DATA SNAPSHOT OF
CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN AFRICA:
FOCUS ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION*

Fact 1: More international migrants move from the Great Lakes region than beyond the continent

As of 2017, over 19 million Africans lived outside their country of birth but still within the continent. An additional 17 million Africans have migrated from the continent since birth. The bulk of these emigrants have gone to Europe (55 per cent) and to Asia (26 per cent), mostly the Gulf States. While this inter-continental emigration is driven mostly by countries in Northern Africa, in the Great Lakes region (as well as in Western Africa), migration is primarily contained within the region: Around 70 percent of migrants in each area stayed within the same region.

How to read this chart: The coloured arrows show the direction of migration from the place of origin (emigration) to the place of destination (immigration). At the example for Eastern Africa (see thin black arrows): In 2017 almost 10 million persons from Eastern Africa lived outside of their country of births. Half of those, 5 million, lived in a country within the same region. Another around 1 million lived in Europe and in Asia, respectively. The remaining migrants lived in one of the other regions in Africa or the other global regions. Besides Eastern African countries themselves, Central Africa is the only other region of origin providing a noteworthy number of immigrants living Eastern Africa (around 1 million).

Fact 2: The Great Lakes region is home to 2.3 million children on the move – most of them entered their host country as refugees

Africa has the largest share of children on the move, 1 in 4 of the foreign-born population is a child. That is more than twice the global average. The share is particularly large in the Great Lakes region (1 in 3), which accounts for 7.7 million persons that have crossed borders as migrants or refugees (2017). The region also hosts some of the largest child migrant populations in Africa in absolute terms. The Great Lakes region is home to 2.3 million child migrants – most of whom entered their host country as refugees.

* For the purpose of this document Great Lakes Region is defined as per the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). Members States of ICGLR are: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Republic of South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

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In total more than 14 million persons are internally displaced in Africa due to conflict and violence - almost 10 million of those in the Great Lakes region - and half of them is estimated to be children. The Democratic Republic of the Congo alone holds 4.5 million of the internally displaced persons at the end of 2017. In 2017, 4.7 million persons got newly displaced within their own country representing 40 percent of the new replacement globally for that year.

UNHCR counted over 500 thousand former refugees and 1.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) having returned to their homes during 2017 – though, the actual numbers may be significantly higher. Nigeria and Sudan alone accounted for 380 thousand returnees. For most countries the number of returning formerly displaced children is not available.

Fact 3: The Great Lakes countries contribute more than 3 million out of the 4 million refugee children fleeing crises in Africa

At the end of 2017, 7.4 million refugees originated from African countries. Some of the largest refugee populations by origin are part of the Great Lakes region: South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic. Children are disproportionally represented among them. Some 57 per cent of all African refugees are children – totaling more than 4 million of whom 3 million come from the Great Lakes region.

African countries take on much of the responsibility for hosting Africa’s refugees. Some 90 per cent of African refugees found asylum in other African countries – among them over 2 million refugee children in the Great Lakes region. Uganda is hosting the largest number of refugees in Africa and is in the same moment an example of good practice in relation to receipt and integration of refugees.1

Largest refugee populations (over 100,000) in Africa by country of origin and destination, 2017 (in thousands)


Fact 4: An estimated 7 million children in Africa are internally displaced – almost 5 million within the Great Lakes region

Top 5 African countries with largest number of conflict-related internally displaced persons, 2017 (in millions)


Fact 5: Almost 2 million former refugees and internally displaced persons returned to their homes in 2017

Top 5 African countries with largest number of returned refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), 2017 (in thousands)


2 UNICEF analysis based on IDMC 2018 (number of children estimated by UNICEF based on the age structure of the national population)

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers

UNHCR 2018
