

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The overall composition is clean and modern, with the text centered on a white background.

# **The importance of the actors active in promoting the respect of children's rights in difficult times**

A case study perspective

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# Recent trends on children on the move

- ▶ According to [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#) (UN DESA) data, the estimated number of people aged 19 or under living in a country other than the one where they were born in rose from 29 million in 1990 to 40.9 million in 2020.
- ▶ In 2020, child migrants (aged 19 years and under) accounted for 14.6 per cent of the total migrant population and 1.6 per cent among children globally. According to the [United Nations Children's Fund](#) (UNICEF) estimates based on UN DESA data, but using under 18 years of age as criteria, the number of child migrants remained stable around 24 million between 1990 and 2000, and steadily rose to 27 million in 2010 and 33 million in 2019. In 2019, child migrants accounted for 12 per cent of the total migrant population ([UNICEF, 2020](#)).
- ▶ The estimated number of young migrants (aged 15 to 24) also rose from 22.1 million in 1990 to 31.7 million in 2020. In 2020, young migrants accounted for 11.3 per cent of the total migrant population and 2.6 per cent among youth globally ([UN DESA, 2020](#)).

- ▶ The proportion and number of child and young migrants vary by region. As of 2020, the share of young migrants in their respective migrant populations is higher in low and middle-income countries than in high-income countries. Since UN DESA started publishing its international migrant stock estimates in 1990, Africa has hosted the highest proportion of child migrants (aged 19 and under) as well as young migrants.
- ▶ From 1990 to 2020, the proportion of migrant children in Europe and Oceania had slightly increased and their share in Latin America and the Caribbean had also increased, while it stayed stable in Africa, Asia and Northern America. As a percentage of the total migrant stock, young migrants have steadily decreased in all regions except Oceania, where it increased, and Latin America and Caribbean, where it stayed stable. The proportion of both child migrants and young migrants in Oceania's migrant stock increased during this period.

- ▶ In recent years, the number of children migrating unaccompanied by guardians has increased.
- ▶ According to [Eurostat](#), the number of unaccompanied minors among asylum seekers in Europe increased from 10,610 in 2010 to 95,205 in 2015, and then decreased to 17,890 in 2019.<sup>2</sup>The increase between 2010 and 2015 can be partly attributed to the overall rise in the number of asylum seekers on the continent in those years. Eight per cent of all arrivals across the Mediterranean to Italy in 2015 were unaccompanied children, which climbed to 14 per cent in 2016. An estimated 90 per cent of all children who crossed the Mediterranean in 2016 were unaccompanied ([UNICEF, 2017a](#)). Between 2014 and 2020, at least 2,300 children died or went missing during their migration journey ([IOM, 2020](#)).

## CHILD AND YOUNG MIGRANTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF MIGRANT STOCKS BY HOST REGION, MID-1990 TO MID-2020

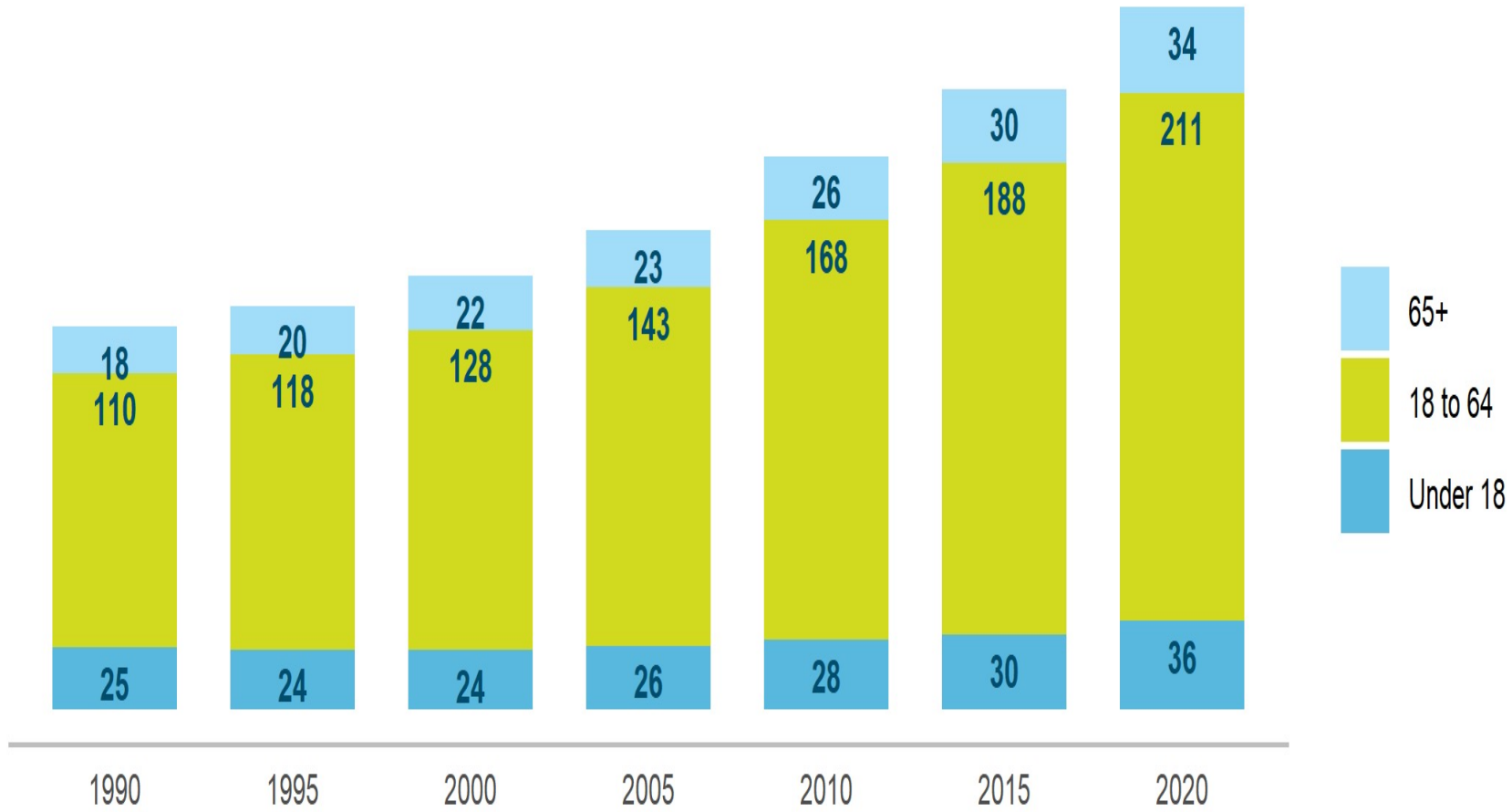


Note: In the above graph, persons between the ages of 15 and 24 are 'young migrants' and persons aged 19 and under are considered 'child migrants'.

CHILD MIGRANTS  
YOUNG MIGRANTS

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020).  
International Migrant Stock 2020.

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# The protection of children in border areas

In the first three and a half months of 2021, until 16 April to be exact, more than 8,520 migrants and refugees arrived on our shores, of whom 1196, 14%, were unaccompanied minors.

# Which are the main rights to grant to migrant children, as soon as they arrive in Italy?

Right to a safe place  
and environment

Right to a guardian

Right to proper health  
care

Right to be informed

Right to be heard

Right to participate

These are all rights that are not easy to ensure in the border and frontiers zones....



The first stages of reception immediately after rescue and relief operations are extremely important and critical in order to immediately recognise children and promptly identify the most vulnerable situations, including unaccompanied adolescents. It is necessary to ensure that children and adolescents, together with other vulnerable persons, have access to spaces reserved for them, to ensure their safety and security, and to access interviews with qualified personnel in a confidential manner.

At the time of tracing, the Public Security Forces are responsible for identifying the minors. This procedure should be carried out with the support of a cultural mediator.

The identification of minors should never be put before their protection. The traced minor should be accompanied by the police, in agreement with the social service, to a safe place, a host community where he/she can be treated as an adult.

The traced child should be accompanied by police staff, in agreement with the social service, to a safe place, a host community where humanitarian assistance can be provided first, as well as legal information and first aid.

Then the person in charge of the structure, as pro tempore guardian, should accompany the minor to the police station for identification.

# The actors involved....

- ▶ At all places of disembarkation, identification follows the Standard Operating Procedures developed by the Ministry of Interior (DLCI and DPS) in cooperation with international organisations:
  - a task force operates in the places of disembarkation, made up of staff from the Immigration Office, Scientific Police, Frontex, NGOs;
  - the Immigration Office staff carries out an initial interview with the migrant: this is a pre-identification, a first approach, carried out with the support of cultural mediators from NGOs and International Organisations (UNHCR - IOM - Save the Children), where essential information is gathered;
  - identification by photo identification (for minors over 14 years old) and document examination.

## - Save The Children

Between 1 January and 31 December 2020, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, Save the Children supported 2,025 unaccompanied foreign minors, between 12 and 17 years old, mainly males, arriving from Tunisia, Bangladesh, Sudan, Somalia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Eritrea and Afghanistan.

269 households, including 469 accompanied minors, between 0 and 17 years old, mainly from Tunisia, Libya, Somalia, Morocco and Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Syria. 52 underage children.

## - Unicef

Psychological first aid, information on their rights as well as on available services and opportunities, an early assessment of potential vulnerabilities and specific protection problems, including those related to gender-based violence, and the distribution of kits containing useful travel and personal hygiene materials.

# First reception of migrant children in Italy - the quarantine boats

- ▶ The procedures for preventing Covid-19 infection have made it even more complex to identify the most vulnerable and in need of specific attention. In fact, dedicated spaces for single children, families with children and women are not always guaranteed.
- ▶ Since March 2020 all the people coming from abroad, no matter how, have to do a quarantine. Migrants coming by crossing the Mediterranean sea are destined to the quarantine boats as a place to observe the period of quarantine.
- ▶ Since December 2020, unaccompanied minors are not supposed anymore to embark on the quarantine boats, since the boats were not considered a safe and child friendly space. In fact, the MSNA is placed in dedicated facilities for a quarantine period.

# The role of the Italian Red Cross on the quarantine boats

- ▶ It may happen that there are guests on board who are registered as adults by the Police Headquarters but are in fact minors. The role of the legal operator on board is fundamental, together with psychologists and cultural mediators. In particular, the legal operator is in charge of providing legal information to the self-styled minors through focus groups or individual interviews, explaining in particular the rights and duties of minors in Italy, how the age assessment procedure and the assessment of the best interests of the minor work, as well as the reception system in Italy.

- ▶ Once the information has been provided, in-depth interviews are conducted with the self-styled minors and, in particular, the migratory path is examined in order to exclude further conditions of vulnerability, the migratory project, the level of schooling, the level of maturity and the possible presence of family members in Italy or in other EU Member States.
- ▶ The legal practitioner can at this point draw up a report of a change of age and consequent minor to be sent to the authorities, in order to ensure the correct take-over of the child after disembarkation at the end of quarantine.

# Best interest of the child - A case study

- ▶ A minor child, syrian citizen, has been saved by a search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean sea. The child is accompanied with other adult migrants to the port to be boarded on the quarantine ship. Red Cross personnel on board reported the presence of an unaccompanied minor to the authorities. The authorities pointed out that the minor was accompanied by his uncle, who had not yet arrived at the embarkation point as he had tested positive for the coronavirus and was therefore waiting to be transported to bio-containment. The child was then taken on board and accommodated in the area for guests who tested negative for covid. A few hours later, the uncle was also taken on board, but was accommodated in the area of the ship reserved for asymptomatic positive guests.



## ► **FIRST RIGHTS VIOLATED:**

- The right of family unit: the minor arrived in Italy as an accompanied foreign minor but remained on board the ship as an unaccompanied foreign minor;
- The right to a safe place and accommodation: numerous investigations have already been carried out into the unsuitability of quarantine ships to be a safe place and a child-friendly space;
- The right to be informed: the child boarded without knowing what was going on, why he was not with his uncle, why he had to be taken on board and what was going to happen.
- The right to be heard: the child was not involved in the procedure, which was not carried out, to determine his or her best interests, i.e. whether he or she should spend the quarantine ashore in a juvenile facility or on board the quarantine ship.

► **ERRORS MADE IN TAKING CHARGE OF THE CHILD:**

- the child was not heard at the time of embarkation;
- the child should not have been embarked or, at least, should have been accommodated in the same area as his uncle, in order to ensure family unity;
- housing the child in the same area as his uncle would have meant exposing him to a high risk of infection;

## ► **UNDERTAKEN MEASURES:**

- signalling of the red cross separation family link service on board;
- information sessions and individual interviews held in the presence of psychologists and cultural mediators, in order to inform the children about their rights and what was happening.
- reporting the case to the authorities to represent that the child was carrying out the quarantine on board alone, his uncle being in another area of the ship as he was positive

► **HAPPY ENDING:**

Through the joint work of the multidisciplinary red cross team it was possible to ensure that the child had a peaceful stay on board for the duration of the quarantine. At the end of the medical isolation period, the minor was disembarked despite the fact that his uncle was still positive and therefore had to remain on board the ship. This was made possible by the fact that the quarantine ship is not a suitable place for a minor to stay, especially if the minor is unaccompanied (our guest, in fact, although technically accompanied by his uncle, in fact remained on board alone, in the section dedicated to negative guests).

The child was sent to a juvenile facility while waiting for his uncle to finish his quarantine. When the uncle disembarked, the minor was reunited with him and the two were placed in a family facility.