (Amine, Spain)

Platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube are used to communicate with others planning trips as well as to gain information about both destination countries and journeys. A Somali girl interviewed in Italy explained:

“
Girls who
migrate turn to
family, friends,
and social
media to plan
their trips. ”

"I got the information about the trip on YouTube. I was seeing the families, how they lived in Europe. While my family had nothing to eat, our neighbours who had relatives in Europe were better off: they had something to eat. So, I decided to go to help (my family)." (Aamiina, age 18, Somali, Italy)

One key informant working with migrant youth in Spain similarly noted: "Young people go through these channels to understand how to get through [borders] and they use social networks. There are a few vloggers who are known by these youth, who film [their migration experience] and post it online." Other young people can connect through Facebook groups. While girls may be more timid than boys to engage on social media, some comment or like some of the posts and videos that boys post to express their interest in migrating." (Migrant youth psychologist, Spain).

A migration programme officer for an NGO in Morocco described the role local communities and social networks play in encouraging migration: "There is even some fundraising in some neighbourhoods to finance the journey, because they expect a return on investment. Also, there is a logic of imitation: let's say one person takes a photo of himself showing how good the life is in Morocco or in Spain or France with beautiful Nike jerseys and shoes, this triggers the envy of those in the country of origin who do not foresee any bright future for themselves compared to those who show an alleged success on social networks."

In some cases, an urgent need to flee or a desire to leave covertly made advanced planning difficult, if not impossible. When children were forced to make a rapid decision to leave, they gathered information piecemeal during various stages in the journey and stays in transit countries. Twenty-year-old Rainatou, from a village in Guinea, did not speak French before making her way to Dakar, Senegal, where she lived for five years after fleeing abuse and child marriage. Seeking information from acquaintances before fleeing her village would have raised suspicions; word may have gotten back to her father. While working for several years in Dakar as a live-in domestic servant, she became aware of the possibility of migrating further north and progressively sought information about the journey, being careful not to let her employer know of her intentions. She took advantage of trips to the market to ask people for information, and would ask her boss's children, who had internet access, to look up information for her.

“For most, the trip was extremely dangerous and plagued by threats to their safety, integrity, and the enjoyment of their human rights.”

4.3. The journey: risks, opportunities and coping responses

This study found that many girls were unaware of the full extent of the risks and dangers involved in migration. This lack of information regarding risks is in line with existing research, including a 2017 study by UNICEF and REACH conducted with 850 refugee and migrant children in Italy and Greece, which found that less than half of children surveyed considered the risks they might face in their journey before migrating.⁴⁵

Across North Africa and southern Europe, girls travelled in a variety of ways and employed different strategies to cross borders. While it may not be reflective of actual flows,⁴⁶ a majority of those we spoke with in Europe who had crossed the Mediterranean Sea without adequate documentation or visas relied on the support of a smuggler or adult guide to help them. By contrast, many girls travelling in and through Libya, Morocco and Tunisia had initially travelled to these countries and entered them regularly, notably because of short-term visa-free policies and visa exemptions⁴⁷ – they then overstayed.

Their trips varied considerably in length, ranging anywhere from several days to more than five years. Routes also varied extensively, with girls often crossing through several countries along the way. For most, the trip was extremely dangerous with threats to their safety. The risks they faced include sexual and gender-based violence, physical attacks or abuse, financial difficulties (running out of money, robbery), detention and arrest, police brutality, lack of shelter, labour exploitation or trafficking, and traversing harsh terrains – such as the desert – or the sea, with exposure to hunger, dehydration, injury and death.

45 UNICEF and REACH, “Children on the Move in Italy and Greece,” (2017), 36.

46 Our sampling approach focused on migrants in irregular situations.

47 Tunisia offers a 90-day visa-free entry to citizens of 97 countries, while Morocco is visa free for many West African countries. Source: Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and



Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

4.3.1. Use of smugglers to travel

Though few girls travelled alone, most were unaccompanied, traveling without relatives. Several girls said they travelled with adults that they did not know; at least two travelled with smugglers on trips paid for by their parents. This was the case of Patricia, 22, from the DRC. Her parents paid a woman from her community, introduced to her as her 'auntie', to bring her along on a journey to Morocco. She provided protection during the trip but made her work (trading goods) to make money and separated from her upon reaching Morocco: "The auntie told me that she was now going to leave me and that I would have to find my own way. She was just here to accompany me to Morocco."

Others followed a contact that they knew of in their neighbourhood, such as another person planning to migrate.

"I was still studying, and I told one girl studying with me that I wanted to migrate; she told me not to go. She told me that her brother helped people migrate from Ceuta. He came to our house to talk with my family about it to agree about the amount of money and at first my brothers didn't want me to come. He came three times to talk about it with my mom and brothers and eventually they agreed on a sum." (Zakia, age 16, Moroccan Origin, Spain)

Ini, 19, who travelled alone from Nigeria to Italy, on a trip paid for by her father, said that she followed a lead and was directed by three to four different people on her trip through Niger and Libya.

Collecting information about smugglers is a method that some girls use to mitigate risks and be better informed on the challenges that might be faced during their journey. Girls reported that their choice of smugglers might change at the last minute due to the reputation of the smugglers.

"We wanted to take a boat and go to Italy, but the smuggler turned out to be a scammer [...] We knew because my brother's wife [...] has a friend who used to be a smuggler and knows all the smugglers there. He advised her not to cross with him. It turns out that during the day of the trip, he would ask you to go to the sea and take your money. He had men with guns around him. You have no choice; either you go in that plastic boat, or they will shoot you because you've seen them and can report them to the police. It's not even a safe boat. You would die in both cases." (Farah, age 20, Libyan origin, Tunisia)

4.3.2. Border crossing and transport strategies

While the findings are presented according to stages (pre-migration, in transit, post-transit) the journeys themselves were often much more complex and non-linear. Girls' migration experiences were heavily influenced by the modes of transport they used.

Some girls interviewed made sections of their journeys on foot; for instance, walking with groups of other migrants across unknown and dangerous territory. For example, several girls interviewed in Tunisia had walked first into Niger, then into Algeria or the south of Libya before arriving in Tunisia. One Guinean girl started her journey, fleeing her village, by walking for five days to get to a transit hub, where she begged truck drivers to let her ride north with them: first to Mali, then to Senegal. Another girl, Fatou, 17, fleeing marriage, escaped the room where she was being held captive in the Gambia; her boyfriend walked her to the next village, and she continued walking for two days. This was the beginning of a journey that would include several long bus trips, trekking through the wilderness, and eventually a two-day boat journey to the Canary Islands.

Figure 8.
Amara's migration story



Girls' multi-country migration journeys were rarely linear geographically, and often occurred over the span of several years, through multiple countries. Even prior to their migration journeys toward North Africa or southern Europe, several girls – particularly West and sub-Saharan Africans – had moved alone or with family members to different countries during their childhood. Amara, a 17-year-old Ivorian girl interviewed in Spain, for instance, had been sent by her grandmother to live in Mali to protect her from ill-treatment (she did not wish to elaborate) and later returned to her native Ivory Coast. Amara had also lived in Equatorial Guinea, where she learned Spanish.

Most of the sub-Saharan African girls interviewed completed part of their journeys in buses or trucks, including by hitchhiking and carpooling with other migrants. Road transportation presented dangers such as roadside robberies, mechanical problems, scarce food and water, sexual assaults, and other violence. No girls interviewed, however, reported travelling as stowaways under trucks – common among boys. One Moroccan boy explained:

"For me, coming with the truck is the only option. If you don't have money, and you can't pay for a boat [inflatable raft], it is the only way." (Haithem, age 17, Moroccan origin, Spain)

When asked to compare their journeys, boys thought that girls were more risk averse during travel and less likely to attempt such dangerous modes of transport.

For respondents in Italy and Spain who had travelled by boat, the sea or ocean crossing was consistently highlighted as the most dangerous part of the trip. The choice to go this way, however, was not due to lack of information: nearly all said they were aware of the dangers and risks beforehand and believed they would likely perish at sea. Some girls interviewed in peninsular Spain arriving by boat used a smuggler to cross the Strait of Gibraltar into Tarifa, while others had initially crossed via the WAAR to the Canary Islands before making their way to peninsular Spain. In the Canary Islands, all respondents had also crossed over by boat, from Western Sahara to the islands of Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and Gran Canaria. In Italy, all respondents interviewed in Catania arrived by sea from Libya, often after being rescued by port authorities or search and rescue NGOs.

Few of the girls interviewed had travelled by plane, but those who did described it as a smoother, less perilous part of their journey. Some in Spain had taken flights from Tangier to Madrid or from Abidjan to Casablanca. Most often, they flew with family members, friends or older chaperones selected by family members. In Tunisia, a few girls travelled by themselves, but had planned to meet up with friends or family members on arrival.

4.3.3. Sexual and gender-based violence and other protection risks

While escaping sexual and gender-based violence was a common reason for girls to migrate in the first place, nearly every girl we spoke to reported having either experienced some form of sexual and gender-based violence – such as rape, sexual assault and harassment – or witnessed it happen to someone close to them, along their journey. The perpetrators they referred to were smugglers or traffickers, other migrants, police and member of armed groups. In some cases, a fear of retribution or detention deterred victims from reporting. Although across contexts, boys were seen as being more likely to suffer from physical abuse and attacks during the journey than girls, none of the boys we spoke with mentioned personally experiencing sexual abuse. This does not mean it did not occur; key informants in Italy noted how stigma and shame dissuade many from reporting such incidents, although some boys did allude to it indirectly, primarily by referring to incidents they had heard of or witnessed.

Some girls travelling with older adults, especially family members, seemed to be less vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence due to the real and perceived protection these travel companions provided:

“I was seeing some girls alone and some boys were playing with them (harassing/abusing them). My sister was protecting me. She didn’t want to leave me alone, especially since there were a lot of people.” (Jemima, age 22, Nigerian origin, Morocco)

Other times, the adults they travelled with were responsible for the violence. Key informants in Morocco noted that many of the girls they had seen were taken by the men of their community and used as bargaining chips, as sexual slaves, for instance, to cross borders: “The men will tell them, ‘We take you with us on the migratory journey, we are going to offer you a better life (often in Europe) but, in exchange, you are going to help us cross the borders.’” A 23-year-old Cameroonian girl interviewed in Tunisia reported being gang raped by an armed group in Algeria along and contracting HIV as a result. She explained that their smuggler had led them straight to the armed group – who proceed to attack, rob and rape them.

With the rising number of female traffickers, some experts are concerned it has become easier to target girls for trafficking and economic exploitation. Tunisia’s National Commission for the Fight Against Human Trafficking (INLTP) recorded an increase in the number of women traffickers and reports that more than 53% of identified traffickers now in Tunisia are women. Some key informants described situations of debt bondage upon arrival, either because they owed money to their smugglers and facilitators.

Some children face indebtedness to their communities of origin, who had helped them to finance the trip: “Often, communities themselves will pay for the plane ticket [of the migrant]. They will tell them that they can work as maids or in a call centre, etc. The deal here is that, when they arrive [in Morocco] they will make them work for about six to eight months and the migrant women will have to give their full salaries to reimburse the price of the plane ticket.” (KII, Morocco).

“Some girls travelled with adults for protection from GBV...”



...other times, the adults they travelled with were responsible for the violence.”



Many child migrants struggle with multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities that increase their level of exposure to trafficking. Some children begin with these vulnerabilities in their places of origin, but they also may be magnified by contextual factors along their journey.

A concurrent study on child trafficking in the Horn of Africa identified several key personal, situational, and contextual factors, which, when combined, have the potential to compound child migrants' risk of exposure to trafficking. text box shared findings

Shared findings from the East African Migrations Study

Compounded Vulnerabilities

Personal

- Child migrants who do not speak Arabic
- Child migrants from sub-Saharan Africa/West Africa

Situational

- Child migrants with abusive situations back home
- Girls fleeing marriage / SGBV
- Protracted conditions of deprivation and irregularity
- Unaccompanied and separated children

Contextual

- Children fleeing from conflict/violence, potential asylum seekers and refugees

Several interviewees described situations of human trafficking. Marie, a 14-year-old from Cameroon, described multiple instances in Morocco and Algeria of being locked in houses with other girls and women, where there was systematic rape. Each time, her mother had to pay a fee to leave the house:

"We arrived in a small village. [...] People came to pick us up and take us to another place with women and children. We stayed a few days without leaving the place, eating or drinking. In this place, they were raping people and even children. They were about to rape me as well, but my mother managed to save me."



Grace, 13, holds up a drawing depicting her love for her mother. Like Grace, who is from Cameroon, many girls interviewed had experienced the death of—or separation from—a parent or other loved one, both prior to and/or during their migration journeys.

Photo: Eva Canan (from Spain)

Key informants in Italy similarly mentioned the use of “connection houses” in North Africa, described as trafficking chains where girls and women are housed together and groomed for prostitution, before being taken onward to Italy.

The risk of becoming pregnant on the journey was noted by several informants, with improvised abortions bearing heavy health risks for the girls involved. According to one migration researcher in Spain: “There was 13-year-old girl who was separated from the adults she came with, and we discovered that she was pregnant. And she told us that this had happened before to her on several occasions, [...] that the men she had travelled with for some time told her that she had a parasite growing inside of her and that they had to get rid of it. So, they had performed two abortions on her, this was going to be the third.”



4.3.4. Survival and coping responses in transit

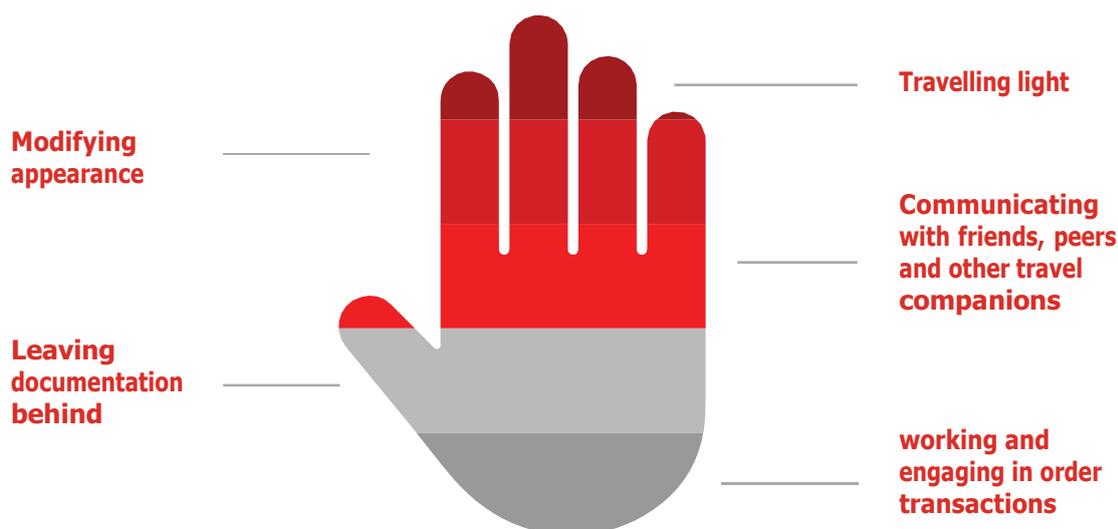
Girls employed many different survival and coping responses while on the move; several of these came with risks of their own. Many tried to stay “invisible,” or under the radar, adopting different strategies to remain out of sight from police, armed groups, fellow travellers, or other potentially dangerous people. Some even altered their clothing and appearance: one girl explains that she swapped out her normal clothes for an Islamic dress and veil while in Libya to avoid being recognised as a foreigner. Ouidad, 17, who was travelling from Morocco to Spain, initially disguised herself as a boy, until the heat during the boat crossing became unbearable and she took off some layers. While she presumably tried to pass as a boy to blend in, she reported that after her fellow passengers realised that she was a girl, they were gentle and caring with her, whereas they were rough with each other.

Travelling without documentation was another way some girls tried to protect themselves. Several girls interviewed in Tunisia reported that, when travelling by land, documents could become a source of coercion and abuse as smugglers would take their documents and blackmail them. They reported that, in some cases, they would dispose of their documents during the journey or leave them at home and have someone send them to them once they arrived.

While the above-mentioned coping responses did provide some measure of protection, for many girls, it also presented challenges to accessing services. For example, girls who appeared older but lacked documentation were frequently denied services available to minors. Lack of documentation also led to arrest and detention.

Travelling light – whether by choice or by necessity – was also very common, at great cost to girls’ personal hygiene and comfort. Many struggled with menstrual hygiene management: while a few girls had access to sanitary napkins, others used bits of cloth from clothing or rags for their periods, the latter being a more common strategy when girls travelled across the desert.

Figure 9. Girls' survival and coping responses



One Moroccan girl preparing to depart by boat for Spain, had little control over the exact timing of the journey, but attempted to time her travel so that it would not coincide with her period. Wiam, a 17-year-old girl also from Morocco, had sanitary napkins for the boat journey, however, while living on the streets in Spain (before accessing the child protection system) she salvaged food, clothing, and rags for her period from rubbish on the street. For some girls, from Guinea and the Gambia for example, using rags had been their usual mode of menstrual management even prior to migrating.

"I would use my clothes, cut them off and then use them for my period. At some point I never got my period anymore ... I didn't know why." (Iman, age 18, Somali origin, Italy)

Travel companions and social support networks were a critical source of protection and moral support. Few girls travelled alone; most set off with family members, friends or other trusted travel companions or met some along the way. Amara relied on her peers – girls around her age and older – to survive when she ran out of water in the desert: text

"I didn't know anyone. Well, I made friends, but I didn't know them before. They gave me some food because I didn't have anything left.

Many girls said they felt safe because they were travelling with siblings, parents, aunts, or uncles. A handful of respondents described travelling with older adults, in particular men, for physical protection:

“I preferred to be at the back with the men, that is how I was protecting myself. I was travelling with men rather than older women.” (Josephine, age 18, Guinean origin, Morocco).

Several girls highlighted new friendships and even romantic relationships along their journeys. These newly forged relationships generally held even greater importance for girls travelling unaccompanied.

Communicating with family members and friends was a lifeline. Many girls reached out to friends and family for moral and financial support and to get advice on where to go next. Yet, many also found it hard to keep in touch with family during their transit or upon arrival. Some girls travelled without a phone or lost it along the way; others struggled with poor reception or had no number they could call to reach their loved ones.

On the other hand, families could have a difficult time relating to their girls' migration experiences, as mentioned by centre staff in a Spanish residence for minors. For instance, one Moroccan teenager who had moved to Spain for crucial medical treatment described conversations with her family back home:

“I don't tell them anything about my experiences here. [...] They don't ask me and I don't tell them.” (Nadia, age 16, interviewed in Spain).

A dozen girls reported being arrested or detained by police at some point in their migration journey, generally for not having appropriate visas or travel documentation, or for attempting to cross a border irregularly, with some having to bribe or negotiate their freedom. Several girls, after being intercepted by the Libyan coast guard, were sent to detention centres and faced abuse and torture: “They beat my head against the wall in Libya. They asked for money and I don't have a family, so they treated me badly. Other times they put a plastic bag in your face. They wanted to hurt you.” (Noella, from Ivory Coast, Italy, age 16).

More boys than girls spoke of experiencing police violence; this was reported to occur in several countries in West and North Africa and Europe. This was often associated with racism and anti-migrant sentiment and was particularly prevalent at both sea and land borders. Some girls, however – particularly in Spain – mentioned the Spanish police as a resource or source of help.

Many girls encountered men requesting or demanding sexual relations in exchange for food, freedom, money, shelter or protection: “You can decide to live with a man, thinking he will take care of you.” (Jemima, Morocco).

Some girls reported working and/or begging during their journeys. Several girls reported performing domestic work in Dakar or Casablanca households, waitressing, and doing odd jobs. Other ways girls obtained money for the journey included selling an inheritance of livestock, financial support from family members, begging, and negotiating.

“A dozen girls reported being arrested or detained at some point along their migration journey,”

4.4. On arrival: environment, access to services, and future aspirations

The experiences of girls upon arrival in Italy, Morocco, Tunisia, and Spain diverged in many ways. How and when girls stopped their migration journeys depended on their desire to remain in these countries, but also their possibility to live legally and, often by extension, the affordability of life and access to essential social services.

Although some girls had already spent several years in these countries, not all considered their journeys complete. Some of the girls we interviewed in Italy and Spain had plans to move on to different European countries, or even to return to their country of origin. In some cases, in Tunisia and Morocco, girls had planned to migrate further initially, but got stuck in transit or decided to remain there instead.

Access to safe and affordable housing, education and employment, medical care, perceptions of the feasibility of access to these services and opportunities, as well as the presence of personal ties and support networks, were important factors in motivating girls to settle into these locations – or move on. Some girls and boys did report seeing each other as having different opportunities because of their gender. In Spain, boys mentioned people feeling more sympathy towards girls than boys, which can impact their access to services and treatment by police. On the other hand, access to employment opportunities was seen to be more readily available to boys than girls. The conditions relating to access upon arrival, and the importance of support received from local authorities, community-based organisations and informal migrant networks are highlighted further below.



Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

4.4.1. Housing and homelessness on arrival

Once girls reached their destination – or at least the locations where they planned a prolonged stay – the challenges of accessing safe, affordable, long-term housing solutions became urgent. Of those we interviewed, only a few girls said they were currently homeless; the majority were able to find housing through networks in the community, such as minor reception centres (Italy and Spain) or local associations (Morocco and Tunisia).⁴⁸ Yet, many shared concerns about the conditions in their current living arrangements, strict rules and lack of privacy within reception centres, and the lack of long-term housing options.

⁴⁸ This is due to the identification and sampling process, by which the vast majority of girls identified (through partners and local associations) were already receiving some form of support and assistance. As a result, these findings may not be representative of the situation for these populations overall.

In Morocco, for instance, many girls found temporary accommodation through local migrant support initiatives, such as the Association of Refugees and Migrant Communities in Morocco, however, stays are frequently limited to three months. Some girls who had used this solution were struggling to find alternatives once the three months were up and feared homelessness. In Tunisia, many girls and young women who sought housing assistance from local associations remained in the streets for months⁴⁹ at a time, unable to change their situation.

“When we first arrived in Tunisia, we slept in the street during the first days. We’ve also been sleeping in the streets for a few months now and protesting, but no one is responding to our needs.” (Zainab, age 22, Sudanese origin, Tunisia).

Girls emphasised that even when they had access to housing, the chances of becoming homeless remained high as their resources or the cash assistance received was insufficient, thus they found themselves struggling to pay rent and secure housing for a longer period.

In Tunisia, the lack of child-friendly social housing options was a noted risk, with girls being placed in domestic violence shelters meant for older women. The procedure to be admitted to these housing centres was long and there were no social housing options solely for girls and fully adapted to their needs. While unaccompanied and separated girls were often given priority access to centres by NGOs, girls who arrived in Tunisia with other family members had fewer options. Poor conditions in the houses provided by NGOs were also a common concern:

“They put us in a house, in winter, in December. There was no gas in the house, no blankets, nothing.” (Farah, Tunisia)

Many of the girls who had accessed Spain’s minor residence centres reflected positively on how they helped them pay for basic essentials, such as food and clothing. They were also able to access healthcare, education, professional development, language classes and other support: “Now I speak another language, I’m studying, I live in a centre where they take care of me and I have wonderful companions,” shared 15-year-old Adrienne, from Ivory Coast . A centre director in Madrid emphasised working in partnership with other service providers to address a range of needs: services may be externalised – particularly for girls with greater needs – by partnering with other organisations that work on literacy, social and vocational integration, administrative support, and psychological care.

⁴⁹ ARCOM, ‘Solution temporaire et aide’, Aider des femmes migrantes à Rabat. <https://migrantesrabat.com/solution-temporaire-et-aide/>

Nevertheless, several also said they felt constricted by the rules and conditions for living in residence centres. Loubna, a 13-year-old Moroccan girl interviewed in Spain, explained:

"I didn't think I would be in a strict space like this; I can only leave on weekends, other than going to school. I had hoped that the centre caretakers would be better than this – not so strict – and that I could talk with my sister every day."

A Somali girl in Italy expressed a similar sentiment: "When I turn 18, I want to change my house where I am now [reception centre in Catania] because I want to be freer. They still treat us like children! I don't have any problems in the centre, but I would like to be able to keep my cell phone as much as I want." (Iman, age 17).

Lack of privacy, due to shared living spaces with strangers, was another common challenge:

"Here I don't have complete freedom because I live with a bunch of girls, we share the bedroom, the bathrooms, sometimes you have some problems because you don't have privacy, others are too involved in your life." (Ouidad, age 17, Moroccan origin, Spain).



Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

“
In Spain and
Italy, some girls
we spoke with
were afraid of
becoming
homeless once
they turned 18
and aged out of
the minor
reception centres and child
protection
schemes.”

While sharing living spaces has its challenges, girls explained that it also presents the opportunity to develop friendships with peers who have similar life experiences and are facing similar challenges and successes in their host countries.

Key informants in Italy and Spain noted a lack of dedicated reception centres for female minors: “Madrid, we had a mixed system. All apartments are for boys and girls. However, the majority of migrants are boys, which can lead to tough situations.” (Local government official, Madrid). When reception centres in Italy get overcrowded, some girls get relocated to different centres, leaving behind their friends and changing schools.

Minors face the additional challenge of ageing-out of support. In both Spain and Italy, some children explained that they were afraid of becoming homeless once they turned 18 and aged-out of the minor reception centres and child protection schemes. Minors are supported and encouraged to become self-sufficient by age 18, and though some may request to have their support prolonged, these options are not available to all and may be contingent on certain factors such as having a good reintegration project or being enrolled in education. For instance, the Community of Madrid has a scheme, Programa Tránsito, that allows some youth aged 18–21 to continue receiving government support,⁵⁰ and other regions have similar programs, although available places are insufficient.

For girls who arrive in their destination country as older teenagers – close to 18 – the expected transition to adulthood and independence is accelerated, and they have less time to benefit from the protection and support granted to wards of the state. Teenage boys in a focus group discussion in Madrid also expressed anxiety about turning 18 and reiterated that, in this aspect, too, girls received more help than boys: “They don’t let [girls end up] on the streets once they turn 18.”

4.4.2. Education, training, and employment

Some girls left home in the hopes of finding better education opportunities, including those who had been deprived of their right to education in their home countries. Upon arrival, many found they could enrol in some form of education or vocational training and spoke enthusiastically about their plans for the future.

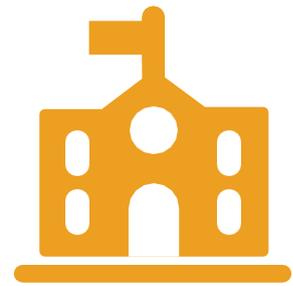
In Italy and Spain, recently arrived migrant children benefited from language and literacy classes, offered in reception centres or by local associations. In Tunisia, some older girls were engaged in night schooling, as well as vocational training courses such as fashion design, cosmetics, and cooking. Some girls in Tunis explained that they planned to use their newfound skills and training to create career opportunities in their countries of origin. “I’ll open my cosmetic centre in my country in two years.” (Denise, age 18, Cameroonian origin, Tunisia).

Younger children tended to have an easier time integrating into the school systems of host countries. Moreover, in comparison to those who arrive at age 16 or 17, for instance, younger children enjoy more years as minors in their new countries – with the protections and specific rights that status entails. Adolescents near the age of majority will soon be expected to be self-sufficient and independent. In these cases, vocational training was seen by key informants as a viable option for migrant youth, although many still have ambitions of careers that would require many more years of education.

Not all girls were enrolled in education or training. The barriers to access varied, including language of instruction, financial constraints, lack of documentation, long enrolment

⁵⁰ Belver, M. 2022, “El dilema de los ex tutelados en Madrid: “¿Y ahora qué hago?” El Mundo, (16 May 2022): <https://www.elmundo.es/madrid/2022/05/16/62790579fdddf52678b45f0.html>

Not all girls were enrolled in education or training. The barriers to access varied, including language of instruction, financial constraints, lack of documentation, long enrolment processes, and lack of knowledge about these services and ways to access them. For several girls, these barriers weighed heavily in their reflections on future migration. For instance, in Tunisia, although migrant children have access to free primary and secondary education irrespective of their or their parents' migratory status,⁵¹ the lack of systems to facilitate enrolment frequently prevents them from exercising this right.⁵² A Libyan girl interviewed in Tunisia confirmed "the procedures to join the school are very slow." (Salma, age 14, Tunisia).



Box 2: Racism, bullying and exclusion

The risks of social isolation, racism and bullying – from students as well as teachers – also had a negative impact on girls' schooling: "Sometimes at school, they insult us. There are a lot of students who insult us... sometimes they even hit us." (Chékina, age 9, Congolese origin, Morocco) "A lot of women come to study in private institutions in Tunisia, but they regret the choice of Tunisia, because of all the racial discrimination and the sexual harassment that they face." (KII, Tunisia). These findings echo previous research, which has emphasised the weight of harassment, discrimination and racism in access to school, including racist policies within some Tunisian schools, resulting in the refusal to accept refugee and migrant children.⁵³

North African and sub-Saharan African boys in Spain also deplored the racism they faced from the police, while seeking employment, and more broadly: "People are worse than I had imagined. They are racist and don't treat you well. I just want to work, but there is no work, because who wants to hire a Moroccan guy? No one." (Amine, Spain) When asked if he had any advice for other boys considering migrating to Spain, one teen replied: "I would tell them the police in Spain [are] racist." (Adil, age 17, Moroccan origin, Spain).

Although migration status is not in itself a barrier to basic education in the countries studied, being undocumented can sometimes stop girls from accessing the funds needed to pursue post-secondary education:⁵⁴ "I really want to have my freedom, go back to school. I want to be a doctor. [...] I applied to get state support, but whenever I try to apply to school; they told me that I lack some paperwork. Sometimes I think that if I have that, it would be easier to achieve some things here." (Josephine, Morocco).

Financial considerations were a concern for several out-of-school girls, often limiting their access to education. Adrienne initially emigrated to Morocco from her native Ivory Coast as a child before subsequently choosing to attempt the journey to Spain. She was obliged to focus her energies on survival in Morocco; she strove to attain housing and healthcare and had to work to provide for her needs: "I didn't have family with me – how was I going to study?"

“ Access to education was high in Italy, Spain, and Morocco but low in Tunisia and Libya. In many cases, girls struggled to adapt to the language of instruction, access cultural mediators, and follow the regular curricula,,

51 Pauline Veron, "Tunisia: Possibilities for Reform and Implementation of Migrant Reception and Protection", ECDPM, (2020), 8: <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/Tunisia-Possibilities-Reform-Implementation-Migrant-Reception-Protection-ECDPM-study-November-2020.pdf>

52 Mixed Migration Centre, "Migrating and Displaced Children and Youth in Tunisia," (15 July 2021), 23.

53 Ibid.

54 Countries studied have enacted law and policy to allow all children to access education, regardless of their migration status.

Many girls we spoke with were fluent in several languages, having picked them up along their journeys. Yet, many still faced challenges with the language of instruction in formal education settings, increasing their risk of social isolation, anxiety, and vulnerability to dropping out. In Tunisia and Morocco, for instance, respondents from East and southern Africa were particularly likely to struggle to adapt to the French and Arabic school systems.

“Here in Morocco, I think it is a bit difficult to adapt to how education is delivered because some courses, like geography, are taught in Arabic. It makes it a bit harder for us to learn it.” (Mayimuna, age 14, Congolese origin, Morocco).

Language barriers have also been a noted challenge for migrant children in Libya, whose education system is seen as ill-equipped to accommodate non-Arabic speakers.

The presence – or absence – of a cultural mediator within schools in Tunisia and Italy was highlighted by respondents as a critical determinant to a migrant child’s success in their studies.⁵⁵ It is worth noting, however, that language barriers not only hinder access to education, but also to vital services such as health, legal administration, protection mechanisms and assistance from local organisations more generally. For instance, a recent study by the Mixed Migration Centre found that service providers in Tunisia more frequently targeted migrant children and youth from Francophone and Arabic-speaking sub-Saharan countries than from other North African and Middle Eastern countries.⁵⁶

Lack of access to education has knock-on effects on the ability of girls to integrate into society and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Many girls struggled to find employment to pay for their basic needs, due to a lack of documentation or work permits. Many girls also turned to informal labour – most frequently domestic work or work in restaurants or bars – and were exposed to labour exploitation:

“When I worked at a restaurant, someone invited us to work there and he told us that he would help us to get the residence permit. We worked for free for a week and a half. He knew from the very beginning that he couldn’t actually help us.” (Jemima, Morocco)

4.4.3. Access to medical care, mental health, and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

Girls who have migrated along these routes frequently have need for healthcare – including mental healthcare – often because of the experiences of physical and psychological injury, trauma and abuse that they faced along their journey. These injuries may manifest themselves physically, or in the form of mental illnesses and disorders such as depression, dissociation, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Broadly, respondents reflected positively on the availability of healthcare services, particularly in southern Europe. Several girls in Spain mentioned that they had travelled specifically to get medical treatments that they could not otherwise have in their countries of origin: “It was my and my family’s decision. Because I’m sick and in Morocco there’s no medicine for that sickness. In Spain, there are doctors who can treat that.” (Jihane, Moroccan, age 13).

⁵⁵ According to the European Commission, “Cultural mediators provide information on different sets of value, orientations to life, beliefs, assumptions and socio-cultural conventions by clarifying culture-specific expressions and concepts that might give rise to misunderstanding, as well as provide translation and interpretation support.”

⁵⁶ Mixed Migration Centre, “Children and Youth in Tunisia,” 7.



Before making contact with authorities, such as police or civil society organisations (CSOs) that can redirect children to the child protection system, some children do not have access to services, including healthcare. As one Moroccan teenager in Madrid attested: text box

"Before, when I was with my brother on the street, I didn't access services. If you're sick, you stay sick until you get better." (Wiam, age 17, Moroccan origin, Spain).

before when...

While healthcare was broadly noted as available, on arrival, however, many girls still faced some complications in accessing it: text box I was sick...

One young woman mentioned that she could not get adequate medical attention because she did not have identity documents. An Ivorian girl who had spent nearly two years in Morocco before continuing to Spain, noted that in Morocco, while she was able to be

"I was sick and went to the hospital. They gave me a prescription. I could not do anything with it since I did not have money to pay for the medicines." (Farah, age 20, Libyan origin, Tunisia).

treated at the hospital in case of emergency, at times she bought medicine illegally, as she was unable to get a prescription from a doctor.

Gaps in accessing maternal health services and birth registration are a key risk for young women, due to the lack of awareness of available services, language barriers, the distrust of medical facilities and fear of penalties for being undocumented, as well as the associated costs. For instance, according to Morocco's 2013 National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum, migrants in Morocco are afforded the right to healthcare, and pre- and antenatal care are, in theory, available at no cost for pregnant migrant women. Yet, key informants noted that in some cases women⁵⁷ continued to face discrimination in hospitals and be asked to pay fees, in some cases services refused to deliver birth certificates of children of mothers who could not pay.

“Gaps in accessing maternal health services and birth registration are a key risk for young women.”

⁵⁷ Layla Babahaji, 'The Current State of Migrant Health in Morocco: Pre-and Peri- COVID-19 Pandemic' (Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, 2020), 32, https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4377&context=isp_collection

Many girls we spoke to expressed an urgent need for psychological support. A Cameroonian girl who was interviewed in Tunisia reported dealing daily with psychological distress and depression and spending all day crying:

“All the time, I spend my days crying. Here I can lock myself and cry. That's not me. All I do is cry. I don't eat well, I don't think straight, I don't feel good. [...] I'm not mentally and emotionally well.” (Pauline, Tunisia)

However, psychological services were not always available. In Italy, other gaps noted were the oversaturation of the public health system and the lack of expertise in trauma-informed care – particularly for survivors of extreme abuse and torture: “You're talking about people with trauma, traumatic life experience, and in our hospitals, our public national and emergency systems, torture and cruelty against survivors is not an everyday matter. They don't know how to manage these kinds of cases.” (KII, Italy).

Language barriers, and the general absence of cultural mediators in health centres – essential to allowing girls to express themselves and discuss their health issues – were a critical gap in service provision. Boys faced this challenge too: a focus group discussion with boys in Spain revealed that they felt somewhat neglected; while they had medical care, they reported often having to attend appointments unaccompanied, which was particularly challenging for minors who do not speak Spanish very well.

In Italy and Spain, informants noted that girls were more likely than boys to be receiving psychological care or counselling. One possible explanation, as described by youth centre managers in Italy, is that widespread issues of stigma, gender norms on masculinity and social expectations for boys to be providers in their societies can prevent them from seeking out emotional support and care, even when they need it.



Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

Stigma around mental health and psychosocial support also fluctuates with the environment. For instance, a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) officer in Libya, who visits detention centres daily, reported that stigma around mental illnesses was a severe barrier to services, but that these varied from one centre to another and from one nationality to another.

Box 3. Need for a rights-based, trauma-informed approach

Across contexts, informants highlighted the need for more capacity building, training and trauma awareness for staff who are directly involved with girl migrants: "There needs to be trauma awareness. This is an aspect that is lacking when it comes to MHPSS services here. People who directly work with migrants need to be fully aware of their traumas and be trauma sensitive to not trigger them or reproduce violence." (KII, Tunisia).

Several informants in Spain and Tunisia also noted the need for specific migrant support services tailored to younger girls, as existing services were often geared toward adult women migrants, and in particular survivors of sexual and gender-based violence: "Many times they find these support programmes, but only once they are 18. However, this might be too late for them. Maybe the girls have already been in Spain for three years, and they find themselves in these programs with a more difficult situation than the one they arrived with. I think that we must adapt programs to young women as well, since they are very vulnerable at those ages." (KII, Spain).

Beyond that, there is a low level of awareness among child migrants of their rights to healthcare and the options available to them for accessing health services. One key informant clearly summarised the issue: "Health problems are the last problem for them, because when you meet them on the street and you suggest that they come to the clinic to evaluate their health, they tell you that they have no health problems, that the problems for them are the job, the house, the documents...so the difficulty is also to convince them and inform them that they have the right to health, that even if they are without documents they can access health services." (KII, Italy).

4.4.4. Social networks, support services, and communication

As during the journey, on arrival many girls described their personal support networks as a source of strength. More than half of the girls we spoke with said they were still in touch with one or more family members after migrating. Some girls even shared stories of mending broken relationships with their family members back home, after leaving against their wishes, and of getting back in touch after losing contact during their journey:

"I went to Malaga with my brother. We left Tangier and went to Malaga in November 2021. My brother and I took a train from Malaga to Madrid; we got separated and lost touch. A boy called the police who took me to a centre; they called my sister and were able to reconnect me with my brother." (Hasna, age 13, Moroccan origin, Spain)

Most girls found ways to communicate with their families, either by phone or through online messaging platforms such as Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. Only a few reported difficulties reaching their loved ones, due to loss of contact information or the inability to access a phone or messaging platform.

Even so, separation from friends and family was a recurrent and sometimes traumatic feature in many of their journeys. In multiple cases, it appears that girls stopped their migration after becoming separated. In some cases, family members or other trusted adults left them behind as they continued their journeys:

"I didn't want to leave my country, but my brother wanted me to leave 'for a while' in order to protect me [from forced marriage]. Since my brother had two friends who were going to Morocco, he helped me get my passport and I went with them. When we got to Morocco, they left me by myself. I was 11 or 12 years old." (Adrienne, Spain)

Another girl described being separated from her mother during the sea crossing to Spain:

"With my mom, we wanted to cross the sea. When we were in Nador, these people told us that we would leave at midnight. My mom left and crossed the sea without me. I stayed because I was really afraid, I couldn't cross the sea. Since she left, we lost all contact. I tried everything (to find her back), even talking to the Red Cross." (Joelle, age 23, Congolese origin, Morocco)

13-year-old Grace, from Cameroon, recounted the sudden disappearance of her aunt, shortly after flying with her to Spain:

"One Friday, I didn't go to school because I was sick, my aunt went to a hair styling school. Normally she would have come back at 2:30, she wasn't there. Around 3:00 or 4:00, we asked her where she was, she said that she was getting money from the bank. We called her again at 9:00, she said she was getting braids done. By midnight, she stopped answering. Then, they sent me to a centre for minors. Since then, I haven't heard anything from her."

Staff from a centre in Spain noted that adults who separate from the children they have travelled with are often aware of Spain's strong child protection system and believe that the children will be in good hands, while they themselves may be unable to provide for the children's needs.

In addition to supporting children with emergency support services – such as legal counsel, housing, and family reunification – many organisations help to foster socialisation, social cohesion, and personal development, such as through after-school homework help, language tutoring, theatre, arts, and games. Across contexts, girls spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities for socialisation that they had within NGO-run community centres and safe spaces:

"I do boxing, and Save the Children organises activities for street children. Save the Children took me to a private gym to do boxing." (Nedjma, age 17, Moroccan origin, Spain)

In Tunisia, 14-year-old Salma recounts:

“On Children’s Day, IOM and the Red Crescent took all the children and took us on a trip. We went to the cinema; they gave us prizes... it was amazing! My best memory in Medenine was at the beginning of 2022. All the centres, with all nationalities, put all our conflicts aside and celebrated New Year’s Eve.”

When asked how they were able to buy items and meet their basic needs, many girls said they turned to family and community members for support and assistance. One key informant explained how diasporas are a key source of moral and material support: “In Morocco we notice that there are some communities coexisting together and, more importantly, if someone gets sick they might even financially contribute to help that person. Hence, communities will tend to help each other a lot.” (KII, Morocco).

Many of the girls we spoke with had developed strong friendships with other migrant youth. Strong peer support networks were also observed in minor reception centres in Spain: “Some boys let me borrow their phones to do video calls with my mom and treated me like their sister. I didn’t feel alone. They were from where I’m from and had the same situation as me.” (Maissa, age 16, Moroccan origin, Spain).



Photo: Mickaela Churchill, Samuel Hall

Still, social isolation upon arrival remained a real risk for many girls. Key informants in Italy noted challenges with social integration that migrant children faced, as they were not attending the same classes as Italian youth: “You don’t have enough places where [migrant youth] can socialise. In the evening, after school, when the Italian students have attended school in the morning you have a specific class for migrant youth, who are going to night school for adults. They have no way to interact with Italian boys or girls.” (KII, Italy).

Social isolation and social integration challenges are further compounded by experiences of racism, xenophobia, stigma and marginalisation that many girls faced in their host country. Unaccompanied girls were among the most socially isolated. Social isolation is especially a risk for girls who may have left suddenly, without the approval or support of their family, financially or otherwise (such as in cases of fleeing forced marriage).

“I am a person who doesn’t like to express my feelings. When I am really sad, I don’t like sharing things. I am really locked down. Most of my moments are kind of sad because sometimes I don’t do things well like the way they are supposed to be and sometimes I fail.” (Ini, age 19, Nigerian origin, Italy)

Despite the challenges, several girls emphasised their resilience and how their journeys had made them stronger: “It was very difficult to leave, but with strength I withstood everything,” said 15-year-old Adrienne. “It was a very bad journey, but at least we have had experiences. I feel that I did things, that I was capable of doing things,” said 16-year-old Maissa. “And being brave,” 13-year-old Grace, from Cameroon, chimed in.

4.4.5. Legal and policy protections and gaps

Migrant girls in North Africa and southern Europe are often exposed to protection issues due to gaps in national legal protection frameworks (or poor alignment with international legal frameworks) and/or limited knowledge of the protections afforded to them.

Official documents and registration

While most countries in the region – apart from Libya⁵⁸ – have instituted laws and policies for the protection of migrant children, many cannot fully access their rights due to a lack of documentation or a residency permit. In some cases, this is linked to challenges with birth registration in host or transit countries. Undocumented parents may seek to avoid interactions with authorities and fail to register their children's births. In the case of Libya, they may also simply lack of pathways to do so.⁵⁹

Without access to a residence permit, children and young migrants encounter great challenges securing formal employment and pursuing higher education,⁶⁰ making them more likely to fall into informal labour, without social or legal protections and with greater exposure to exploitation.⁶¹

Some children and migrants interviewed reported being stateless, further restricting their access to services due to a lack of documents.

"We are Amazigh, from the Tuareg tribe. We live in the Sahara. Our tribe does not recognise documents. [...] We were born in Libya but we won't get documents. [...] We are not allowed many services because of this." (Salma, age 14, Libyan origin, Tunisia).

Lacking the necessary identity documents to access social services and the ability to return to their countries of origin, some stateless



Photo: Abir Mars, Samuel Hall

58 The Law No.19 of 2010 prohibits all unauthorised entry, stay, and exit of "foreign illegal migrants" within the territory under penalty of fines and indefinite detention, followed by deportation.# Libya is not signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its additional protocols, and has no legal framework for processing asylum claims. These measures have resulted in large numbers of migrants, including children, being trapped in Libyan detention centres without access to international protection. See: FIDH, "NO WAY OUT: Migrants and Refugees Trapped in Libya Face Crimes Against Humanity," (32 November 2021), 38.

59 There is no entity in Libya that registers foreign births. (KII60, UN WOMEN, Libya)

60 Mixed Migration Centre, "Children and Youth in Tunisia," 22.

61 Pauline Veron, "Tunisia: Reform of Migrant Reception and Protection," ECDPM, 9.

Box 4: Accessing justice and remedies for violations

Many migrant girls fell victim to severe crimes and human rights violations along their migration journeys, yet access to justice and reparation are a critical gap in current protection frameworks. Even the most egregious human rights abuses, such as child labour and trafficking, often occur with impunity due to the challenges of cross-border prosecution.⁶²

Even when these abuses occurred in their host country, respondents noted that girls would refrain from reporting these crimes to authorities, due to concerns about their own status as migrants, their gender or age, or even their lack of knowledge of their rights and the support they are able to receive.

persons describe feeling like they are in an “open prison” (Karima, age 21, Libyan origin, Tunisia).

Children travelling without identity documents are at particular risk of being misidentified as adults, jeopardising their access to education, healthcare and support services. One girl we spoke to in Spain explained how she was forced to leave a minor’s reception centre at age 15, as operators had misidentified her as an adult:

“I was 15 but they said I was older. They threw me out of a minors’ centre, so I was on the street. There were drugs, prostitution, violence, threats. Save the Children asked me what I was doing, gave me clean clothes, shower, and had me hosted by a woman for almost two months. [...] I entered [Melilla] on foot. Save the Children asked for my papers to help identify me as a minor so I could go to [peninsular] Spain.” (Nedjma, Spain)

Many migrant children develop strong ties and a sense of belonging and being at “home” in their host countries. Yet, pathways for regularisation are often unclear and inaccessible. Many migrant children from sub-Saharan African countries can enter Tunisia with visa-free restrictions for up to 90 days, but face challenges prolonging their stay, due to lengthy administrative procedures and the requirements for obtaining residency. They may also incur penalties if they overstay their visa (even due to delays in administrative processes), thus placing them in precarious legal situations, or pushing them to migrate onward.⁶³

ITALY

Under Italian law, all children are provided legal residence until they reach 18, however children of undocumented migrants are left unprotected from this provision, as their parents cannot apply for their children’s residency permits without risking detention and deportation by authorities. Once they reach the age of majority, migrant children apply to

⁶² It should be noted, however, that recent bilateral cooperation initiatives between North Africa and the EU have sought to fill this gap, such as joint EU-UNODC initiative “Dismantling Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Networks in North Africa” (2019-2022) covering Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.

⁶³ This has been found to be a driver for migrants to enter irregularly into Libya. See: Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, “Manual on Regularisations for Children, Young People and Families,” (March 2018), 47: https://www.picum.org/Documents/Publi/2018/Regularisation_Children_Manual_2018.pdf

Table 1. Legal protections for migrants in Libya, Morocco, and Tunis

Libya

- The Law No.19 of 2010 prohibits all unauthorised entry, stay, and exit of “foreign illegal migrants” within the territory under penalty of fines and indefinite detention, then deportation.⁶⁴
- Libya has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or its additional protocols and has no legal framework for processing asylum claims.
- These measures have resulted in large numbers of migrants, including children, being trapped in Libyan detention centres without access to international protection.

Morocco

- The legal status of migrant minors is not clearly addressed by national law.
- Migrant children do not require a visa to enter and stay in Moroccan territory, many fall into a situation of irregularity once they reach the age of majority, due to the absence of a regularisation framework.⁶⁵
- Some migrants in Morocco are refused access to asylum procedures and humanitarian assistance.⁶⁶
- Arbitrary detention was reported as prevalent among migrants, even children.⁶⁷

Morocco

- Migrant children’s rights are enshrined in the Constitution, which provides that all children on Tunisian territory are afforded protection by the states, regardless of their migration status.⁶⁸
- In practice barriers remain due to lack of residency cards and language barriers.
- Many migrant children enter Tunisia with visa-free restrictions (for up to 90 days), although some face challenges accessing employment⁶⁹ and may be subject to fees for overstaying their stay, thus placing them in a situation of legal precarity.
- A limited legal framework for the employment of migrants and refugees in Tunisia leaves many exposed to labour exploitation, including for children.

extend their stay on the grounds of ‘work, education or to look for work’ – but this requires regular residency status and proof of an education or employment project.

Unaccompanied children reaching the age of 18 can benefit from extended protection and assistance up until the age of 21, through a *prosieguo amministrativo* (administrative continuation), decided by the Juvenile Court. (Similar challenges of regularising one’s stay after reaching adulthood were observed in Morocco and Spain.)⁷⁰

64 FIDH, “NO WAY OUT,” 38.

65 Humanium, “Morocco’s Unaccompanied Minors - Today and Tomorrow,” KII14, interview conducted with a member of the Conseil National des droits de l’homme in Morocco, January 2022.

66 Amnesty International, “Syrian Refugees Trapped in Desert on Moroccan Border with Algeria in Dire Need of Assistance,” (May 2014).

67 Global Detention Project, “Country Report - Immigration Detention in Morocco,” (updated July 2021).

68 Specifically, Article 47 of the Tunisian Constitution states that “it is the responsibility of parents and the State to guarantee the child dignity, healthcare, education and instruction. The state must ensure all forms of protection to all children, without any distinction, in accordance with the best interest of the child”. See Minority Rights Group International, ‘Review of the Combined 4th to 6th Periodic Report of Tunisia. Committee on the Rights of the Child. 85th Session, Geneva, 7 - 25 September 2020.’

69 Mixed Migration Centre, “Children and Youth in Tunisia,” 22.

70 Save the Children, “Crecer Sin Papeles en España,” (2021); Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, “Manual on Regularisations for Children, Young People and Families”, (updated 2020), 70.

4.5.6. Projects and aspirations for the future

Across contexts, the girls we spoke with shared their hopes of finding safety and stable living, their ambitions for personal development and growth, and of giving back what they could to their families and communities. Wian, a Moroccan girl in Madrid, approaching the age of majority, said she hoped to find work, to help herself and her younger brother.

Another young woman from Libya voiced her desire for safety for her children:



"I dream of a safe environment where I don't fear for (my children) to get harassed. I want them to be able to finish their studies and concretize their dreams and goals." (Salma, 14, Tunisia)

Still others had ambitious personal projects and career aspirations, such as going into law, medicine or computer science. Others simply wanted a safer environment for themselves and their children. Ouidad explained how she wishes to help protect other vulnerable girls and women:

"I started thinking about having my own house, if I have money in the future and a good job, to do a project. An association for women in prison, who were raped in jail. Because that happens a lot." (Ouidad, 17, Spain)

“
Most girls we
spoke with said
they intended
on staying in
the country in
which they
were currently
located.”

While most girls we spoke with had found a sense of security and belonging in their host communities and planned to stay, for others the journey was still ongoing. For those girls who said they were continuing their journey, reuniting with family members, accessing better education, employment and safe accommodation options were the main reasons pushing them onward. By contrast, for boys, future migration was almost always tied to economic and employment opportunities. A key informant explains how gender roles and gendered expectations play into this: "When they [boys] talk about work, they talk about inclusion. When they say they want to get a job, what they are talking about is inclusion. They have seen that the only way to be included in society is to find a job. It doesn't matter if they want to share something else of what they are, the system forces them to find a job." (KII, Italy). Despite many hardships, some girls reflected positively on the opportunities for personal development and resilience that their journeys had given them: text box whatever what...

"Whatever what we went through, it turns us into strong and mature individuals. It gives us determination. [...] You don't look at the obstacles of your goals the same way, because you know what you went through. So, you know that you can make it. It will be an asset for us when we will have our own family and kids." (Genevieve, age 22, Nigerian origin, Morocco).

5. DISCUSSION



Drawing by Aamiina, 18, of Somali origin, interviewed in Italy. Girls were invited to draw during interviews.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to develop a holistic and gender-specific understanding of the migratory patterns and experiences of girls in, through, and to North Africa as well as to fill the gendered knowledge gap. While several key patterns that emerged from the findings appear transversal and have been observed in other regional Girls on the Move reports, others are unique to the North African context.

The research confirms that there is no single narrative that can sufficiently capture the experience of girls on the move. Girls and young women make the difficult decision to migrate for multiple and complex reasons, some of which they themselves are not able to fully articulate. The migration journey in and through the North African countries covered by this research is dangerous, brutal, and oftentimes deadly. Yet, as the gateway to southern Europe and beyond, it is an important transit point. An awareness of risks inherent in sea journeys varied by country of origin, as well as age. For example, many Moroccan girls made the migration decision fully aware of the risks and willingly accepted them for the chance to reach Europe. Those who viewed countries in North Africa as a destination faced similar risks and challenges in their journeys, yet willingly faced the dangers to access perceived better opportunities. Their experiences show clear gendered aspects impacting their journeys as well as life on 'arrival', which this research sought to unpack to allow for adapted policy and programming.

Gendered differences

Gendered differences in the migration experience became evident as girls and boys described their different protective measures and coping mechanisms. Multiple stakeholders described girls as more knowledgeable and well prepared for the journey, while boys reportedly engaged in minimal planning, often resorting to dangerous practices such as riding beneath trucks. The complexity of the gender dynamics at play is evident: on the one hand, as a protective measure, girls rarely travelled alone and often travelled in groups of men and boys. At the same time, sexual harassment, assault, and violence were prevalent, confirming the need for these protective measures as well as the added risks that they could lead to. Sexual exploitation and abuse premised on access to protection, food and other basic needs was also common. To avoid this, some girls also disguised themselves as boys.

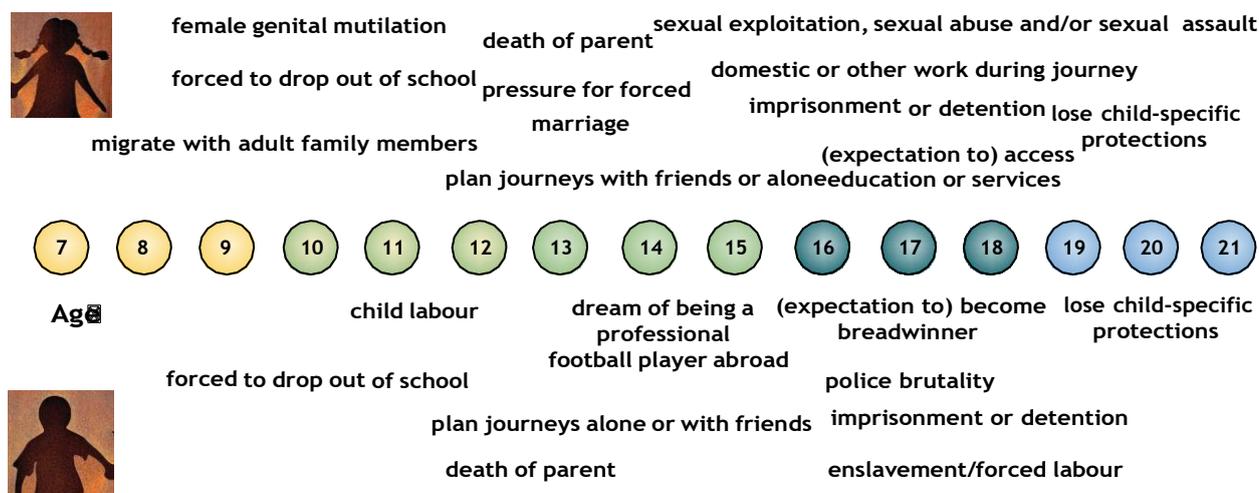
Conversely, gendered differences in countries of destination seem to favour girls. Boys reported protection risks of a different type. For example, they were more likely to have experienced police violence, often associated with racism and anti-migrant sentiment. This was particularly prevalent at both sea and land borders. Some girls, however – particularly in Spain – mentioned the police as a resource or source of help. In Italy and Spain, girls were more likely than boys to receive psychological care or counselling, and boys frequently reported more favourable treatment of girls at the reception centres. These experiences underscore the complexities of these gender dynamics as well as the need for stakeholders to develop a more nuanced understanding of gender differences in migration.

Figure 10 below presents an amalgamation of findings, highlighting some of the more common aspects of migration journeys evoked by boys and girls interviewed, underlining the influence of sexual and gender-based violence on girls' journeys in particular.

In destination countries, both girls and boys reported trepidation about reaching the age of majority. Since children have specific rights, turning 18 often represented an end to government assistance, schooling, or potentially legal resident status.

Figure 10. Gender related trends in migration

Age and Gender Timelines



Profiling Girls on the Move

A confluence of factors impacted how and why girls made the decision to migrate, as well as how they experienced migration.⁷¹ For many, these experiences, and to some degree, their agency in the decision to migrate were shaped by their country of origin. Understanding the role migrant girls' ecosystems play in decision-making is critical to understanding their migratory experiences. In general, Moroccan girls interviewed in Spain were the most well-informed and well-prepared. Their migratory path was heavily influenced by societal norms and expectations within their communities; the strong ties and in some ways, the prior knowledge accessed through existing migrant networks provided them with an advantage. As a result of their social networks, they had some idea of what to expect and were better prepared for the challenges faced in the journey, particularly in terms of risk mitigation strategies. Even those who spoke of their disillusionment when they realised that the reputed advantages of their destination were greatly exaggerated, appeared to fare better upon arrival, likely due to their advanced knowledge, preparation, and well-defined and established social networks.

In contrast, girls of West African and other sub-Saharan African origins interviewed were often less prepared and faced greater challenges in transit, as well as at their destination.⁷² For this subgroup, in particular, challenges including arranged marriages, violence and conflict and sexual and gender-based violence, constrained girls' choices and pushed them to migrate, as a consequence these girls began their migration journey already significantly disadvantaged and in a state of increased vulnerability. Their stories highlight gendered power dynamics inherent in migration, and underscore the urgent need for increased information, as well as the importance of protective factors.

⁷¹ It is important to note that the sample size was limited, and therefore these findings may not be generalizable.

⁷² Ibid.

“ Many girls and boys experienced the death of a parent prior to leaving their countries of origin. For some girls, the loss of a parent meant losing a protector and advocate for their rights; after the parent’s death, the girl might be pulled out of school or forced to marry by other family members. For boys, on the other hand, the death of a parent frequently meant being expected to, or wanting to, become a breadwinner to help support their families. ”

A further subgroup of girls on the move were the “invisible” girls. There are limited mechanisms in place to identify migrant girls and connect them to services and resources.

As described in the findings, many girls migrated without documentation, and some were misidentified as adults, limiting their access to support services. The findings underscore the extreme vulnerability of young women between the ages of 18–24, many of whom began their migration journey as minors, yet were unable to access services often reserved for unaccompanied minors, including MHPSS, healthcare, and education. This policy failure limiting access of young women to support services particularly affects those girls who became pregnant while in transit. For multiple reasons, including lack of documentation, many of these girls were unable to access necessary services, and once they gave birth, their children are also extremely vulnerable- another generation was left to fall through the cracks.

Agency and Resilience

The degree of agency that girls perceive they exercise in their decisions and actions to move is of critical importance, as it can affect the level of “social disruption” experienced, and the preparation of protection strategies for the journey.⁷³ In line with previous research by Samuel Hall, which found that most girls viewed their decision to migrate as being voluntary, and “made on their own or with their active involvement,” this study found that most older girls were at least partially involved in the decision to migrate.⁷⁴

Girls interviewed demonstrated multiple and diverse strategies to access resources available to them and to challenge gender roles and norms throughout their migration journeys.

- They deployed ingenuity in the planning and information-gathering stage, going beyond social media to gather information through more covert measures to maintain secrecy. Girls spoke of furtive conversations in markets, asking friends to search online, and seeking out other migrants.
- Despite these efforts, girls faced a range of challenges on their journeys: problems with smugglers, trafficking, sexual abuse and assault, and nearly all encountered unanticipated risks and dangers for which they were not prepared. However, the experience itself of overcoming these challenges, often independently, and the strength they discovered within themselves that enabled them to persevere in the face of tremendous adversity, were highlighted by many.
- Girls frequently demonstrated a strong desire for self-determination; their decisions and aspirations for better education and career opportunities indicate their motivation to achieve greater autonomy. It is important to note that many girls were aware of the multiple rights-based disadvantages they faced, largely due to their life circumstances. Their understanding and ability to engage critically in a discussion on their basic lack of human rights as migrant girls was exemplified by one Moroccan girl in Spain, who noted: “Your passport is valid for you to travel to different countries, but mine isn’t. Why is yours valid but mine not?” (Sofia, age 16, Moroccan origin, Madrid)

73 Temin et al., “Girls on the Move in the Developing World,” p.20,21.

74 IOM & Samuel Hall, “Migrant Smuggling to Canada: An Enquiry into Vulnerability and Irregularity through Migrant Stories,” (2018):

https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migrant_smuggling_to_canada_2018_final.pdf

Journey to Self-Reliance

Girls and young women often survived egregious abuses and faced enormous obstacles on the way to their destinations. However, arrival in countries of destination did not necessarily alleviate gendered challenges faced by these migrants. This was most keenly felt by those who were not eligible to receive support services due to age or status. Many girls struggled to obtain stable housing, access services, obtain documentation, and find employment. These persistent challenges further compounded their vulnerabilities, exposing girls to continued violations of their rights and bodily autonomy. Nevertheless, girls spoke proudly of their own perseverance, as well as their ability to overcome multiple challenges to achieve independence.

As the findings illustrate, all migration journeys have gendered elements. Listening to the voices of girls, acknowledging their varied experiences, and unpacking these journeys is a critical step to begin to address the protection risks faced by girls throughout all stages of migration. This must be done in conjunction with recognizing the agency of girls – and treating them not as victims but as the actors which the research shows them to be.

“
We say, ‘when
you suffer a lot
in your life one
day, you’ll
achieve your
dream.’ With all
this suffering,
one day I will
reach my
expectations.
(Aminata, 22,
Ivory Coast,
Tunisia),”

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research offers needed insight into the lived experiences of girls on the move in North Africa and travelling to Italy and Spain. Its findings highlight the urgent need to engage with key stakeholders, community-based organisations, and migrant girls themselves to generate relevant and contextualised information to drive actions and achieve meaningful results to support girls and young women at various stages in their journeys. The following recommendations are directed towards all relevant stakeholders who share in the responsibility of safeguarding and promoting safe migration experiences for girls and young women.

Core Recommendations



Policy



Programming



Participation

During and After Journeys



Countries of transit



Countries of destination

6.1 Core Recommendations

Clear cross-cutting recommendations emerge from the findings for incorporation by actors across the stakeholder landscape. The following core recommendations are categorised by policy recommendations (in blue), programming recommendations (in red) and participation recommendations (in orange):

Policies and programmes geared towards children on the move and youth should explicitly take a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive approach. This approach should also consider age as a specific vulnerability. Findings indicate that boys, girls, young men, and young women have different experiences, vulnerabilities, and needs, as well as reasons for migration; it is imperative that boys be included in policies and programmes. While migration offers enhanced opportunities for girls and young women, it also exposes them to multiple vulnerabilities throughout all stages of the migration journey which are linked to their age and gender. All actors need to consider gender explicitly in their engagement with migration policy and programming to ensure a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive approach to ensure adapted engagement in advocacy, programming, and policy design. This approach should go beyond focusing on gender-linked vulnerabilities to also recognising opportunities for transformative change towards greater equality, including⁷⁵ recognising migrating girls as agents challenging gender norms in countries of origin, transit, and destination.

- **Enact policy frameworks to combat sexual and gender-based violence in all forms and implement existing commitments and policies to protect human rights.** Several policies and guidelines exist addressing some of the human rights violations identified in the research. These (such as The Guidelines on Combating Sexual Violence and its Consequences in Africa, elaborated by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights) give States an obligation to prevent sexual violations, including rape and child marriage, and provide protections to survivors, guaranteeing access to justice mechanisms and effective remedy. They require stronger implementation – for all girls on the move regardless of their status. This could be facilitated by stronger referral mechanisms and child-friendly judicial services and access to cultural mediators to ensure survivors can fully benefit from the legal pathways to ensure their protection. Governments should work to address barriers, providing safe and accessible reporting mechanisms. Anonymised reporting mechanisms, potentially leveraging technology (many migrant girls had access to phones during at least parts of the journey), as well as social workers trained in other languages and how to discuss such abuses, could facilitate this.
- **Develop non-discrimination frameworks and policies to improve access to services for girls on the move.** Girls on the move often face barriers to accessing services due to discrimination. Policies and frameworks should be developed to ensure services, including child protection systems, are accessible to them. Policies should specifically target unaccompanied girls, and include antitrafficking measures, training for reception centres on SGBV and protection measures, as well as enhanced identification of victims of trafficking.
- **Create enabling environments supporting girls' right to fully participate in society.** Many girls on the move reported difficulties in fully participating in society – socially, educationally, for employment – in their countries of origin, transit, and destination. To build girls' agency and choices, programming to address this will be key. This can range from programming seeking to improve access to education to addressing underlying causes of child marriage, among others. Coordination and partnerships – in particular with local organisations with expertise on specific contextual challenges – should explore opportunities for synergy in gender-responsive, child-friendly, and empowering programming and advocacy. Finally, access to social protection systems, including social assistance and labour market programmes should be embedded as a basic right into national legislations, with resourcing child protection mechanisms a key priority.

⁷⁵ Inclusive of cisgender and transgender migrant girls

- **Emphasise migrant girls' participation in policy and programme design.** Taking a participatory approach to policy and programme design explicitly targeting the involvement of migrant girls will be key to addressing the challenges they face. Actors can promote this by creating inclusive spaces in their design for migrant girls to propose ideas and react to initial planning, allowing their voices to underline potential challenges and opportunities otherwise missed.
- **Develop spaces for positive awareness-raising discussions.** The research underlines the complex nature of girls' migration journeys and their drivers. In the vast majority of cases, they are not undertaking these without information – personal networks and social media provide an understanding of the risks and opportunities offered, although the latter may be over-emphasised. Additional engagement directly with migrant girls and youth is required to improve actors' understanding of how they understand and perceive the risks of migration to move beyond simplified models of understanding. Building on past assessments of awareness campaigns suggests the importance of positive and honest communication through a range of platforms employed by migrant youth. Previous studies have found that campaigns of fear, highlighting risks, have been shown to have limited impact.⁷⁶ Rather, engagement should provide participants with additional tools to manage these risks, as well as offer information on regular migration strategies, including scholarship and visa application guidance and strategies for obtaining foreign work permits.
- **Improve networks of communication throughout the journey.** Girls often reported being separated from their families/travelling companions. To support migrant children and youth in various stages of their journeys, partners should identify existing formal and informal networks to support communication and develop communication channels. Coordination should occur with migrant advocates as well as returnees in countries of origin to ensure efficacy and maximum reach across contexts. In addition, partners should ensure that the mechanisms developed to facilitate communication are tailored to meet the needs of girls on the move. Research, including a previous study by Samuel Hall on family tracing and reunification (FTR), has found that informal social media networks are often more effective than long, drawn-out formal processes.⁷⁷ In addition, partners should support efforts to ensure mobile connectivity and digital literacy in transit.
- **Enhance cross-national coordination and protection efforts based on the respect of fundamental human rights and strengthen the overall level of awareness of child migrant's rights.** Create pathways for cooperation and coordination across migration journeys between countries of origin, transit and destination to support the development of gender-sensitive policies and provide enhanced protection to migrant girls. In all locations, project and centre staff as well as migrant girls' themselves require training around migrant girls' rights to ensure they are accessing the support to which they are entitled. Programming should involve advocating for migrant rights, including the right to ask for asylum, right to healthcare and other services. Follow-up programming should include support to girls/youth in obtaining necessary documentation to facilitate access services available to them.
- **Improve data collection on girls on the move, as well as migration data quality, validity, and comparability.** The desk review conducted for this research highlights the lack of data on migrant children and girls, but the research also found that girls' experiences differ from those of boys along several key axes. Continued emphasis should be placed on building stronger systems to collect gender-disaggregated data consistently and systematically, to avoid gendered challenges being 'hidden' within aggregated data and the risk of missing or worsening protection issues unintentionally. Where migration data exists, it is often inaccurate, incomplete, and not comparable across migration contexts. Strategies to enhance data quality and collection methods include the inclusion of migration-related questions in household surveys and censuses, increasing the use of data from administrative records (e.g., visa applications, requests for asylum, work permits) and enhancing the use of gender-disaggregated data.

⁷⁶ Rodriguez, A.-L. (2017). European attempts to govern African youths by raising awareness of the risks of migration: ethnography of an encounter. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–17. doi:10.1080/1369183x.2017.141

⁷⁷ Samuel Hall, "Ikea Foundation- Coming Together: Family Tracing and Reunification," (2017): <https://www.samuelhall.org/publications/ikea-foundation-coming-together-family-tracing-and-reunification>

6.3 During and after migration journeys

In addition to the above, specific recommendations can be proposed for government (in blue) and UN / NGO / CSO and other organisation (in red) actors in transit and destination contexts.

In countries of transit

- **Establish accountability mechanisms to combat impunity for abuses faced by girls on the move.** Throughout their journeys, girls are subject to multiple violations and abuse, much of which goes unreported. Even when it is reported, those responsible often go unpunished. This requires mechanisms to enhance monitoring of abuses and rights violations and increase enforcement of violations.
- **Engage local governments and partners to improve emergency humanitarian service provision.** Implementing partners should support local governments to coordinate efforts to prioritise hygiene and dignity kits, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services. In addition, identify medical and MHPSS providers in key transit locations and engage local communities to identify and support migrant girls in need of medical and/or MHPSS attention.
- **Work with partners to identify safe houses.** In key transit locations, link to migrant communication/information networks in countries of origin as well as transit to encourage access. Engage migrants in the process to ensure locations are safe, trusted, and accessible.

In Countries of Destination

- **Leverage the expertise of local governments and key authorities.** Utilise existing expertise to inform policy and support opportunities for inclusion, building the capacity of key stakeholders to address issues facing migrants in communities. At the community level, support the development of migrant networks to enhance communication and increase linkages to available services.
- **Strengthen the provision of MHPSS services.** MHPSS services should be proposed in proximity to reception centres, taking into account children's language needs. This will require liaising with both government-provided support as well as other organisations' programming. Additionally, beyond MHPSS staff, all staff working with migrant girls should be trained in gender and trauma-sensitive practices to avoid re-traumatisation. Cultural mediators can also serve to encourage migrant girls to use MHPSS services when needed. Finally, local migrant community members can be trained to identify those in need of support who and to encourage the use of services.
- **Increase funding for the protection and access to services of people involved in migration with a rights-based focus and enhance collaboration with implementing partners.** Improve also development cooperation funding to strengthen child protection systems as well as resources supporting legal channels, working mobility and private sponsorships.
- **Increase outreach and awareness efforts to 'invisible' populations and children living in precarious conditions.** Partners should work to target vulnerable populations, who may otherwise attempt to "fly under the radar" or who may be unaware of services available, in awareness-raising initiatives and the provision of services. A particular focus is needed on children who are approaching 18 and will soon "age out" of system to pre-empt their falling through the cracks. In addition, partners should aim to connect children living in precarious conditions with services and ensure that UASC are brought into the child protection system.

- **Ensure programming supports the inclusion of UASC in the child protection system and connects all migrant children with services**, while also working with partners to improve options for safe gender-separated housing. Gaps should be identified in gender-based violence identification and treatment. Information dissemination is critical; efforts should focus on ensuring information on projects targeting migrant women and girls is promoted.
- **Identify and engage the migrant diaspora.** At the migrant community level, identify and engage migrant leaders to support newly arrived girls and young women who are at increased risk. In addition, develop community networks within the broader diaspora to support new migrants in the country of destination and in country of origin. This will ensure the development of linkages of stronger ecosystems in the long-term environment. Work should emphasise building the capacity of migrant community members to support future programming efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Investigate economic survival strategies employed by girls in destination countries (plans for further travel, risks of trafficking, sexual exploitation, particularly once they reach age of majority).
- Examine the concept of migrant girls as 'agents of change' and explore ways in which girls are challenging gender norms at various stages in the migration journey.
- Contribute proactively to research and engagement with children with diverse SOGIESC including in future Girls on the Move editions.

The findings highlight the need to identify and engage community leaders and to strengthen community-based programming to promote honest discourse about migration experiences and realities. Of critical importance is the need to increase access to migration-related information

7. ANNEXES

7.1 Research Locations

Morocco

The research team conducted interviews in Rabat – an urban hub host to a large number of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Migrants interviewed come from several geographic regions including North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East.

Contacts and interview spaces were facilitated with close support and coordination from the Fondation Orient-Occident and Médecins du Monde. Participants identified and selected for interview were beneficiaries of one of the above organisations and selected based on their availability and relevance to the research.

Tunisia

The research team conducted interviews in Tunis and Nabeul. Nabeul is a key departure point for migrants travelling by sea. Tunis is host to the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia. Because Tunisia is both a transit and destination country, the participants were at various stages in their migratory journeys; some had recently arrived in Tunisia while others had been in the country for a longer time, either voluntarily, or because they were unable to continue their journey for a variety of reasons.

Several case studies were facilitated with support from Terre d'Asile Tunisie. This association identified beneficiaries who were relevant to the research and interested in participating. In addition, they provided an interview venue in their local office in Tunis. Other participants were identified and recruited by the Samuel Hall research team through snowball sampling in locations with high migrant populations.

Italy

Research in Italy aimed to understand the experiences of girls travelling across the central Mediterranean routes (CMR). Data collection activities were conducted in close coordination with Save the Children Italy, and the day centre Civico Zero. Interviews were conducted in Catania – Sicily's second-largest city and a main entry point into Italy for migrants. Participants were already familiar with the centre managers or regularly visited the centre.

Spain

Data collection in Spain focused primarily on girls who had migrated through the western Mediterranean routes (WMR) as well as the western Africa–Atlantic route (WAAR) to the Spanish Canary Islands. In-person data collection was undertaken in Madrid and Gran Canaria, with several remote interviews with key informants based in Tenerife and Malaga. Save the Children Spain facilitated coordination with child protection authorities in each location, as all children interviewed in Spain were under the protection of the state.

Libya

Migration flows from and through Libya are significant, and the country is a key transit point in North Africa; however, given the security situation in Libya and the difficulty of ensuring the safety of potential child participants, in-country data collection consisted of remote key informant interviews with adult participants. The research team was able to interview several Libyan migrants in Tunisia and speak to migrants who had transited through Libya during data collection in Italy.

7.2 Safeguarding and Research Ethics

Prior to interviews, informed consent and assent forms were obtained from the interviewees and the parents or legal guardians of all girls and boys under the age of 18.⁷⁸ Forms were available in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish, and ample time was allotted preceding each FGD or CS interview to explain the purpose of the study and potential risks and benefits; emphasise that participation is voluntary and encourage potential participants to ask questions.

Children were interviewed individually in case studies or together with other young migrants of the same age group and gender, in FGDs, with a family member present when desired. Interviews with children were led by an interviewer of the same gender and in semi-private spaces such as residence centre classrooms, libraries, recreational rooms, and meeting rooms within NGO or government offices. The selection of child participants was based upon their self-attributed gender, as opposed to sex categories, focusing in particular on children who identified as girls.

In the lead-up to fieldwork, the research team coordinated closely with supporting organisations and Save the Children offices, to prepare a safe space for the research and adequate support, follow-up and referral options. Some cases were identified as high-risk prior to interviews, based on known traumatic experiences, and appropriate accommodations were made. In Catania, for instance, interviews were conducted in the presence of a Civico Zero staff member trained in responding to issues of mental health, trauma and psychological distress.

In most cases, social workers or other child protection staff were close by, but not present during the interviews. Wherever available, interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the respondents (Arabic, English, French, Italian and Spanish). For one FGD, the interview was facilitated with the support of a local cultural mediator who spoke the children's native language (Somali).

⁷⁸ In Spain, the state has legal guardianship over unaccompanied minors and provided consent to the reception centre staff.

7.3 Country-level migration overview

Morocco



Morocco is a popular transit and destination country for migrants in North Africa. Between 2018 and 2019, the WMR to Europe overtook the CMR as the predominant entry point to Europe, while the WAAR to the Canary Islands has also seen increasing journeys since 2020. Since then, Morocco has taken measures to reduce the number of migrants by targeting trafficking networks, and while it is still a place of transit, it has also become a destination for refugees and asylum-seekers.

As of March 1, 2022, Morocco reported 9,342 refugees and 8,906 asylum seekers (18,248 total). Of these, the migrants originate from Syria (54%), other Middle Eastern countries (16% - Yemen, Iraq and Palestine) and sub-Saharan countries (25% - Guinea, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and South Sudan). There is limited data on migration in Morocco, though the available data suggests there is a large population of more than 80,000 foreign nationals, predominantly young male migrants from West and Central Africa, who most often cite economic reasons as the driver of migration. With Portugal and Morocco recently signing a migration agreement, setting out legal arrangements for Moroccans to live and work in Portugal as a response to deter irregular migration and human trafficking, it is estimated that migration of Moroccan nationals will continue to increase.

Tunisia



Tunisia is a leading country of origin for migrants arriving in Europe. Its urban centres in Tunis, Sfax, and Medenine governorates are hubs for mixed populations of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and key nodes for transit along the CMR. Tunisia has seen rapidly growing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants since the 2011 revolution, despite the CMR towards Italy being the deadliest route in the world. As of May 2022, there are 9649 refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia, 38% female and 62% male; of the total counted, 14% are boys while 10.5% are girls. This number is projected to climb to over 11,000 by the end of the year. Refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia predominantly arrive from Ivory Coast (37%), Syria (27%), and other sub-Saharan countries such as Sudan, Cameroon, and Guinea. Migrant children have access to education and basic healthcare; children who are refugees or asylum seekers in Tunisia have access to primary and secondary education, basic public health facilities, temporary accommodation in shelters, and other basic protection services.⁸⁹

Libya



Libya is at once a hub for intra-African labour mobility, and a source and transit country for Europe-bound migration, attracting mixed-migrant profiles from countries in Central, Eastern and Western Africa.⁹⁰ Libya is home to North Africa's largest population of migrants: there are at least 635,051 migrants in Libya in 2022, with an extreme gender imbalance (13% female, 87% male), and a relatively low rate of children (14%, of which 53% were unaccompanied).⁹¹ Migrants in Libya typically come from sub-Saharan Africa (56%), with Niger (24%), Egypt (17%), Sudan (15%),

85 UNHCR, "UNHCR Special Update #3 - Inauguration of the "Shamel Office" for the Inclusion of Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants and Returning Tunisians," (2021), 1.

86 UNHCR, "UNHCR Tunisia's Comprehensive Refugee Protection and Solutions Response," (2022). <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91250>

87 UNHCR, "Operational Data Portal - Refugee situations: Tunisia," (2022): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/tun>

88 UNHCR, "Tunisia's Refugee Protection and Solutions Response."

89 UNHCR, "Tunisia Factsheet February 2022," (2022): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91185>

90 UNHCR, IMPACT, and Altai Consulting, "Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges," (2017).

91 IOM, "Displacement Tracking Matrix: Libya," (2022) <https://dtm.iom.int/libya>

and Chad (13%) being the top-origin nations.⁹² Libya sits along a route of much danger: in 2021, 1,100 refugees and migrants died or went missing at sea after departing from Libya (up from 750 in 2020), and at least 1,825 people are believed to have died along land routes from East and West Africa to Libya and Egypt in 2020.⁹³ However, despite the myriad challenges and risks, migrants may be attracted to Libya because of its permeable borders and potential to access employment opportunities.

Arriving in Spain and Italy



Current data on irregular migration into Italy and Spain from North Africa is primarily measured by sea arrivals to Italy and Spain – including the Canary Islands – as well as land arrivals via the Spanish enclaves.⁹⁴ While girls and women make up approximately 43% of the international migration population in North Africa, relatively fewer girls and women find their way to Europe through the CMR, EMR and WMR. IOM reports that women and girls made up just 20% of total land and sea arrivals between 2018 and 2020, with girls accounting for roughly 6%, 38%, and 11% of all child arrivals on the CMR, EMR, and WMR/WAAR routes, respectively. In 2019, girls made up 10% of all arrivals via these routes (34% of children), decreasing to 2% of all arrivals in 2020 (11% of children).⁹⁵

As of May 2022, Spain had 12,161 arrivals, up 19% from the same reporting period in 2021, with 4,307 by the WMR and 7,854 by the WAAR (typically to the Canary Islands).⁹⁶ Current age and sex-disaggregated data on migrants is not publicly available, so it is a challenge to ascertain specifics on the demographic structure of migrants to Spain. That said, in 2020, an estimated 3,890 migrant children arrived by boat, with 86% being UASC.⁹⁷ As of early 2021, official figures recorded 9,030 UASC in Spanish child protection systems.⁹⁸ In Italy, 21,945 refugees and migrants had arrived in Italy as of June 2022, including 2,505 unaccompanied children.⁹⁹ The rate at which children are arriving in Italy has dramatically increased in recent years, with nearly three times more children arriving in 2020 (6,252) than in 2019 (2,232).¹⁰⁰ Of concern, a persistent proportion of around 75% of children arriving in Italy from North Africa are UASC, originating from Tunisia, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, and Guinea.¹⁰¹

92 IOM, "Regional Snapshot: Middle East & North Africa," (2022):

<https://migration.iom.int/reports/regional-snapshot-middle-east-north-africa-december-2021?close=true>

93 UNHCR, "Arrivals to Europe from Libya - 2021 in Review," (2022): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92165>; Mixed Migration Centre, "Update: North Africa."

94 Other routes outside the North African context have been excluded from this analysis. For instance, land arrivals to Italy mainly originate from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

95 IOM, "Flow Monitoring Surveys in the Mediterranean and Beyond. Women and Girls on the Move to Europe," (2021); IOM, UNHCR, and UNICEF, "Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe."

96 UNHCR, "Spain weekly snapshot - Week 20 (16-22 May 2022)" (2022): <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/esp>

97 UNHCR, "Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe 2020," (2021): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87693>

98 Save the Children, "Día universal de la infancia: millones de niños y niñas en España todavía ven vulnerados cada día sus derechos," (2021): <https://www.savethechildren.es/notasprensa/dia-universal-de-la-infancia-millones-de-ninos-y-ninas-en-espana-todavia-ven-vulnerados>

99 Italian Ministry of Interior. "Cruscotto Statistico Giornaliero" (14 June 2022).

100 UNHCR, "Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe 2020," (2021): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87693>

101 *ibid*

GLOBAL RESEARCH SERIES

GIRLS ON THE MOVE

SUMMARY

The Girls on the Move Initiative is a global series of **action research** conducted across different regions within existing Save the Children programmes. Each regional study generates targeted evidence to address knowledge gaps in current literature and programme approaches and engages Save the Children teams to **immediately strengthen ongoing interventions for girls** in different stages of migration, notably during transit and arrival. Methodology and emphasis vary according to context, but research is mostly qualitative. In all contexts, it includes the **literature review, participatory research** with girls on the move in countries of origin, in transit and/or at destination, **participatory programme review and capacity building** with country and regional office teams directly responsible for implementing programming that reaches girls on the move. Through this initiative, we hope to cultivate a more nuanced understanding within and beyond Save the Children of how gender impacts experiences and outcomes for children in migration and displacement. The research reports are published as a series with a global summary that presents interventions for quick uptake to accelerate our collective ability to seek out and reach girls on the move and achieve **Ambition 2030**.