



## FROM FAITH TO ACTION

Inter-religious conference to protect the rights of children affected by migration

# **FROM FAITH TO ACTION: WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED AND INTER-RELIGIOUS ACTORS TO PROTECT REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN**

Report following the 'From Faith to Action' online conference, 10 - 11 December 2020

European Council of Religious Leaders

Religions for Peace



Joint Learning Initiative  
on Faith & Local Communities



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## THE 'FROM FAITH TO ACTION' ONLINE CONFERENCE

Protecting refugee and migrant children requires multi-stakeholder collaboration and working across borders in complex political contexts. The contribution of faith-based and inter-religious communities and organizations can be vital to supporting children whose lives have been affected by forcible displacement or migration.

'From Faith to Action' is an initiative framed by UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) which brings together a wide range of stakeholders who share one overriding aspiration – to ensure that children escaping conflict, persecution, natural disaster or poverty are supported and protected physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

The collaboration draws on the expertise of senior religious leaders, faith-based organizations (FBOs), community groups and initiatives, academics, and UNICEF experts on refugees, migration and integration.

The collaboration is also informed by the experience and wisdom of children and families affected by forcible displacement or migration. The "From Faith to Action" conference was co-organized by UNICEF, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI), and the European Council of Religious Leaders - Religions for Peace (ECRL-RfP), and in collaboration with Islamic Relief Worldwide, A World of Neighbours (AWON), the Lutheran World Federation, and World Vision International. The online format convened 138 participants representing 68 organizations from 40 countries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trotta, S., Fashugba, C., Kjaersgaard, J., Mosquera, M., Wilkinson, O., (2021). 'From Faith to Action: Inter-religious action to protect the rights of children affected by migration with a focus on Europe and Central Asia'. UNICEF; Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities.

The conference featured migrant and integration support specialists, experts on refugee and child rights, alongside religious leaders, youth and migrant representatives, and academics. The two-day conference provided opportunities for participants to learn, share, and discuss:

- 1 Examples of best practices which illustrate<sup>2</sup> the significant role that FBOs, religious communities, and religious leaders play in supporting and protecting vulnerable children, including children on the move.
- 2 The importance of the continuum of child protection which, in the context of refugee and migrant children, ensures their access to vital social services, and spiritual and psychosocial support as they move from their country of origin to their country of safety.
- 3 In host communities, the role religious actors can play in building peaceful societies and combating xenophobia and discrimination against migrants and refugees.
- 4 The power of religious communities as policy influencers and as advocates for more inclusive approaches in response to the displacement of children and their families.

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# DAY 1

THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2020

## FOCUS ON THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE AND PROMISING PRACTICES

### OPENING SESSION (2h) - 9:00 – 11:00 am Geneva

9:00 – 9:05 (5 min)	<b>Introduction (Prayers)</b> <b>Master of Ceremony:</b> Kehkashan Beenish Khan, UNICEF Public Advocacy and Partnerships Specialist
9:05 – 9:35 (30 min)	<b>Welcome speech</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director</li><li>▪ Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia (ECA), Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe</li><li>▪ Monsignor Robert Vitillo, Secretary General of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)</li><li>▪ M.Sc. Nermin Botonjić, Secretary of the Mesihat of Islamic Community in Croatia</li></ul>
9:35 – 9:50 (15 min)	<b>Perspectives of Refugee leaders and young migrants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Najeeba Wazefadost, Director Global Refugee-Led Network</li><li>▪ David Joseph Belaire, Student, Ulogger, U Report Ambassador</li></ul>
9:50 – 10:20 (30 min)	<b>Religious leaders and FBOs advocating for the inclusion of children on the move in the European region</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Imam Yahya Pallavicini, President of CO.RE.IS. (Comunità Religiosa Islamica), the Islamic Religious Community of Italy</li><li>▪ José Ignacio García SJ, Regional Director, Jesuit Refugee Services Europe</li><li>▪ Elina Sarantou, Programs Manager at HIAS Greece</li></ul>
10:20 – 10:40 (20 min)	<b>Agenda presentation: scope and expected results UNICEF perspective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mario Mosquera, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO)</li><li>▪ UNICEF perspective on strategic partnerships with religious leaders around child rights</li><li>▪ Ghassan Khalil, UNICEF Representative in Georgia</li></ul>
10:40 – 11:00 (20 min)	<b>Faith, migration, and child rights in Europe and Central Asia</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Dr. Olivia Wilkinson, Director of Research for the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities</li><li>▪ Susanna Trotta, Research associate for the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities</li></ul>
11:00 – 11:10 (10min)	<b>Break</b>



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## PARALLEL PANEL SESSIONS (3 BREAKOUT ROOMS)

11:10 – 12:50 (1 h 40 min)	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3
	<p><b>The role of faith actors in Strengthening the Continuum of Protection for Children on the Move</b></p> <p><b>Expected results:</b> Faith actors and key partners engaged in discussions around challenges and promising practices for promoting family and community care for children on the move.</p>	<p><b>The role of faith actors in building peaceful societies and combating xenophobia</b></p> <p><b>Expected results:</b> Faith actors and key partners discussed drivers of xenophobia and behaviours that hinder social integration and identify strategies to foster positive norms, diversity and inclusion.</p>	<p><b>The role faith actors on policy/advocacy</b></p> <p><b>Expected results:</b> Faith actors and key partners discussed existing legal and policy frameworks and identify advocacy strategies on how to make them more inclusive to improve children on the move access to services e.g., health, education.</p>
11:10 – 11:30 (20 min)	<p><b>Framing the session</b></p> <p><b>Facilitators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peter Prove, Director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs</li> <li>▪ Frederique Seidel, Senior Advisor on Child Rights and Manager of the WCC-UNICEF partnership</li> </ul>	<p><b>Framing the session</b></p> <p><b>Facilitators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rev. Dr. Sivin Kit, Program Executive for Public Theology and Interreligious Relations, Department for Theology, Mission and Justice, The Lutheran World Federation</li> <li>▪ Nikica Lubura Reljic, Faith and Development Lead in World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina</li> <li>▪ Atallah Fitzgibbon, Faith Partnerships Advisor at Islamic Relief Worldwide</li> </ul>	<p><b>Framing the session</b></p> <p><b>Facilitator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kate Wiggans, Islamic Relief Worldwide's UN Representative in Geneva</li> <li>▪ Torsten Moritz, General Secretary Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) – Ecumenical Centre, Belgium</li> <li>▪ Kehkashan Beenish Khan, UNICEF Public Advocacy and Partnerships Specialist</li> </ul>
11:30 – 11:45 (15 min)	<p><b>Promising practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vedrana Bjelajac, Project Coordinator <u>Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization</u>, Serbia</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promising practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dr. Vassi Leontari, Director, Programmes and Intl Cooperation at <u>Apostoli (Mission)</u>, Greece</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promising practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nicolai von Skerst, Project developer and fundraiser for the <u>Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe</u> gGmbH</li> </ul>
11:45 – 12:20 (35 min)	<p><b>Panel discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Amra Pandžo, Director of the Association for Dialogue in the Family and Society, "Mali Koraci"</li> <li>▪ Rev. Fredrika Gårdfeldt, Project manager, Goda Grannar/ Good Neighbours, Sweden</li> <li>▪ Dag Pontvik, Country director for Adventist Development &amp; Relief Agency (ADRA) Italy</li> <li>▪ Maria Khoshy, Youth representative, Salvation Army</li> </ul>	<p><b>Panel discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dr. Kathrin Winkler, Professor of Religious Education and Intercultural Theology</li> <li>▪ Imam Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi, Director General of SABS and a member of ECRL</li> <li>▪ Anna Wilczynska, A World of Neighbours</li> <li>▪ Emina Frljak, Program Coordinator, Youth for Peace; Member, International Youth Committee</li> </ul>	<p><b>Panel discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Anna Stamou, Public Relations at the Muslim Association of Greece</li> <li>▪ Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Geneva Secretary, World Methodist Council</li> <li>▪ Father Giorgi Pirtskhelani, Georgia's Orthodox Church</li> <li>▪ Lejla Hasandedic-Dapo, Youth representative, Board member of European Interfaith Youth Network (EIYN) and URI (United Religions Initiative), Religions for Peace</li> </ul>
12:20 – 12:40 (20 min)	<p><b>Plenary discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Q&amp;A for clarifications</li> <li>▪ The way forward</li> </ul>	<p><b>Plenary discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Q&amp;A for clarifications</li> <li>▪ The way forward</li> </ul>	<p><b>Plenary discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Q&amp;A for clarifications</li> <li>▪ The way forward</li> </ul>
12:40 – 12:50 (10 min)	<p><b>Session 1 wrap up &amp; Instructions for Day 2</b></p>	<p><b>Session 2 wrap up &amp; Instructions for Day 2</b></p>	<p><b>Session 3 wrap up &amp; Instructions for Day 2</b></p>

# DAY 2

FRIDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2020

## FOCUS ON THE ACTION PLAN

9:00 – 9:45  
(45 min)

### Plenary discussions

#### Facilitators:

- Kerida McDonald, UNICEF Senior Advisor Communication for Development

#### Objectives:

1. Key highlights from previous sessions
2. Overview of draft action plan
3. Feedback and suggestions for the next steps from key participants
4. Instructions for sessions 4, 5 and 6 and the breakout sessions



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## PARALLEL PANEL SESSIONS (3 BREAKOUT ROOMS)

9:45 – 11:45 (2 h)	<b>SESSION 4</b>	<b>SESSION 5</b>	<b>SESSION 6</b>
	<p><b>Strengthening the continuum of protection for children on the move</b>  <b>Expected result</b>            Agree on strategies and pathways to facilitate integration and social inclusion through enhancing access to social services and promoting empathy, welcoming practices and shared space between the host community and the newcomers.</p>	<p><b>Building peaceful societies and combating xenophobia</b>  <b>Expected results:</b>            Agreed on strategies and pathways to fostering social cohesion and combating xenophobia and discrimination and promoting interreligious dialogue</p>	<p><b>Advocacy to promote rights-based inclusive policies for children on the move</b>  <b>Expected results:</b>            Agreed on strategies and pathways to advocating for and influencing policymakers towards more inclusive approaches in response to the displacement of children and their families, including building interreligious coalitions for advocacy.</p>
9:45 – 9:55 (10 min)	<p><b>Framing the session</b>  <b>Facilitators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peter Prove, Director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs</li> <li>▪ Frederique Seidel, Senior Advisor on Child Rights and Manager of the WCC-UNICEF partnership</li> </ul>	<p><b>Framing the session</b>  <b>Facilitators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rev. Dr. Sivin KIT, Program Executive for Public Theology and Interreligious Relations, Department for Theology, Mission and Justice</li> <li>▪ Nikica Lubura Reljic, Faith and Development Lead in World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina</li> <li>▪ Atallah Fitzgibbon, Faith Partnerships Advisor at Islamic Relief Worldwide</li> </ul>	<p><b>Framing the session</b>  <b>Facilitator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kate Wiggans, Islamic Relief Worldwide’s UN Representative in Geneva</li> <li>▪ Torsten Moritz, General Secretary Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) – Ecumenical Centre, Belgium</li> <li>▪ Kehkashan Beenish Khan, UNICEF Public Advocacy and Partnerships Specialist</li> </ul>
9:55 – 10:40 (45 min)	<b>Group work</b>	<b>Group work</b>	<b>Group work</b>
10:40 – 11:25 (45 min)	<b>Plenary discussion within the group</b>	<b>Plenary discussion within the group</b>	<b>Plenary discussion within the group</b>
11:25 – 11:45 (20 min)	<b>Work plan component 1 wrap up</b>	<b>Work plan component 2 wrap up</b>	<b>Work plan component 3 wrap up</b>
11:45 – 11:55 (10 min)	<b>Break</b>		
<p><b>Group discussions reporting back to plenary from leaders of each of the three thematic areas on examples of good practice, key challenges and recommendations re the action plan</b></p>			
<p><b>Facilitator:</b> Aaron Greenberg, UNICEF Senior Regional Advisor for Europe and Central Asia, Child Protection</p>			
11:55 – 12:35 (40 min)	<p><b>Brief remarks from Members of the Coordinating committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prof. Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Associate Secretary General, WCC</li> <li>▪ Mark Owen, Secretary General EU Council of Religious Leaders / Director, Centre for Religion, Reconciliation and Peace</li> <li>▪ Andrea Kaufman, World Vision International Coordinator, Faith Action for Children on the Move</li> <li>▪ Jean Duff, Senior Advisor, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith &amp; Local Communities</li> </ul>		
12:35 – 13:00 (25 min)	<p><b>Closing: The way forward: advancing results for children on the move</b>  <b>Facilitator:</b> Philippe CORI, UNICEF Deputy Regional Director, Europe and Central Asia</p>		

## WHY DO REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN NEED SPECIAL ASSISTANCE?

Children by their nature, are at the most vulnerable stage of life. The severity of this vulnerability deepens when families are forced to leave their homes to escape conflict, persecution, or natural disaster or when there are no safe and legal avenues for migration.

The journey to find safety, protection and better opportunities is often extremely dangerous. For example, it is estimated that every day, more than one child dies along the perilous Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy.<sup>2</sup>

Ensuring the safety of children on the move becomes a challenging and complex mission. Within refugee and migrant populations finding their way to better futures and settling into new lives, children can sometimes be the least visible and hardest to reach. And children who begin their journeys alone or who, along the way, become separated from their parents and family, face higher risks of abuse, violence and exploitation by people smugglers and human traffickers.

Religious communities and FBOs have a long history as advocates for children's rights, and together with UNICEF, have collaborated on a range of programmes supporting children's programmes around the world.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF *Refugee and migrant children in Europe* <https://www.unicef.org/eca/emergencies/refugee-and-migrant-children-europe>



## THE GROWING CHALLENGE OF CHILD REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

In 2020, an estimated 94,800 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe from countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria. Nearly one in every five (18.5%<sup>3</sup>), was a child.

At the end of 2020, there were some 60,000 refugee and migrant children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, and Serbia. Among them are 12,000 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) whose lives depend on humanitarian assistance.

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly affected the influx of refugees and migrants into Europe in 2020. The European Union (EU) registered a 33% overall decrease in the number asylum applications. But the decrease was not evenly spread across Europe, and many local communities received unexpectedly large surges of new arrivals<sup>4</sup>.

The pandemic raised many additional concerns about the health and safety of children and families. And UNICEF and have had to adapt very quickly to the fast-moving situation across the Europe and Central Asia Region, and ensure that children especially prioritized in procedures related to disembarkation and accommodation when they arrived.

In 2020, Europe, UNICEF and partners have worked tirelessly to reach approximately 51,000 refugee and migrant children with a range of support,<sup>5</sup> to protect the health and well-being during this crisis.

Especially worrying were the over-crowded conditions in which so many refugee and migrant children and families live. Which make it difficult to follow the basic rules for COVID-19 prevention – such as frequent handwashing and social distancing.

Refugee and migrants living close together have often faced a ‘double lockdown’ – with additional restrictions imposed on their confinements in settlements and camps, adding to their stress and their feelings of isolation.

As learning opportunities had to adapt from in-person to online modalities, a major concern was making sure that refugee and migrant children remained connected to education while access to Internet technology, digital devices, and mainstream channels was very difficult.

***In Europe and Central Asia, the “From Faith to Action” initiative is built on the principle that a child is a child.***

***The initiative seeks to strengthen partnerships that can help ensure protection, health, and education to all child refugees and migrants, reinforces the principle of the best interest of the child.***

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR data for Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain as of 31 December 2020. ‘Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Mediterranean situation’

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/statistics-migration-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/statistics-migration-europe_en)

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Humanitarian Situation Report 2020 No. 38

## WHY WORK WITH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES ON PROTECTING CHILD REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS?

Religious communities have historically been one of the strongest advocates for the world's most vulnerable children and families, providing them with guidance, aid and comfort.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – the most widely ratified human rights treaty – reflects deeply-held values embedded within religious traditions for millennia. Religious communities and organizations have:

- A strong consensus about the dignity of life and rights of every child.<sup>6</sup>
- A wealth of institutional knowledge and experience in supporting children and young people living in extreme conditions, and often in the poorest communities.
- Deep cultural, religious, and traditional knowledge, that facilitates a level of trust, empathy, and communication.
- Significant local networks and resources to assist and familiarise migrant and refugee children with the integration process and ensuring they can access support from local services and authorities they deserve.

Evidence and experience clearly show that working with faith-based and inter-religious actors has the potential to enhance the impact and efficacy of work carried out by local and national governments, UN agencies, EU institutions, and not-for-profit organizations working on protecting and supporting refugee and migrant children.

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<sup>6</sup> UNICEF (2020) 'From Faith to Action: Inter-religious conference to safeguard and protect the rights of children affected by migration'. Switzerland: UNICEF

## EXAMPLES OF FAITH-BASED SUPPORT

Description	Outcomes	Partners
<p><b>The Italian Humanitarian Corridors Initiative<sup>8</sup></b> Creates channels to obtain visas for to permit organized safe and legal arrival of refugees into Italy.</p>	Since 2015, the secured visas for over 2,500 refugees in camps in Lebanon and Ethiopia, advocates for fast-tracking asylum procedures, provides families with funds, accommodation, etc.	Federation of Evangelical Churches (FCEI), the Tavola Valdese of the Waldensian Church and the Community of Sant'Egidio in cooperation with the Ministries of Interior and of Foreign Affairs in Italy.
<p><b>"Faith Over Fear" movement</b> Global multi-religious initiative promoting a welcoming culture towards displaced people among faith communities.</p>	Engages religious leaders and faith communities in sharing stories of choosing "faith over fear". The campaign includes video stories and features a social media toolkit <sup>9</sup> .	UNICEF and Religions for Peace <sup>10</sup>
<p><b>Goda Gannar - Good Neighbours, Sweden</b> Multi-faith consortium providing support to learn language, find pre-schools, employment, and healthcare.<sup>11</sup></p>	In Stockholm and beyond, supports the integration of asylum seekers and, through dialogue, develop cooperation with members of different faith communities.	Stockholm Mosque, the Katarina Parish, Islamic Relief, Syrian Orthodox Church, the Negashi Mosque
<p><b>The Vaiz of Bursa, Turkey<sup>12</sup></b> Campaigns for Syrian refugees to have access healthcare, school, and other social services.</p>	Overcome bureaucratic and legal hurdles faced by displaced people without paperwork, to be issued birth certificates, and marriage registrations. <sup>13</sup>	A network of state preachers.
<p><b>Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization, Serbia</b> Assists migrants and refugees transiting Serbia, focusing on access to education, and countering prejudice and discrimination.</p>	Supports refugees and migrants to build life skills through non-formal education. Trained teachers in intercultural work to support the inclusion of children on the move in local schools.	Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Serbian Reformed Christian Church, Apostolic Exarchate for Greek Catholics in Serbia and Montenegro, Evangelical Christian A.B. church in Serbia-Vojvodina, World Council of Churches
<p><b>Apostoli, Greece</b> Intervention focus on mental health, welfare facilities, and education and support to refugee and migrant families and children.</p>	In 2011, opened "Estia", an accommodation facility for unaccompanied minors, operates and educational centre and after-school day care centres in Athens, central and northern Greece.	Holy Archdiocese of Athens Greek Orthodox Church.
<p>A UNICEF supported initiative with Georgia religious leaders seeks to enhance protection of migrants and child migrants through collaboration with religious leaders and faith actors at different levels to influence public and political opinion.</p>	Successfully developed dialogue with religious communities on child rights, resulting in the development and adoption of the Code on the Rights of the Child.	Georgian Orthodox Church, UNICEF, State Agency of Georgia for Religious Issues, Administration of All Muslims of Georgia, Armenian Apostolic Church, Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Georgia and Southern Caucasus, Catholic Church, Parliament of Georgia.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.humanitariancorridor.org/corridoi-umanitari/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FaithOverFear-Partner-Social-Media-Toolkit-Guide.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://wechoosefaithoverfear.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.goda-grannar.se/om-oss/>. See also <https://www.facebook.com/groups/godagrannar/>.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Jacoby, Roger McGinty and Bülent Şenay. "Islam, the State and Turkey's Syrian Refugees: The Vaiz of Bursa." *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2018). DOI: 10.1093/jrs/fey025.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

## WHY WORKING WITH FBOs AND INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS MATTERS FOR CHILDREN REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

### BENEFITS

The conference participants recognised that partnering with FBOs and inter-religious organizations brings a wide range of benefits. For example:

# 1

Continuity of education is key for supporting and protecting children on the move and many FBOs and inter-religious communities have significant expertise in providing quality education. Many religious communities and faith-based schools offer values-based education, which emphasise important principles such as peace, respect, human dignity, dialogue, and mutual understanding. These lessons can provide skills for children integrating into religiously diverse/secular societies and communities.

# 4

Religious communities often have access to local networks and organizations that can provide vital support for refugee and migrant children and young people integrating into a new society. This support could include arranging housing and material resources, providing guidance on accessing formal and informal education, social services, and legal advice.

# 2

Religious communities and FBOs are often transnational, multi-skilled, and sometimes multi-religious. These components are important in driving holistic and multi-stakeholder approaches to overcome challenges faced by refugees and migrants. Religious communities and FBOs often have the contacts and resources to support refugee and migrant children and young people during their journey. They can also be a familiar and reassuring presence for children and young people integrating into a new environment.

# 5

Regulations and policies governing refugees do not always adequately protect the rights of the child and/or are not sufficiently enforced by national and local authorities. Religious actors have a tradition of speaking 'truth to power' and holding governments to account. Religious actors bring with them the authority and legitimacy of respected institutions and large communities.

# 3

Religious communities and FBOs have a crucial role to play in tackling hate speech, fear, and xenophobia against refugees and migrants. To positively influence attitudes, many FBOs have initiated projects in host communities to enable people to meet face to face with refugees and migrants and learn more about their cultures, traditions, and customs. Many of these initiatives model inter-religious respect and cooperation, and break down negative stereotypes and preconceptions about migrants and refugees.

# 6

FBOs and inter-religious communities have a hugely important role to play in offering spiritual support to child refugees and migrants healing from traumatic past events. Such support helps children to build a sense of belonging, and them to reaffirm their evolving identities despite extremely difficult and volatile contexts.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTION PLAN

The 'From Faith to Action' action plan was completed in February 2021, and will be used as a catalyst to:

- Consult further with FBOs and religious actors and seeking validation and support from valued partners across the Europe and Central Asia region.
- Continue consultations with UNICEF country offices to learn about their current work with religious actors, and to support future collaborations.
- Carry out work to map country level religious actors that will help in developing new and strengthening existing networks.
- Assist with collecting and sharing evidence on promising practices.
- Mobilize local and regional resources and building alliances at country level.



## ACTION PLAN SUMMARY<sup>13</sup>

### Policy/ Advocacy Areas



- Enable all children, regardless of their status, access to education.
- Advocate for more flexible and inclusive education systems with greater links between formal and informal education.
- Promote policies which support religiously and culturally sensitive modes of reception.
- Advocate for policies that better support the reunification of refugees and migrants with their families.
- Provide oversight and monitoring of national government commitment and compliance with existing legislation aimed at guaranteeing legal and social protections for minors.
- Support advocacy and policies addressing drivers of forced migration, including climate-induced migration, to Europe.

### Mobilizing Multi-faith Communities and Faith- based Organizations



- Initiate and/or support campaigns to support the continuum of child protection, making particular use of new and social media platforms.
- Work with local-level faith organizations and actors to enhance knowledge of relevant policies/global compact/rights of the child.
- Raise knowledge and awareness amongst partners and networks about the importance of religiously and culturally sensitive modes of reception and settlement for all refugees and migrants, including children.
- Provide training for faith actors to raise knowledge of internationally accepted standards in safeguarding children, and to build expertise on the effects of trauma on child refugees and migrants.
- Provide leadership on initiatives that positively influence attitudes and behaviours of local communities towards migrants and refugees, especially children.
- Provide leadership on initiatives to help tackle divisive and xenophobic narratives both within and between religious communities, and in the wider society.

### Enhancing Collaboration and Learning for Best Practice



- Strengthen knowledge of religious and inter-religious networks and organizations to facilitate more effective multi-stakeholder approaches and partnerships between UNICEF, other UN agencies, national and local governments, and faith-based organizations and communities.
- Work with religious communities and leaders, including lay leaders and especially women and youth, to develop culturally and religiously appropriate approaches to supporting the spiritual and mental wellbeing of children on the move.
- Identify further examples of best practice in supporting children on the move and develop models and resources to disseminate to organizations working with child migrants and refugees.
- Strengthen the evidence base to support advocacy and policy initiatives and emphasize the moral and spiritual imperative of protecting children on the move.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/15901/file> for comprehensive Action Plan

# CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

'From Faith to Action' conference participants identified a number of cross-cutting themes considered relevant for all staff and organizations working with children on the move:

**" I suggest creating a forum or platform where young refugees can exchange their ideas "**  
*David Joseph Belaire, Student, U blogger, U Report Ambassador*

## Youth participation

Safe spaces where children and young people on the move can speak out and be heard on issues that matter to them, should be created.

More young people from FBOs could be engaged to provide peer-to-peer mentoring and support.



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**" It is not enough to talk together. Serious efforts must be made to take action together. "**  
*Monsignor Robert Vitillo, Secretary General of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)*

## Coordination

Equitable and sustainable partnerships and coalitions between government, religious (where possible interfaith), and refugee response actors should continue to be sought and built.

**" Homelessness...lack of access...isn't normal. As professionals, we shouldn't normalize the situation of refugees and migrants "**  
*Elina Sarantou, Programs Manager at HIAS Greece*

## Gender

Gender awareness should be integrated into all recommendations and actions, adapting them as necessary to respond to the needs of girls, boys, women, and men as needed.



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**" Inter-religious cooperation and religious freedom is part of western citizenship... No prejudice. No discrimination. "**  
*Imam Yahya Pallavicini, President of CO.RE.IS. (Comunità Religiosa Islamica), the Islamic Religious Community of Italy*

## Religious Literacy:

Enhancing staff capacity to understand the complexities and dynamics of religious traditions can help to ensure that partnerships with faith-based actors are always respectful and equal.



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## SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED ACTORS

'From Faith to Action' builds on UNICEF's rich history of partnering with faith-based actors, and being a catalyst for inter-religious cooperation. Local and national governments, IOM, UNHCR and other UN agencies, EU institutions and bodies, and not-for-profit are strongly encouraged to build on existing partnerships and establish alliances that strengthen collaboration and support for refugee and migrant children.

Faith-based and inter-religious actors can take several different forms, ranging from local community groups and initiatives, to large, professional, transnational FBOs. It is important to have a good understanding of the context when working with religious traditions and communities, as are often complex and contested entities.

Background research and consultations with a wide range of religious and inter-religious actors, can be a good way to identify the appropriate faith-based and inter-religious partners. As well:

- Clearly appropriate levels of child safeguarding, accountability and transparency are non-negotiable. Some religious organizations and communities may not be legally constituted or formalised, but this does not mean they cannot be engaged through third parties or through other forms of partnership as they can often offer knowledge and expertise not always available in other types of organizations.
- Most FBO partners are knowledgeable about and conform to broadly accepted principles of humanitarian work, as well as their own religious motivations to care equally for others. When establishing partnerships, discuss key principles and each other's understanding of these principles.

- There are many positive examples of the excellent work FBOs and inter-religious communities are doing to help child refugees and migrants. These case studies are an important resource for understanding best practice and how successful partnerships can be developed.



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## FROM FAITH TO ACTION PARTNERS

- [UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office \(ECARO\)](#)
- [World Council of Churches \(WCC\)](#)
- [The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities \(JLI\)](#)
- [The European Council of Religious Leaders - Religions for Peace](#)
- [Islamic Relief Worldwide](#)
- [A World of Neighbours - Inter-religious Praxis for Peace/ Church of Sweden](#)
- [The Lutheran World Federation](#)
- [World Vision International](#)
- [The University of Winchester \(Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace\)](#)

