



Civil Society Key Advocacy Messages GFMD Roundtable 2: Youth and Children

Disclaimer: The following content reflects only the outcomes of the GFMD Civil Society Thematic Dialogues. Therefore, the challenges and opportunities outlined are limited to what emerged during the discussions. These ideas may evolve as further analysis and discussions take place.

Challenges

1. Difficulties accessing services on their own terms

- a. Lack of an intersectional approach to ensure equitable access to services considering gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, ethnicity, age, culture, and family status regardless of migration status. Example: LGBTQI+ adolescents and youth are not given access to a full range of health services, or those services are difficult to access.
- b. Continued compounding of access to services for children and youth with women's sexual and reproductive rights, with no differentiated approach that can specifically cater to the needs of youth and children.
- c. Lack of representation for access to asylum or other legal status
- d. Children with disabilities, who make up nearly [240 million worldwide](#), face significant barriers when accessing basic rights and services. These children are often excluded from early care, education, and healthcare due to poverty, stigma, and inaccessible services. In turn, they are more vulnerable to poor health outcomes, discrimination, and limited development opportunities.

2. Difficulties accessing education and employment

- a. Young people, often diaspora members of labour migrants themselves, have limited access to decent work and often face labour exploitation.
- b. Administrative and systemic obstacles in accessing education further exacerbate access to decent employment.
 - i. A key challenge is the portability of qualifications, proof of education, and access to education and training, especially for young migrants in their country of destination.
 - ii. Lack of financial resources, high education costs, limited internet access, and unaffordable student housing are all factors that hinder educational opportunities.

3. Difficulties in accessing legal documentation, citizenship which impacts children's access to rights and services

- a. Migrant children and youth are particularly at risk of not being able to access regular status or legal documentation, leading to insecurity and limiting their access to basic rights and services.
- b. Widespread policies still prevent parents from transferring their citizenship to their children (e.g. in some Asian countries).

- c. Challenges for the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generations in countries where their right to nationality is not guaranteed.
- d. Stateless children are often left out of citizenship policies or even regularisation pathways, which puts them in situations of further vulnerability.
- e. Youth and children with disabilities are at high risk of being excluded from accessing services and citizenship due to exclusion in migration policies.

4. Continuation of policies that violate children and youth's human rights and do not centre the best interest of youth and children

- a. Conditional protection on children and youth based on contested notions of who is considered a youth migrant or child migrant (e.g. Perception of children as children for family reunification, but not for children workers)
 - i. Continued lack of guarantee of protection of children and youth when they are perceived as teenagers or young adults.
- b. Continuous violation of children's rights who are detained and deprived of their liberty.
 - i. Children in detention face significant well-being and mental health challenges that affect their growth and sense of identity, yet they rarely receive mental health support.
 - ii. International human rights law has specified that immigration detention is never in the best interest of children and that it is a form of violence against children.

5. Mental health issues and social isolation

- a. There is a lack of accessible mental health support, particularly in terms of language, and it fails to consider the various cultural and family situations. This gap can lead to increased isolation and loneliness.
- b. The pressure to excel and support their families can have detrimental effects on the mental and physical health of children and youth.
- c. For migrant families with undocumented members, children and youth may experience anxiety about the possibility of deportation, adding another layer of psychological pressure.
- d. The detention of migrant parents/guardians has severe consequences for children left behind, causing anxiety, trauma, and long-term mental health challenges. Separation from parents/guardians disrupts their education, creates financial instability, and increases their vulnerability to exploitation, violence and abuse.

Opportunities / Actions needed to ensure that migrant children and youth can access opportunities

1. **Prioritise children and youth rights regardless of perceptions and categories that de-humanise or diminish the 'child' aspect - this must include expanding the understanding and application of children.**
 - a. In destination countries, we require a better understanding of the specific challenges affecting migrant children, who are often viewed merely as "part of the family."
 - b. A human rights approach is particularly crucial for Indigenous children and youth, as well as those with disabilities. These groups are more likely to be held in detention and face visa rejections if they declare a disability or health issue.
 - c. We must bring attention to the atrocities faced by children and youth on the move (such as detention) and urge states to uphold their international commitments to safeguard the rights of children and youth.
 - i. Basic recognition of children's rights is lacking in many countries for migrants, including inadequate reception and a lack of differentiation in conditions.

- ii. There's an untapped opportunity/ potential to use international law momentum to make ending child detention a reality.

2. Prioritise and protect the best interests of the child - including services and care

- a. Establish clear boundaries between documentation and access to rights and services for children.
- b. Train local authorities involved in migration systems on the human rights of children and migrants, emphasising trauma-informed practices in support programs.
- c. Ensure and prioritise family unity and reunification at all times.
- d. Consider intersectionality for children, including diverse gender identities, sexual orientation, disability, language and ethnicity.
 - i. Develop specific programs for young LGBTQI+ migrants.
- e. Policies must prioritise family unity, with a broad definition of family, prevent unnecessary detentions, and establish robust support systems to safeguard the rights and well-being of these children.

3. Ensure the right to education and decent employment for migrant children and youth, including as they become adults.

- a. Create a pathway for unaccompanied children to obtain work or student visas when they reach adulthood.
- b. Permit migrant students to engage in internships or their first jobs while on a student visa.
 - i. Allow youth to work under their student visas, aligning with the opportunities available to other students.
- c. Ensure that young workers are protected under labour codes.

4. Empower youth by removing barriers and providing funding to support and invest in youth-led organisations, mobilisation efforts, community solutions, and solidarity building.

- a. Ensure the right to education and decent employment for migrant children and youth, including as they transition to adulthood.

5. Ensure focus on diaspora youth in development strategies

- a. Leverage technology to enhance public perceptions that support the growth potential of migrant/diaspora youth.
- b. Engage local actors and communities in intercultural exchanges to promote social cohesion among youth.
- c. Support start-up and incubator projects for diaspora youth in their countries of origin to foster job creation and connectivity.

6. Develop inclusive education that fosters anti-racism and anti-xenophobia, inclusive and accessible education for youth and children with a disability, creating safe environments for children and youth.