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Talent on the Move

Listening to children and young people on the move
to unlock their potential



Kingdom of the Netherlands



Major Group for
Children and Youth
the space for children and youth in the United Nations

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Foreword

Talent on the Move: Engage, empower, equip!

When you think of a place that inspires innovation, you may not think of an informal urban settlement or sprawling refugee camp.

When you think of the next great tech developers or social entrepreneurs, you probably won't think of a young refugee or undocumented migrant.

When we think about the future of countries affected by conflict or displacement, we see only problems, and rarely possibilities. But at UNICEF, we want the world to see beyond these obstacles to what is, in fact, a wealth of untapped talent and potential in some of the most unexpected places on earth.

Powered by the voices of 8,764 young people around the world, this report highlights the potential of young migrants, internally displaced or refugees as changemakers, leaders and innovators. Young people on the move who are featured in this report — like Nujeen, Faridah and Alejandro — are transforming their communities and economies.

Told through the eyes and voices of young people, this report offers story after story about hidden talents, aspirations and resilience. Each young leader and changemaker profiled inspires us to shape a new narrative around children on the move — not as victims or burdens, but as assets to any society. As we listen to them — and learn from them — our job is to find new ways to support their dreams and ambitions, and unlock new opportunities for them to learn, earn and thrive.

Let's match their incredible resilience and hope with our own best efforts to support them and ignite the full potential of every child and young person, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Henrietta H. Fore
UNICEF Executive Director



Youth as Solution Providers and Innovators

Combating xenophobia in Colombia, providing peer support and training to fellow migrants in Kenya or using art to foster integration and healing in the US — in every country and every city young people on the move are transforming the communities they live in.

They are spearheading innovative solutions and technologies and building bridges between host communities and people on the move. They are speaking out and raising issues that are bigger than themselves, such as unequal access to education, jobs, and services, official qualifications going unrecognized or discrimination because of a person's migratory status.

Obstacles that, if not removed, lead to wasted talents and injustice — leaving behind a generation unable to fulfil its potential. Young people have strong voices, clear priorities, and practical solutions, and we are calling loudly for meaningful partnerships and support.

We joined forces with UNICEF to co-design the poll questions, reach and engage young people in our own networks and co-create this report, because we want the voices of young people — their stories and solutions — to come to life. To be heard and listened to. Not by passively asking for help, but by offering our support and genuine partnership. This report is an invitation to follow the lead of young people to come together for change.

Marta Verani
Global Focal Point
Migration Youth and Children Platform —
Major Group for Children and Youth



Let's keep Youth at Heart

"We need to get into the habit of structurally listening to what youth have to say." – Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands

The very idea that young people should be able to have a say on matters that affect them is exactly what UNICEF has done with the U Report poll. This report is placing the voices of young people first and brings to light their experience in the transition from 'learning-to-earning'. This has been conducted under the Prospects partnership¹ bringing together the Government of the Netherlands, IFC, ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, and the World Bank to provide a unique combination of humanitarian assistance, longer-term development support, and private sector solutions to help forcibly displaced persons rebuild their lives, with a particular focus on youth and women.

The findings in this report help Prospects partners understand barriers and opportunities youth face on their 'learning-to-earning' pathways and inform Prospects programming.

Meaningful youth participation is a human right, which also improves development interventions and makes them more sustainable. We do not want to lose a generation but ensure that youth from both forcibly displaced and host communities have (future) prospects, can build a life for themselves, and contribute to the societies in which they live. Let me express my appreciation to UNICEF and the Prospects partners for this flagship report. Let me also thank the youth that have shared their ideas, views, needs, concerns and insights through the poll. The results from this report show that there is enormous merit in meaningful engagement with young people. Let's keep learning from each other and let's keep youth at heart.

Tijmen Rooseboom

*Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands*



Introduction

While COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill, millions of children and young people continue to be 'on the move' – many driven by hopes for a meaningful life and aspirations to learn and earn.

There are an estimated 281 million international migrants.² One in five is a young person³ and 36 million are children.⁴ Worldwide, more than 4 out of 10 forcibly displaced persons are younger than 18, with 33 million children living in forced displacement at the end of 2019 – either as internally displaced persons within their country or abroad as refugees or asylum seekers.⁵ Each day of 2020, almost 26,900 children were displaced by climate-induced disasters alone.⁶ While many are uprooted from their homes due to conflict, violence, political persecution or disaster, for others, the decision to move may be influenced by personal, family, cultural or economic factors - including gendered roles and responsibilities or family crises, like the sudden death of a parent or breadwinner.

While we know surprisingly little about how young people come to decisions, one thing is certain: decisions to leave home are never taken in isolation.

They usually happen in a context of constrained life choices faced by young people caught between their aspirations and hopes, a duty of care to their families and communities, and pressures to leave home.

The journey of a young person is rarely linear and will often take place in stages. It may be a move from the village to the capital city; the young person may be internally displaced before becoming a refugee; he or she may move safely and regularly, or may be forced to take great risks, falling prey to smugglers or becoming a victim of trafficking. For some, the journey will continue abroad; for others it will involve a return to their region of birth.

Regardless of their reason for moving, their journeys from learning to earning are often disrupted, leaving young people without recognized credentials, social networks, mentors, or peer support, as they move and settle in unfamiliar places. Along with their right to education remaining unfulfilled, their CVs remain blank, and their dreams and career ambitions are seldom realized.

¹ The partnership is active in eight countries in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda).

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UNDESA), 2020, International Migration 2020 Highlights, executive summary, p.1, available at https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesd_pd_2020_international_migration_highlights.pdf; data from 2020 includes refugees and asylum seekers.

³ UNDESA, Population Division, 2020, International Migrant Stock 2020.

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) data website, April 2021, Child Migration, available at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/>; Data from 2020 - young person is under 25 and child is under 18.

⁵ UNICEF data website, April 2021, Child Displacement, available at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/>

⁶ UNICEF UK, 2021, Futures at Risk – Protecting the rights of children on the move in a changing climate, p.5 available at <https://www.unicef.org.uk/futures-at-risk-climate-report/>

BOX 1

Definitions

Children on the move: International or internal child migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as internally displaced children or returnees.⁷

Young people and ‘youth’: While there is no single definition of “youth” or “young people”, this report focuses on young people, aged 14 to 24, and uses the terms ‘young people’ and ‘youth’ interchangeably.

Host population ‘youth’: In this report, host population youth is used to describe all young people, aged 14 to 24, who have not left their homes and are neither migrants nor displaced.

Migrant: A person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a home country regardless of whether the move is voluntary or involuntary regardless of their legal status or length of stay.⁸

Refugee: A person who lives outside his or her country of nationality and is unable to return because of persecution or fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.⁹

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): Individuals or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.¹⁰

Yet young migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) across continents represent a unique, untapped pool of talent, ideas, and entrepreneurship. Often resilient, highly motivated and with experience overcoming adversity, they have the potential to help solve some of our greatest challenges.

While COVID-19 has spurred a myriad of on and off-line ‘skilling and employability’ initiatives for young people, efforts to support youth on the move – especially the most vulnerable – to transition into the world of work, often fail to identify their hidden talents or to connect them with the opportunities available to them.

Powered by the voices of youth, this report harnessed the technology of U-Report to ask 8,764 young people, aged between 14 and 24, if they felt heard and invited them to share their aspirations to learn and earn.

According to this poll, **nearly 40 per cent of young people on the move identify education and training as their biggest priorities, and 30 per cent prioritized looking for a job. When asked what was holding them back from achieving their goals, 70 per cent said that limited financial resources prevented them from learning, and 38 per cent identified a lack of available jobs as their biggest barrier to earning an income.**

What they told us confirmed the simple truth that for many, while talent is universal, opportunity is not. The right of every child and adolescent to develop their talents to their fullest potential is often a distant dream as quality skills-building and employment opportunities are hard to come by.

“I want to learn everything”,
said an 18-year-old woman from Egypt.

“I would like to learn how to become a great person and how to succeed in life”,
said a 17-year-old boy from Kenya.

While the story we hear is often one of difference, discrimination, and exclusion, we learned that young people – whether they are migrants, forcibly displaced, or have never left their homes – share the same dreams and aspirations for their futures. They are united in their desire to launch their careers, earn a living and live a meaningful life. We heard stories of ambition, resilience, and empowerment. Of having faced the odds and succeeded.

‘Everyone asks you about the past, but no one asks you about the future. But I reimagine my future every day’, Kotada Yonus, former Syrian refugee and youth entrepreneur.¹¹

This report provides an opportunity to listen – and then to act with and for young people on the move. This means working together to cocreate personalized and flexible pathways to help young people learn, gain necessary skills and build resilience to future shocks. It means leveraging and tailoring digital innovations and private sector partnerships to overcome barriers. It means identifying and fostering the talent of high-potential youth.

As the examples in this report highlight, young people on the move are a force for success. But only by creating incentives and opportunities for them to fulfil their aspirations can we turn their passions, energy and hopes into something productive and empowering.



U-Report, Guatemala

7 UNICEF, 2016, Uprooted – the growing crisis for refugee and migrant children, p. 14, available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/uprooted-growing-crisis-refugee-migrant-children/>

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Youth At Heart Virtual Forum - livestreamed on YouTube [Youth@Heart LIVE - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

PORTRAIT #1: Alankrita Dayal



Alankrita Dayal is a young migrant who, at age 17, founded an organization called Program yoUr Future (PUF) to help students – particularly young women and youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in the US – acquire the skills needed to lead successful careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Alankrita struggled as one of the few migrant girls in her community. It was difficult to find mentors or to feel welcomed. This fuelled her passion to advocate for equity and inclusion and sustainable prosperity for all, especially the most marginalized.

Alankrita was accepted to the University of California-Berkeley, where she studied a double major in Computer Science and Cognitive Science, with minors in Public Policy and South Asian Studies, and a certificate in Entrepreneurship and Technology.

Now through her entrepreneurial reform efforts at Program yoUr Future, she is actively inspiring others with the necessary tools, connections, and resources to be able to do the same.

Alankrita has supported over 20,000 youth by providing access to data-driven interventions that help build a more inclusive culture that appreciates and welcomes the diversity that migrant and displaced people bring to a community and helps overcome skill and social barriers.

The poll: How the information was gathered

As part of an effort to listen to the voices of young people on the move, UNICEF worked with U-Report,¹² a messaging programme for adolescent, youth and community participation that amplifies the voices of 15 million U-Reporters in 81 countries.

The poll questions were co-created in partnership with young people and the Migration Youth and Children Platform of the Major Group for Children and Youth. Partners involved in the Prospects partnership funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs joined to support the poll's outreach and dissemination; these included the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation.

Launched in May 2021, the poll ran over four weeks on five independent U-Report platforms: at global level; regionally through the interagency Uniendo Voces platform targeting Venezuelan migrants and refugees living in Ecuador, Brazil and Bolivia; and through national U-Report programmes in Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon and Uganda.

The questions focused on aspirations and barriers to learning and earning. Most questions were multiple-choice, with only some requiring open-ended responses.

The poll reached 26,375 people and 16,326 provided a valid response, including 8,764 young people between 14 and 24 years of age. Among them, 3,157 respondents, aged 14-24, self-identified as migrants, refugees or IDPs.

BOX 2

U-Report

U-Report is a real-time social messaging tool that allows anyone from anywhere in the world to speak out on the issues they care about. It was developed by UNICEF and partners to provide a platform for capturing a range of voices on the critical development issues of our time.

U-Report has members called U-Reporters. U-Reporters can join the platform by SMS or social media channels such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, allowing them to respond to polls, report concerns, support child rights and work as positive agents of change. Currently more than 6 million U-reporters are present in over 50 countries.

To sign-up, U-Reporters must register their age, gender and where they live. Once signed up, U-Report sends SMS messages and alerts about polls or updates from ongoing campaigns. Their responses are analysed in real-time, providing an immediate snapshot of the situation.

¹² U-Report website, available at <https://ureport.in/>

BOX 3

Poll Questions

The U-Report poll asked one question on the migratory status followed by four multiple choice questions and one open-ended question:

1. My current status is?
2. What is your top priority now?
 - a. If your top priority is education, what are the main obstacles to access learning?
 - b. If your top priority is finding a job, what do you most need to access income sources?
3. If your top priority is to access learning, what would you like to learn? (open ended)
4. If your top priority is accessing employment, what are the main obstacles to accessing job opportunities? (open ended)
5. Do you feel you can contribute your opinions, skills and talents in your community?
6. How would you like to share your voice in your community?

The respondents are not necessarily a representative sample of migrant and displaced youth based on their demographics, their country of origin or current geographic location. In addition, the poll respondents are a select group because they – unlike many others – have access to the internet or mobile phones, and have at least basic digital skills. It is also important to note that participants in the poll signed themselves up for U-Report and were responsible for providing accurate information about their age, sex and the country they were in.

While this report captures the voices of a subset of youth on the move, it is important to note the poll's limitations in reaching some of the most vulnerable. Complementary research approaches to target those without connectivity, and efforts to bridge the digital divide, are needed if we want to attain a more comprehensive picture of the aspirations and challenges for youth on the move.



Profile of children and young people

The results presented in this report represent the voices of 8,764 young people aged 14-24, of whom 3,157 self-identified as a migrant, refugee or IDP.

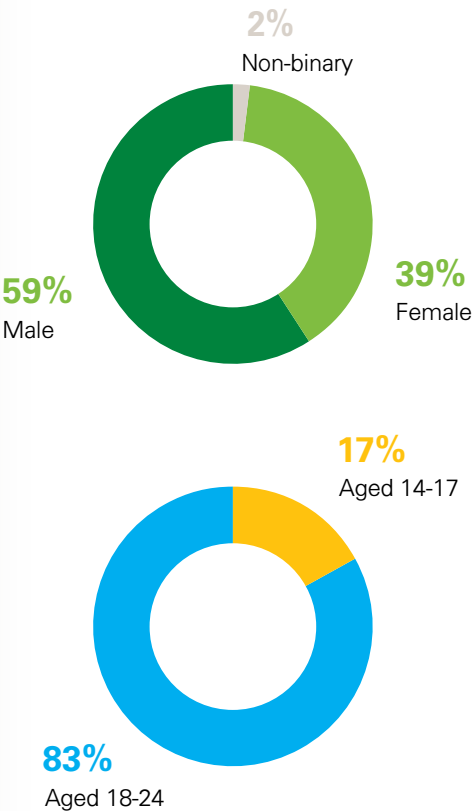
Though the poll collected information from respondents younger than 14 and older than 24, the report focuses on those aged 14–24, in line with UNICEF's mandate.

About 59 per cent self-identified as male, 39 per cent as female, and 2 per cent as non-binary. Less than one in five respondents were younger than 18 and 83 per cent said they were aged 18–24. Of the 3,157 youth on the move, 68 per cent were forced to leave their homes, while 32 per cent left by choice.

Nearly 95 per cent of the respondents participated from countries in the Middle East and North Africa (52%) and from Sub-Saharan Africa (43%) -with far fewer participants responding from Latin America and the Caribbean or other parts of the world.

Age and Sex

Fig 1. Percentages of the 3,157 young people on the move (aged 14-24) by gender and age.



The response rates were particularly high in Iraq and Uganda due to strong national U-Report platforms and partnerships that could be leveraged to reach young people.

In Uganda, partners working in refugee-hosting districts promoted the poll amongst their youth networks, inviting interested participants to send the trigger word, 'learning', to join the poll and have their voices heard. In Iraq, the poll was shared with young people in IDP camps through established partnership networks. As noted earlier, partners of the Prospects partnership – including ILO, UNHCR, the World Bank, IFC and the Netherlands – also joined the effort to promote participation of young people, particularly those living in areas hosting displaced populations.

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