



# Monthly Review

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## SPECIAL ISSUE:

### PROTECTION OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

#### EDITORIAL

## The promotion of appropriate care for children affected by migration: An impossible mission?

*In addition to the child's status in relation to his or her migration situation or to that of his or her relatives, the focus of the professionals, States and the public at large should be on the child as an individual and on the fulfilment of his or her rights: are we facing here an impossible mission?*

Despite the principles (see attached box), guidelines and other instruments, adopted at international and regional level to promote the rights of children affected by migration, a key element continues to be lacking: political commitment and action. Notwithstanding this status quo, reflections are underway and initiatives are being launched in the field to try and offer to these children a protection that respects their dignity and their needs.

#### **Achieving genuine political commitment: An impossible mission?**

The appropriate care of children affected by migration has been actively addressed by the international community for several years, while, at national level, political commitment – when it does in fact exist – is still far from being translated into action. Whilst some justify this inertness by the transitory – and sometimes very brief – stay of the child, or not wanting to see the children settle permanently on their territory, other countries are finally beginning to take responsibility. Through the recent adoption of a law relating to the protection of unaccompanied foreign children (see p. 4), Italy is, according to the NGO Save the Children, 'the first European country to provide an organic system, which

considers migrant children first and foremost as children'. This law – hopefully the first of a long series – testifies to a political will, whose scope will depend on the concrete actions that follow.

Over and above the debate on the creation or not of a parallel system of protection (see p. 11), is this not about training professionals and other persons involved in the specifics of care of migrant children, as has been done in the field of intercountry adoption? Indeed, it is widely accepted that the path taken for children adopted internationally deserves particular attention, why not follow this same logic for migrant children?

#### **Offering family-type care: an impossible mission?**

Even though '[e]very child and young person should live in a supportive, protective and caring environment that promotes his/her full potential'<sup>1</sup>, the detention of children in migratory situations, in all its forms, is regrettably the most widespread response worldwide<sup>2</sup>. There are several reasons explaining this phenomenon, such as the failure of the child protection system or the insufficient number of family-type care measures. Nevertheless, alternatives do exist, as demonstrated by civil society and the tireless

advocacy led by the International Detention Coalition<sup>3</sup>. Some innovative experiences have been identified, such as the project of the NGO

Suka Society in Malaysia, which, through community-based work, enables migrant children

or those affected by migration to benefit from family-type care (see p. 7). In Switzerland, a

workshop developed by the association Espace A is offered to families caring for migrant children (see p. 6). Moreover, the cross-sectoral dimension of the protection of children affected by migration (justice, immigration, social and child protection services, civil society, etc.) has resulted in the development of several resources already available (see p. 9).

by migration requires increased training and cooperation within a country and across borders. This cooperation is still failing, and impacts considerably on the continuity and quality of this care. Overwhelmed by the complexity and diversity of migratory situations, the majority of current responses offered by countries focus on immediate protection, certainly essential, but not exclusive to the development of appropriate long-term solutions.

Placing the child and his or her individuality at the centre of decisions should guide any interventions and the measures chosen should be based on three cornerstones: protection, integration and future perspectives, which are actively promoted by ISS through advocacy work and the sharing of tools. In this respect, ISS is close to finalising an international handbook aimed at promoting a harmonised and comprehensive approach to the care of children affected by migration. This approach is in several stages, and relies on cross-border collaborative mechanisms, essential to ensure supervision and monitoring of the chosen protection measure.

**Then, indeed, this mission is possible, as demonstrated by the current initiatives. However, its true scope will operate only if States ensure the implementation of fundamental human rights and fully assume their responsibilities. It is thanks to the capitalising of the battles fought at all levels, and the granting of coherent political, economic and technical means, that the children affected by migration will finally see their rights respected.**

The ISS/IRC team  
April 2017

**Extract from the Recommended principles to guide actions concerning children on the move and other children affected by migration (adopted June 2016)**

The term **'children on the move'** refers to children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers.

**'Other children affected by migration'** refers to children remaining in the country of origin after their parents have migrated, and to children living with their parents in the destination country.

Source: [http://destination-unknown.org/wp-content/uploads/explanatory\\_comments\\_recommended-principle-EN.pdf](http://destination-unknown.org/wp-content/uploads/explanatory_comments_recommended-principle-EN.pdf).

**Ensuring quality long-term care: an impossible mission?**

Faced with the multitude of stakeholders and countries involved, the care of children affected



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