

TECHNOLOGY AND CHILDREN ON THE MOVE OR AFFECTED BY CRISIS: USES, RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES



LITERATURE REVIEW



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ECPAT gratefully acknowledges the financial support provided for the development of this report by Safe Online.



ECPAT International acknowledges the core funding support for its overall organisational objectives from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Oak Foundation. The opinions expressed in this document belong solely to ECPAT International. Support from these donors does not constitute endorsement of the views expressed.

Suggested citation:

ECPAT International. (2025). *Technology and children on the move or affected by crisis: uses, risks and protection measures. Literature review*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

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Definitions

Children on the Move is an umbrella term used to refer to “those children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntary or involuntary within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement might place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of inadequate care, economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect or violence.”¹

Children affected by crisis are those whose lives are disrupted by situations such as conflict, inequalities, the effects of climate change or other emergencies.^{2,3}

Digital technologies refer to devices such as personal computers and tablets, tools such as cameras, calculators, and digital toys, systems such as software and apps, augmented and virtual reality, and less tangible forms of technology such as the Internet.⁴

Gender refers to socially constructed norms, roles, behaviours, expressions and identities associated with boys, girls, men, women and gender diverse people.⁵

Age This research adopts the definition of the age range for children enshrined in the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child, considering individuals up to 18 years old as children.⁶ However, given that age is a category of analysis, the study will explore how children on the move understand age and life stages, to better contextualise and deepen the research.

Migration refers to the movement of people away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State.⁷ This broad definition covers all forms of migration (voluntary/forced migration, internal/international migration, long-term/short-term migration), different motives for migration (migration because of political persecution, conflicts, economic problems, environmental degradation, or a combination of these reasons or migration in search of better economic conditions or conditions of survival or well-being, or other motives such as family reunifications, and irrespective of the means used to migrate (legal/irregular migration)).⁸

1 Save the Children. (n.d.). [Children on the move](#). Save the Children Resource Centre.

2 Havard Humanitarian Initiative. (n.d.). [Children in Crisis](#).

3 UNICEF Greece. (n.d.). [Children in crisis](#).

4 Kelly Johnstone, Lisa Kervin and Petta Wyeth. (2022. May, 24). [Defining Digital Technology](#). Digital Child.

5 World Health Organization. (n.d.). [Gender and Health](#). Canadian Institutes of Health Research (n.d.). [What is gender? What is sex?](#)

6 United Nations. (1989). [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

7 International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). [Key Migrant Terms](#).

8 European Commission. (n.d.). [Migration and Health Affairs](#).

Sexual exploitation of children is defined by the second edition of the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse as “[a] child is a victim of sexual exploitation when they involved in a sexual activity in exchange for something (e.g. money or other gains like food, housing, clothing, protection or even the promise of such) received by a third party and/or the perpetrator”.⁹ It is important to note that the definition of sexual exploitation of children overlaps with that of sexual abuse of children. However, it is distinguished by the presence of an additional element of exchange (money, material goods or access to protection or shelter).

Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse according to the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, “technology is an increasingly pervasive element in sexual offending against children and it is becoming rare that no technology at all is used at some stage of the preparation, commission, or further dissemination (in the case of child sexual abuse material) of the sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of a child. Although not always used to facilitate or commit a sexual crime, the overarching role of technology in facilitation means that it can cover crimes committed in both digital and non-digital environments. Firstly, a sexual offence committed in the digital environment is, by definition, facilitated by technology. Secondly, a broad variety of sexual offences committed in-person are made possible with the help of technology, for instance, to connect perpetrators of sexual offences, exchange information, and coordinate actions.”¹⁰

9 Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2025). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). Thailand: ECPAT International.

10 Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2025). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). Second Edition. Thailand: ECPAT International.

AT A GLANCE

Digital technology plays a crucial role in the lives of children on the move—it can serve as both a lifeline and a source of significant risk. This literature review was conducted to inform a project on the digital safety of children on the move, implemented by ECPAT International and ARSIS. It covers literature published between 2019 and 2024 and addresses key research questions, including: how children on the move perceive and use technology; the harms they face online, particularly technology-facilitated sexual exploitation; and the protective role that digital platforms can play.



Key findings

How do children on the move perceive and use digital technology?

- » **Accessing migration information:** Children on the move use social media and online platforms to find information about migration routes, legal requirements, safety, and what to expect in destination countries.
- » **Shaping identity and staying connected:** Technology enables children to stay connected to their culture, create and share content, and develop online identities. This gives them a sense of control and agency across different cultural settings.
- » **Supporting emotional well-being:** Staying in contact with family offers emotional support, but can also create pressure, especially for boys, who often feel expected to succeed, send money, and help their families migrate. Children also use tech for leisure, though there is limited literature exploring this aspect in depth.
- » **Learning and building skills:** Online tools are used to access education, learn languages, and gain skills. However, access remains uneven, particularly in crisis contexts.
- » **Accessing health information:** While less documented, some studies show children search online for general health and sexual and reproductive health information, sometimes without guidance, raising concerns about misinformation.
- » **Engaging in advocacy:** A few examples show children using digital platforms to raise awareness about their rights and migration experiences. However, this area is still under-researched.
- » **Conducting financial transactions:** Some evidence suggests that children on the move utilise mobile platforms to send or receive money, although this remains a relatively underexplored topic in the literature.

What are the gender and intersectional factors that influence their use of digital technology?

Multiple factors, including gender, age, ethnicity, digital literacy, and the availability of technological infrastructure, shape children on the move's access to and use of digital technology. Additionally, the stage



and context of migration play a key role in determining whether and how children can access devices or connect to the internet. For example, rules in shelters or accommodation centres often influence children's ability to use technology. In many cases, children develop digital skills independently and often support others, such as helping parents navigate online spaces.

What documented harms have been facilitated by digital technology in these contexts?

Although limited documentation exists on technology-facilitated harms experienced by children on the move, available evidence highlights a range of risks that are intensified by their existing vulnerabilities and the socioemotional impacts of migration.



- » **Online grooming:** Perpetrators often use social media to conceal their identities and establish trust with children on the move, luring them with false promises of safe migration, shelter, jobs, or financial support. In some cases, children themselves are used to recruit their peers, particularly through romantic relationships or friendship.
- » **Sexual and financial extortion:** Evidence shows that perpetrators blackmail children on the move by demanding sexual content produced by children themselves or money.
- » **Child sexual abuse material:** Children on the move may be coerced into producing child sexual abuse materials, often under deceptive circumstances such as offers of virtual modelling or other misleading job opportunities.
- » **Online bullying and harassment:** Studies consistently report that children on the move experience ongoing harassment, bullying, and hate speech online, often targeting their migration status, ethnicity, or gender.

- » **Doxing, scamming, and privacy violations:** Children on the move are also at risk of being hacked, scammed, or having their personal information stolen or misused, exposing them to further exploitation and threats to their safety.



What role do digital platforms and tech companies play in protecting children on the move?

While there is limited evidence of technology companies directly protecting children on the move from sexual exploitation, insights from related sectors highlight opportunities for them to take a more active role. Children on the move often rely on the Internet

for information, but inaccurate or outdated content can heighten their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Technology companies can play a meaningful role in addressing these challenges by using their platforms to share reliable and timely information on migration-related risks and available support services, as well as by developing tools to detect false or misleading content. Other potential contributions include establishing accessible reporting mechanisms. Some promising initiatives, led by NGOs and sharing economy platforms, have supported child protection by providing safe accommodation for children and their families, and by training hosts on child protection, gender issues, and refugee rights.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology plays a crucial role in the lives of children on the move and affected by crisis,¹¹ offering both opportunities and new risks, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse. Yet, there remains limited understanding of how these children themselves experience, navigate, and interpret digital environments.

To address this gap, ECPAT International, in collaboration with ECPAT's member organisation in Greece, Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS), have launched in 2024 a groundbreaking research project on the digital safety of children on the move, with a particular focus on Greece and linkages to the Venezuelan migration crisis in Latin America.¹² The overarching research question is *'How can we ensure that systems, products and processes designed to make digital environments safe and rights-respecting for children are informed by the diverse experiences and profiles, particularly gender, of children on the move?'*

The project adopts multiple research methods, including participatory approaches to generating evidence co-created with children on the move; and with strategic actors, including humanitarian, child protection and support workers, tech companies, and policy makers. As a first step in this process, a literature review was undertaken to assess the existing body of evidence and inform both the research methodology and subsequent analysis. The literature review explored the following questions:

1. How do children on the move perceive and use digital technology? What are the gender and intersectional factors that influence their use of digital technology?
2. What documented harms have been facilitated by digital technology in these contexts? *With a particular focus on sexual abuse and exploitation, and gender-based violence.*
3. What role do digital platforms and tech companies play in protecting children on the move?

This literature review included journal articles, research reports, and 'grey' literature published between 2019 and 2024 in English, Spanish, and Greek.

¹¹ This project explores the lived experiences of children on the move and those affected by crises, recognising that children in both circumstances face significant disruptions but also demonstrate agency in responding to them. Given the overlapping aspects of these concepts, the term "children on the move" will be used throughout this literature review.

¹² ECPAT International has led a research project on the sexual exploitation of children in the context of Venezuelan migration in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru during the period 2024-2025, aimed at identifying and analysing the perceived quality, accessibility, and usefulness of prevention and support services available to children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation within the context of Venezuelan migration in these countries.

The search encompassed the broader context surrounding children on the move globally, with a specific focus on Greece, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, while also incorporating sources from other countries with significant refugee populations to ensure a comprehensive understanding. Twenty-six documents were identified, which primarily explore the use of digital technology. Fewer studies focused on documenting technology-facilitated harms and the role of digital platforms and tech companies in protecting children on the move.

2. CONTEXT

An estimated

123.2
million

people were
forcibly displaced
worldwide by
the end of 2024.¹³
Among those
displaced



children (aged 0-17)
make up
around

40%¹⁴

Migration and displacement patterns have evolved significantly over the past decade. Since 2015, the European Union has seen significant migration and displacement movements. Arrivals peaked in 2016 at 389,976 but declined significantly in the following years, reaching 99,907 in 2020.¹⁵ However, the trends underscore persistently high flows of people on the move.¹⁶ Following the 2020 dip, arrivals rose again, peaking at 292,985 in 2023 before slightly decreasing to 208,909 in 2024.¹⁷ During 2024, the primary arrival countries for people on the move in Europe were Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain.¹⁸ Greece lies on one of the main routes into Europe for people fleeing their home countries, primarily from the Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt, Afghanistan, Türkiye, and Eritrea. In 2024, there was a notable increase in boats departing from the North African coast towards the southern Greek islands of Crete and Gavdos.¹⁹

Another significant migration movement is the Venezuelan migration, which has become one of the largest and most complex in Latin America,²⁰

¹³ UNHCR Refugee Data Finder. (2024). [Global Overview: Forcibly Displaced People](#).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). [Europe - Mixed migration flows to Europe: Arrivals](#). Retrieved April 3, 2025

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). [Europe - Mixed migration flows to Europe: Arrivals](#). Retrieved April 3, 2025.

¹⁸ International Organization for Migration. (2024, June 3). [Europe — Mixed Migration Flows to Europe, Yearly Overview 2024](#). Displacement Tracking Matrix.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Arena, M., Fernandez Corugedo, E., Guajardo, J., & Yopez, J. F. (2022, December 7). [Venezuela's Migrants Bring Economic Opportunity to Latin America](#). International Monetary Fund.

resulting in more than 7.89 million Venezuelans having fled the country, particularly to other Latin American countries, due to the political and economic crisis.²¹

Since 2022, migration and displacement trends have been increasingly shaped by large-scale displacements driven by conflict, climate-related disasters, and political and economic factors. Conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, Yemen, and Myanmar, alongside climate-induced disasters in Pakistan, the Philippines, Brazil, China, India, Bangladesh, and Colombia, have intensified forced migration across different regions.²² Over time, economic, geographic, and demographic factors have shaped migration patterns, leading to the emergence of distinct “corridors” connecting developing countries to major economies such as the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Germany. Some corridors, such as the one from Syria to Türkiye — the second largest globally — also reflect the ongoing impacts of conflict and displacement.²³ At the same time, migration has increasingly become a political issue, particularly within democratic systems. In Europe, concerns over immigration and rising living costs have significantly influenced election outcomes. For instance, in Germany, a far-right party doubled its share of votes in 2024 (20%) compared to 2021 (10%), with anti-immigration as its major campaign theme.²⁴

As noted, children comprise a significant portion of those displaced and encounter threats and dangers at every stage of their journey. Many of these children migrate unaccompanied.²⁵ European countries alone recorded 40,420 new asylum applications from unaccompanied children (8% were girls and 92% were boys) in 2023.²⁶ According to a Save the Children 2024 report, about one in every four children on the move who arrived in Greece in 2024 came without family or a legal guardian, totalling over 1,500 unaccompanied children on the move or triple the figure from the first half of 2023.²⁷

Gender plays a critical role in shaping the migration and displacement experiences of people. It influences every stage of the migration journey — from the reasons for migrating, to the age at which individuals migrate, and even the ways they use technology during the process. Research has highlighted that boys are more likely than girls to embark on migration journeys, often travelling unaccompanied and under pressure to support their families.^{28,29} A 2021 UNICEF study further explored this dynamic by examining the migration life cycle through a gender lens. It found that boys are more likely to engage in long-distance and cross-border migration, whereas girls tend to migrate within their own country.³⁰ This disparity may indicate the differing roles and

21 Plataforma Regional de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela. (s.f.). [Refugiados y migrantes de Venezuela](#). Retrieved 29 May 2025

22 International Organization for Migration. (2024). [World migration report 2024](#).

23 Ibid.

24 Le Monde. (February 24, 2025). [German elections: Far-right AfD party achieves historic result](#).

25 UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM. (2024). [Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe-Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated-2023](#).

26 Ibid.

27 Save the Children. (2024, July 17). [Child Migrant Arrivals in Greece Quadruple This Year](#).

28 Gatto, T. (2018). [Gender Analysis of deliverables produced by the project FORUM](#).

29 UNICEF. (n.d.). [Uncertain pathways: How gender shapes the experiences of children on the move](#).

30 Ibid.

responsibilities assigned to boys and girls in their home countries, which are often shaped by patriarchal societies and reinforce rigid gender norms for children. For example, children, particularly boys, affected by crises, such as those in Iraq, often take on greater economic responsibilities to support their families. They engage in income-generating activities, such as working in shops, mechanics, agriculture, and on the streets, which frequently leads to school dropouts.³¹

The conditions of movement are often dangerous for children, who face numerous risks, including discrimination and xenophobia along the routes.³² These dangers also encompass violence, labour and sexual exploitation, as well as recruitment by irregular armed groups.³³ Those unaccompanied and separated are at higher risk of suffering violence and other rights violations.³⁴ According to investigations by journalists that uncover the stories of missing child migrants in Europe, over 50,000 unaccompanied children on the move were missing in Europe in the period 2021-2023, highlighting their heightened vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking.³⁵

In the context of children on the move, technology is a vital tool that significantly influences their migration experience. It shapes various aspects, including planning their journey, facilitating entry and integration into destination countries, and maintaining connections with family and communities in their home countries.³⁶ However, children on the move may be exposed to digital threats, as the unsupervised nature of online spaces, combined with the separation from their families, exacerbates opportunities for perpetrators to harm them.³⁷

31 ECPAT International. (2024). [A Call for Nuanced, Contextualised and Coordinated Responses to Complex Manifestations of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Humanitarian Contexts. Case Study: Kurdistan Region of Iraq](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

32 UNICEF. (2018, November 14). [Venezuelan migration: The children and adolescents' point of view](#).

33 UNICEF Latin America. (2022, March). [Children on the move, including from Venezuela, and people affected by Covid-19](#). 6.

34 International Organization for Migration. (2023). [Children on the move](#).

35 Lost in Europe. (2024, April 30). [More than 50,000 unaccompanied child migrants missing in Europe](#).

36 Gelb, S., & Krishnan, A. (2018, September). [Technology, migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Retrieved from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SCD website: Save the Children.

37 Save the Children. (2020). [Digital Safeguarding for Migrating and Displaced Children. An overview of the current context and trends, potential risks and practical next steps](#).

3. CHILDREN ON THE MOVE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

The literature review aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the engagement of children on the move with digital technologies, with particular attention given to studies that document children's self-initiated use of the Internet, mobile phones, and similar tools. Reports focusing on technology use promoted through interventions or research projects — such as evaluations of refugee education apps or studies using digital methods — were excluded from the review.

Many of the identified studies and reports focus on refugee and male unaccompanied children, and those residing in shelters. Fewer studies provide insights into girls and younger children (i.e. those below 12 years old). The geographical locations covered encompass a variety of primary destinations for children on the move, including Greece, Colombia, Peru, Italy, the United States, and Spain.

Accessing migration-related information via social media and online video platforms

Children on the move use the Internet to access information to make decisions along their migration routes. Internet platforms, particularly social media and video sharing platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, significantly influence children's perspectives and migration plans. Through these platforms, children establish contact with relatives, other children, or people they meet online who share their migration experiences and assist them in planning their own migration.³⁸

Children actively use mobile phones and the Internet to access information about migration routes, legal requirements for entry in the countries, destination countries, sociocultural contexts, and personal safety. In a study on smartphone use among sixteen refugee boys in Greece (six unregistered and ten unaccompanied), participants reported using their smartphones to watch the news, navigate and organise their journeys with tools such as Google Maps and GPS, and learn European languages through translation apps.³⁹ Similarly, research with unaccompanied boys and male youth in Spain showed that mobile phones were crucial

38 Asociación Pro-Derechos Humanos de Andalucía. (2020). [Derechos Humanos en la Frontera Sur 2019: Infancia Migrante](#).

39 Katrmpouza, A. G., Spounthourakis, J.-A. & Kamarianos, I. (2020). [The role of the smartphone in modern immigration networks: a case study of refugees served by an NGO in Greece](#) 1. Rynkiewicz & V. Zorbas (Eds.), *Citizenship at a Crossroads: Rights, Identity, and Education* (pp. 843 - 859). Prague, CZ: Charles University and Children's Identity and Citizenship European Association.

during their transit and arrival.⁴⁰ Children interviewed said they used mobile phones to identify safer routes, find locations where conditions and procedures for children were more favourable, and where migration processing was more efficient, as well as to communicate with their contacts.⁴¹ They often spoke with friends and family already in Spain or with people they had met online, using these connections as a safety measure.⁴² Children also followed YouTubers who share content about their migration experiences, helping them to resolve their own questions about migration processes.⁴³

Children on the move also use technology to search for and receive information about safety. In 2021, Save the Children interviewed 48 children on the move (including 30 unaccompanied boys) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia to better understand the violence experienced by refugees and children on the move arriving in Western Europe through the Balkans.⁴⁴ Three participants mentioned using the Internet, particularly YouTube, to access information on the risks faced by children on the move, including videos showing violent behaviours against children on the move, such as beatings at borders, kidnappings, and other incidents. Similarly, a 2022 study with 27 Ukrainian adolescents (10-18 years old) affected by the Russia-Ukraine war showed evidence that they use technology to stay alert for air raid siren notifications and to seek shelter.⁴⁵

While on the move, children use social media to share their experiences and challenges, exchanging advice with peers on how to overcome them. In doing so, they create online spaces for mutual support and self-help.⁴⁶ Children on the move often experience restricted power in their lives, and digital technologies can provide them with greater agency by offering access to online self-help and health support groups.⁴⁷ Through these platforms, they can connect with others and share their mental health experiences, fostering a sense of empowerment.

Maintaining and developing transnational identities

The available literature indicates that children on the move maintain connections with their culture of origin through the creation and interaction with online content, including social networks and digital platforms.^{48,49} Children on the move use the Internet to create and share content showcasing their home countries' food, music, and religious

40 A total of 38 children and young people were interviewed for the study, including two girls.

41 ACCEM. (2020). *Brechas digitales en menores y jóvenes extranjeros no acompañados*.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Save the Children's Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub and the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of the University of Sarajevo (2022). "Wherever we go, someone does us harm". *Violence against refugee and children on the move arriving in Europe through the Balkans*.

45 Lopatovska, I., Arora, K., Fernandes, F. V., Rao, A., Sivkoff-Livneh, S., & Stamm, B. (2022). Experiences of the Ukrainian adolescents during the Russia-Ukraine 2022 War. *Information and Learning Science*, 123(11/12), 666–704.

46 Pottie, K., Ratnayake, A., Ahmed, R., Veronis, L., & Alghazali, I. (2020). *How refugee youth use social media: What does this mean for improving their health and welfare?* *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 41(3), 268–278.

47 Ibid.

48 Iossif Konstantinou. (2023). *Migrant and Refugee Students in New Experiences of Family Ties: Media, Surveillance and Sociability*. *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 81–87.

49 ACCEM. (2020). *Brechas digitales en menores y jóvenes extranjeros no acompañados*.

practices, thereby preserving their traditions and customs.⁵⁰ A 2023 ethnographic study of Syrian refugee families living in a refugee camp in Athens found that young children actively sought Internet access to watch Arabic-language programmes on YouTube, helping them learn the language and maintain a sense of “togetherness” with their homeland.⁵¹

Through technology, children on the move navigate their identities, which are shaped by the cultures of both their home and host countries. Technological platforms offer a space for them to continuously express and refine their identity, which evolves over time.⁵² This evolving identity may diverge from the sociocultural norms expected in either their home or host countries, reflecting the complex interplay of influences they navigate.⁵³ Research with unaccompanied boys in Spain found that in some cases, they avoid sharing certain photos online to prevent judgment from family or friends back home, particularly around identity and lifestyle.⁵⁴ Digital media provide children on the move with the opportunity to shape their online identities, allowing them to control the text, images, hashtags, and sounds they share. This creative control can foster a sense of agency, allowing them to express themselves as teenagers, young adults, refugees, and members of diverse cultures and communities.^{55,56}

Supporting socio-emotional well-being and leisure

Staying in constant contact with family and support networks through technology is a priority for children on the move, as reported in various studies on displacement, settlement and conflict settings.⁵⁷

A 2023 qualitative study with 15 Ukrainian refugees, aged 10-14, who were sheltered in a refugee camp in Poland after fleeing the Russia-Ukraine war, found that teenage girls (10-12) spoke about participating in small WhatsApp and Telegram groups to share their daily experiences and check on the well-being of their friends.⁵⁸

While staying in contact with their families can offer support, it can also place significant pressure on the children. This could lead children on the move to present positive images that portray a successful migration journey, even if this does not reflect their reality. Images may be edited or falsified, for example, by showcasing products that imply wealth, either to ease worries and alleviate the social pressures they face from family

50 Neag, A., & Sefton-Green, J. (2021). [Embodied technology use: Unaccompanied refugee youth and the migrant platformed body.](#)

51 Iossif Konstantinou. (2023). [Migrant and Refugee Students in New Experiences of Family Ties: Media, Surveillance and Sociability.](#) *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 81–87.

52 Pottie, K., Ratnayake, A., Ahmed, R., Veronis, L., & Alghazali, I. (2020). [How refugee youth use social media: What does this mean for improving their health and welfare?](#) *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 41(3), 268–278.

53 ACCEM (2020). [Brechas digitales en menores y jóvenes extranjeros no acompañados.](#)

54 Ibid.

55 Yang, C. C., Calvin, A., Choukas-Bradley, S., Leurs, K., Manago, A., & Subrahmanyam, K. (2025). [Online Self-Presentation and Identity: Insights from Diverse and Marginalized Youth.](#) *Handbook of Children and Screens*, 245–252.

56 Michalovich, A. (2021). [Digital Media Production of Refugee-Background Youth: A Scoping Review.](#) *Journalism and Media*, 2(1), 30–50.

57 Hourcade, J., "P; Antle, A. N., Giannakos, M. N., Jerry Alan Fails, Read, J. C., Markopoulos, P., ... Palumbos, A. (2019). [Child-Computer Interaction SIG. CLOK](#) (University of Central Lancashire).

58 Khvorostianov, N. (2023). ["Is everyone alive?": Smartphone use by Ukrainian refugee children.](#) *new media & society.*

and friends.⁵⁹ For boys, in particular, the pressure often includes meeting their family's expectations to reach their destination, earn money, and pave the way for the rest of the family to follow. Putting pressure on them to continue their journey despite the challenges.⁶⁰ A recent ECPAT case study analysed the context of boys on the move (mostly from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa) in Calais, France, and highlighted that, due to pressure deriving from gender norms, boys often feel compelled to project an image of strength and avoid showing any signs of weakness.⁶¹

Children also use technology, particularly their mobile phones, to manage stress and uncertainty that arises from conflict, displacement and new realities.⁶² For example, a 2021 case study of Pakistani boys and youth⁶³ who arrived as unaccompanied children in Greece from 2015 onwards found that most of them spent time online and talking to friends on their mobile phones as a coping strategy to ease their psychological distress.⁶⁴

While there is less evidence in this area, existing studies suggest that children on the move also use technology for recreational purposes, including watching videos, playing games, and engaging with social media.^{65, 66, 67} For example, Ukrainian adolescents affected by the Russia-Ukraine war shared their experiences of living in a conflict setting and indicated that they use technology for entertainment, such as video game apps and social media.⁶⁸

A 2023 report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees focusing on digital leisure among forcibly displaced people highlights that those on the move often prefer mainstream platforms such as

WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube for their leisure time.⁶⁹ This contrasts with approaches to connectivity and digital inclusion that focus on developing apps specifically designed for refugee services and uses.

Like other children, children on the move often use social media to connect with new friends or develop romantic relationships. However, this behaviour is not widely documented, with existing studies primarily

59 ACCEM. (2020). [Brechas digitales en menores y jóvenes extranjeros no acompañados](#).

60 Buchanan, A., & Kallinikaki, T. (2018). [Meeting the needs of unaccompanied children in Greece](#). *International Social Work*, 63(2), 206–219.

61 ECPAT International (2024). [Case study: ECPAT France in Calais, France](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

62 Khvorostianov, N. (2023). ["Is everyone alive?": Smartphone use by Ukrainian refugee children. new media & society](#).

63 At the time of the interviews, 14 were young adults (aged 18–20) and six were children (aged 16–17). The study collected data in Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioannina and Patras.

64 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021). [Unaccompanied children outside the child protection system - case study: Pakistani children in Greece report](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

65 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021). [Unaccompanied Children Outside The Child Protection System - Case Study: Pakistani Children In Greece Report](#).

66 Nikolopoulou, K., Kehagia, O., & Gavrilut, L. (2022). [EasyRights: Information Technology Could Facilitate Migrant Access to Human Rights in a Greek Refugee Camp](#). *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*.

67 Chun, A. (2022). [Digital literacy practices and identities of two children with refugee backgrounds](#). *Bilingual Research Journal*, 1–17.

68 Lopatovska, I., Arora, K., Fernandes, F. V., Rao, A., Sivkoff-Livneh, S., & Stamm, B. (2022). Experiences of the Ukrainian adolescents during the Russia-Ukraine 2022 War. [Information and Learning Science](#), 123(11/12), 666–704.

69 Arora, P., Alencar, A., Jaramillo-Dent, D., Warnes, J., & Pérez, É. (2023). [The Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced](#). Part 2. Luxembourg: UNHCR

focusing on its risks.⁷⁰ Most documented cases emphasise the potential for deception and sexual exploitation, while the more positive aspects of online social connections remain largely unexplored.⁷¹ This research gap may be partly due to the reluctance of governmental and development agencies to address these topics, fearing that acknowledging them could discourage donor support or complicate government partnerships aimed at promoting digital inclusion.⁷² For children on the move, this gap may be even more significant, as social norms in many contexts discourage open discussions about young people's sexuality.

Accessing education and employment opportunities

The literature emphasises the use of online learning platforms for children on the move for formal education, learning languages, and skill-building.^{73,74} Online learning platforms and apps, such as WhatsApp, have been widely used by non-governmental organisations and governments to provide education to children on the move in several countries, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools were closed.⁷⁵ A study examining apps for refugee education identified 14 apps used between 2015 and 2020,⁷⁶ with the majority (9 out of 14) targeting children in early, primary, and secondary education.⁷⁷ Most apps focused on language acquisition, especially for newly arrived refugees or those living in camps. In contrast, refugees who had settled in urban areas for longer periods tended to use education-focused apps. Key features of these apps included being free of charge, not reliant on internet access, using age-appropriate multimedia, and providing scaffolding for learning content. The identified apps also incorporated relevant content tailored to refugees' lives, addressing a gap previously noted as a drawback in earlier mobile learning studies.

Children on the move also use technology to support their learning, including completing homework and gaining knowledge about their host countries, such as learning the local language. In an ethnographic study, children of Syrian families attending Greek elementary school used digital technology platforms from their parents' smartphones as part of an informal education process.⁷⁸

70 Ibid.

71 Arora, P., Alencar, A., Jaramillo-Dent, D., Warnes, J., & Pérez, É. (2023). [The Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced](#). Part 2. Luxembourg: UNHCR

72 Ibid

73 Summers, K., Crist, J., & Streitwieser, B. (2022). [Education as an Opportunity for Integration: Assessing Colombia, Peru, and Chile's Educational Responses to the Venezuelan Migration Crisis](#). *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 10(2), 233150242210851.

74 All Children Reading. (2021, December 16). [How EdTech solutions can fill gaps and address barriers to literacy for refugee and migrant children](#).

75 Potocky, M. (2021). The Role of Digital Skills in Refugee Integration: A State-of-the-Art review. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity & Inclusion*, 5(5). <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i5.37514>

76 Drolia, M., Papadakis, S., Sifaki, E., & Kalogiannakis, M. (2022). [Mobile Learning Applications for Refugees: A Systematic Literature Review](#). *Education Sciences*, 12(2), 96.

77 Some educational apps identified in the study targeting children on the move: [Can't wait to learn, Qysas, Anturia and Letters, Feed the Monster](#)

78 Iossif Konstantinou. (2023). Migrant and Refugee Students in New Experiences of Family Ties: Media, Surveillance and Sociability. *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 81–87. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejsocial.2023.3.3.468>

However, studies also pointed out that while technology provides valuable opportunities for children on the move to access education, it remains insufficient compared to local children. For example, during COVID-19 school closures, Venezuelan children on the move in Peru, Colombia, and Chile had less access to online or hybrid learning due to limited internet and digital devices.⁷⁹

Accessing health knowledge and solutions

While there is limited evidence, some studies suggest that children on the move utilise Internet platforms to explore and seek solutions for health-related concerns, including sexual and reproductive health, and general health information. In the context of sexual and reproductive health, a 2024 study involving adolescent girls on the move revealed that they access a wide array of websites to obtain information, ranging from health e-magazines to pornography sites, despite concerns about the reliability of sources and the risk of encountering misinformation.⁸⁰ Caregivers also seek information on child health, often relying on search engines or social media platforms to connect with service providers or acquaintances. They frequently depend on children's digital skills to locate health-related information, sometimes shifting the responsibility to children to interpret the content.⁸¹ This reliance can place an undue burden on children and may undermine the accuracy or suitability of the information obtained.

Advocating for their rights and needs

Some studies indicate that the internet also provides a vital platform for children on the move to advocate for their rights and raise awareness about rights violations and challenges in their home communities.⁸² For example, the Migration Youth and Children Platform is a self-organised space that allows young people (up to 31 years old) to engage in United Nations policy processes and advocate for meaningful youth participation.⁸³ In 2021, the group launched the Instagram platform @letstalkmigration, enabling participants and the broader community to share migration stories through virtual media rooms.⁸⁴

79 Summers, K., Crist, J., & Streitwieser, B. (2022). [Education as an Opportunity for Integration: Assessing Colombia, Peru, and Chile's Educational Responses to the Venezuelan Migration Crisis](#). *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 10(2), 233150242210851.

80 Aibangbee, M., Micheal, S., Liamputtong, P., Pithavadian, R., Hossain, S. Z., Mpofu, E., & Dune, T. (2024). [Socioecologies in shaping migrants and refugee youths' sexual and reproductive health and rights: a participatory action research study](#). *Reproductive Health*, 21(1), 134.

81 Zysset AE, Schwärzler P, Dratva J. (2023). [Seeking Health in a Digital World: Exploring Immigrant Parents' Quest for Child Health Information—A Scoping Review](#). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 20(19):6804.

82 Pottie, K., Ratnayake, A., Ahmed, R., Veronis, L., & Alghazali, I. (2020). [How refugee youth use social media: What does this mean for improving their health and welfare?](#) *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 41(3), 268–278.

83 Children and Youth migration platform. (n.d.) [Who we are](#).

84 Children and Youth migration platform. (2021.) [Youth Forum A Virtual Event at the XIII GFMD Summit of the UAE](#). New York: Major Group for Children and Youth .

Conducting financial transactions

Despite the lack of extensive evidence, certain studies have suggested that children on the move utilise existing technology platforms for financial transactions. For example, a study conducted with refugees in camps in Jordan, Rwanda, and Uganda, which included focus groups and surveys, revealed that mobile money was commonly used to send funds to children studying outside the camps.⁸⁵ A 2020 Save the Children report indicated that young people on the move in the United States have been using online mobile payment platforms, such as Venmo, to raise funds for expenses they are unable to cover, for instance, to support family costs when a relative is detained or deported by immigration authorities.⁸⁶

85 Casswell, J. (2019). [The digital lives of refugees: How displaced populations use mobile phones and what gets in the way](#) GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation.

86 Save the Children. (2020). [Digital Safeguarding for Migrating and Displaced Children: An overview of the current context and trends, potential risks and practical next steps](#). Save the Children's Resource Centre.

4. FACTORS SHAPING TECHNOLOGY USE AMONG CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

The literature suggests that children's digital experiences are shaped by a range of individual, family, and structural factors, including gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and digital skills. For children on the move, these factors interact with the specific challenges they face, such as the stages of their journey and the availability of internet infrastructure.

In many traditional and patriarchal cultures,⁸⁷ girls are often subject to stricter supervision, limiting their opportunities to use digital tools compared to boys.⁸⁸ For instance, the 2021 report by the International Data Alliance for Children on the Move highlighted that girls often faced greater obstacles to online learning during COVID-19, as their parents were less likely to provide them with Internet-enabled phones due to harmful gender norms around girls' education and safety concerns, compared to their sons.⁸⁹

Age also plays a significant role in digital access, as evidenced by a 2022 study involving displacement-affected communities in Lebanon, Papua New Guinea, and South Sudan.⁹⁰ Through qualitative engagement and surveys with refugees, internally displaced people, and host communities, the study revealed that parents expressed concerns about their children's online activities, particularly on social media, based on both gender and age. In northern Lebanon, for example, parents often imposed strict rules about which apps their children could use, who they could interact with, and what content they could access.⁹¹ Platforms like Instagram and TikTok were especially seen as inappropriate for girls and younger children.⁹² Similarly, in Bor, in South Sudan, there were concerns about children accessing harmful content online.⁹³

Young children may have less access to a mobile phone or other devices. However, this does not mean that they cannot access the Internet. They usually use their parents' or older relatives' devices for recreation, education, or to help their older family members use the device.

87 This term refers to a traditional form of organizing society which often lies at the root of gender inequality. Retrieved from: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA). (n.d.). [Patriarchy](#).

88 Stokowska, A. (2023). [Children with Migration Experience and ICT](#). Warsaw: School with Class Foundation

89 International Data Alliance for Children on the move. (2021, April). [A web of Insecurity](#). Gendered risks and vulnerabilities for children on the move during the Covid-19 pandemic.

90 Hamilton, Z., Downer, & M., Acland, S. (2022) [The digital worlds of displacement-affected communities](#). GSMA & UNHCR

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

For example, research on refugees' digital skills in Europe found that women refugees usually depend on intermediaries, such as children, for tech support, to get access to education or other information.⁹⁴

An ethnographic study with refugees highlighted that children's technology use is influenced by the interaction of gender, ethnic, and religious affiliations, which are often shaped by hierarchical structures.⁹⁵ For example, in the case of rural Afghan boys housed in Belgian shelters for unaccompanied children, learning was gendered and frequently hierarchical. Older male community members—such as an older brother, an uncle, or a male friend met during the journey or in the asylum centre—often mediated digital skill development.⁹⁶

Children on the move's use of technology is also strongly influenced by the specific needs and circumstances of their migration or displacement. For example, a study in Spain found that in general, mobile phones are the most used device by children on the move; however, as they begin seeking formal employment, the use of computers and other devices becomes more necessary.⁹⁷ Children typically access computers in shelters or support institutions, subject to the rules set by the individuals in charge of these facilities.⁹⁸

The conditions of the migration stage or crisis scenario are another crucial factor shaping how children on the move engage with and utilise technology. For instance, during transit, the availability of a connection to the Internet and access to financial resources can influence the use of phones or other devices. Even if they have the financial means to access mobile devices, smugglers may confiscate their phones at certain points along the route due to fears of government tracking, leaving them without connection.^{99,100} In some cases, children travel with only a SIM card, borrowing mobile phones for short periods as needed.¹⁰¹

Upon arrival at their destination, Internet access and accessibility to devices are also influenced by the conditions set at their accommodation. When children are placed in shelters, adults frequently restrict their internet use by controlling the type of device, the time allowed online, and sometimes the activities they can engage in. Studies involving unaccompanied children in shelters or institutional accommodations reveal frequent complaints about restricted internet access.¹⁰² While access to mobile phones is generally widespread, access to other technologies, such as

94 Potocky, M. (2021). [The Role of Digital Skills in Refugee Integration: A State-of-the-Art review](#). The International Journal of Information, Diversity & Inclusion, 5(5).

95 Georgiou, M., Leen d'Haenens, Zaki, A., Donoso, V., & Bossens, E. (2024). [Digital skills of and for lives marked by vulnerability: Being young, refugee, and connected in Europe](#). European Journal of Communication, 39(3), 277–285.

96 Ibid.

97 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021). [Unaccompanied children outside the child protection system - case study: Pakistani children in Greece report](#).

98 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021). [Unaccompanied children outside the child protection system - case study: Pakistani children in Greece report](#).

99 Hourcade, J; Antle, A. N., Giannakos, M. N., Jerry Alan Fails, Read, J. C., Markopoulos, P., ... Palumbos, A. (2019). [Child-Computer Interaction SIG](#). CLOK (University of Central Lancashire).

100 Georgiou, M., Leen d'Haenens, Zaki, A., Donoso, V., & Bossens, E. (2024). [Digital skills of and for lives marked by vulnerability: Being young, refugee, and connected in Europe](#). European Journal of Communication, 39(3), 277–285.

101 Hourcade, J; Antle, A. N., Giannakos, M. N., Jerry Alan Fails, Read, J. C., Markopoulos, P., ... Palumbos, A. (2019). [Child-Computer Interaction SIG](#). CLOK (University of Central Lancashire).

102 ACCEM. (2020). [Brechas digitales en menores y jóvenes extranjeros no acompañados](#).

computers, is often dependent on the spaces individuals on the move find themselves in, such as reception centres or support organisations.

A 2021 participatory study in Austria with unaccompanied youth on the move, including children above 16 years old, aimed to understand how to design better technological mental health resources for refugee and displaced communities.¹⁰³ In addition to limited internet access in accommodations, the study found that other conditions within the centres also impacted the use of technology. For example, the lack of privacy in rooms restricted the use of applications that required sound. Challenges within the centres were compounded by individual circumstances, such as youth working hours and school or German language training schedules to support their integration into the country.

While many children on the move are tech savvy, many others face digital literacy challenges due to socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural barriers, despite the widespread use of smartphones.¹⁰⁴

Although smartphones facilitate essential digital tasks, such as staying connected with family, they often lead to fragmented digital knowledge, limiting the development of broader problem-solving skills needed to fully navigate and benefit from digital environments.¹⁰⁵

This literature review shows that children on the move use technology at every stage of their journey: during the planning phase, throughout their displacement, and after settling in a host country. Technology plays a crucial role in their lives, helping them to find information, support their integration, and meet their social and emotional needs. This finding is consistent with studies published before 2018, which identified the Internet as a necessity, sometimes considered as important as, or even more important than, food and shelter.¹⁰⁶ There is evidence that the technology is so essential for children on the move that perpetrators sometimes exploit this dependence to commit sexual exploitation.¹⁰⁷ Research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2021 found that among 20 unaccompanied Pakistani boys over the age of 15 and young Pakistani adults who had arrived as unaccompanied children in Greece, half reported experiencing sexual harassment.¹⁰⁸ Some said that they, or someone they knew, had been approached by older men who touched them or offered goods, including mobile phones, in exchange for sexual favours.

103 Tachtler, F., Talhouk, R., Michel, T., Slovak, P., & Fitzpatrick, G. (2021, May). [Unaccompanied migrant youth and mental health technologies: A social-ecological approach to understanding and designing](#). In Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1-19).

104 Potocky, M. (2021). [The Role of Digital Skills in Refugee Integration: A State-of-the-Art review](#). The International Journal of Information, Diversity & Inclusion, 5(5).

105 Ibid

106 Kutscher, N., & Kreß, L.-M. (2018). [The Ambivalent Potentials of Social Media Use by Unaccompanied Minor Refugees](#). Social Media + Society, 4(1).

107 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021). [Unaccompanied children outside the child protection system - case study: Pakistani children in Greece report](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

108 Ibid

5. DOCUMENTED TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HARM AGAINST CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Several experts have warned about the risks of technology-facilitated violence for children on the move. However, there is little evidence documenting these harms, and even less that looks specifically at technology-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation or gender-based violence. A review of studies on how technology is used to recruit children for sexual exploitation found that researchers often do not ask directly about the role of technology during recruitment.¹⁰⁹ In addition, research on how technology is used to commit trafficking crimes is limited, which is often the case for many types of online criminal activities.¹¹⁰ This is partly due to the inherently challenging nature of detecting and monitoring cybercrime.

Children on the move also face extra barriers when trying to report violence, meaning many harmful experiences are never officially recorded. A 2024 study aimed at building the evidence base on technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Asia conducted multi-country focus group discussions with 68 key informants from 47 organisations across 14 countries in the region.¹¹¹ While the issue of technology-facilitated gender-based violence among individuals on the move was less frequently discussed, participants highlighted that women from refugee and migrant backgrounds were potentially as affected by this type of violence, if not more so, than other groups of women. However, due to intersecting forms of marginalisation and barriers to accessing services and support, these women are likely to be less visible within the system compared to others. Victims may refrain from reporting incidents out of fear of detention or deportation.¹¹²

Online grooming of children for sexual purposes

Perpetrators use social media to conceal their identities and contact children on the move, gaining their trust before deceiving them with false promises of safe migration, money or job opportunities. The Brussels Times reported a troubling case in September 2022. The case involved underage Afghan boys in Belgium, aged 13 to 18, who were groomed on TikTok and then exploited into prostitution by a human trafficking network.¹¹³ The case, which involved dozens to hundreds

109 Gezinski, L. B., & Gonzalez-Pons, K. M. (2022). *Sex Trafficking and Technology: A Systematic Review of Recruitment and Exploitation*. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 10(3), 497–511.

110 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (n.d.). *Module 14. Links between Cybercrime, Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants- The use of technology to facilitate trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants*.

111 UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office. (2024). *Understanding technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Asia. A qualitative study*.

112 Ibid.

113 Missing Children Europe. (2023). *Annual review 2022*.

of children, led to the arrest of five Afghan men suspected of human trafficking.

Perpetrators often use social media to contact children on the move, presenting themselves as friends or romantic partners. For instance, in Kenya, anecdotal evidence highlighted the case of a refugee girl who met a foreign man online.¹¹⁴ He travelled to Kenya to legally marry her, offering her the prospect of leaving the country to live with him in Ghana. However, after a few months, the man moved to Canada, leaving the girl with his three brothers, who sexually exploited her.

In some cases, perpetrators use children on the move to recruit other children, often by encouraging them to form romantic relationships and convince their peers to begin a migration journey. They may provide information about the route and even offer financial support to cover travel expenses.¹¹⁵ Once the recruited children leave home, they are often drawn into networks of sexual exploitation. According to a former director of the Táchira Women's Institute in Venezuela, at least 18 such cases were documented in 2021, as reported in a journalistic investigation by Los Andes and Connectas.¹¹⁶

In 2020, Save the Children published a report on digital safeguarding for children on the move, based on interviews with children, key stakeholders, and a review of relevant documents.¹¹⁷ The report highlighted that traffickers often target vulnerable children on the move through open communication channels and gradually groom them into moving to more private platforms, where detection by authorities becomes more difficult.¹¹⁸ For instance, in Serbia, WhatsApp was identified as a tool used to recruit children for home-based sexual exploitation.

As described earlier, children on the move often seek information about migration routes, job opportunities, and places to stay; however, much of this information is misleading or false, putting them at serious risk.

A report on the trafficking of Venezuelan people on the move during COVID-19 documented the use of fake websites offering modelling jobs to women and girls.¹¹⁹ After being recruited and arriving in the destination country, many had their passports taken away and were subjected to sexual exploitation.

114 ECPAT International. (2024) [A Call for Nuanced, Contextualised and Coordinated Responses to Complex Manifestations of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Humanitarian Contexts](#). Case Study: Kenya. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

115 Los Andes & CoCONNECTAS. (n.d.) [Niños arrastradores, el anzuelo de las redes de trata](#).

116 Ibid.

117 Save the Children. (2020). [Digital Safeguarding for Migrating and Displaced Children: An overview of the current context and trends, potential risks and practical next steps](#). Save the Children's Resource Centre. Save the Children's Resource Centre.

118 Ibid.

119 CEDEX. (2021) [La Trata y el tráfico con fines de explotación sexual de mujeres y niñas venezolanas](#). En Contexto de Movilidad de tiempos de COVID-19. Recomendaciones para la acción.

Sexual and financial extortion

The existing evidence shows instances in which perpetrators blackmail children on the move, demanding sexual content produced by the children themselves or money in return. A 2019 study in Spain involving 52 children on the move highlighted sexual extortion as a perceived hazard.¹²⁰ In this context, an interviewee from the Forth Greek BIA team, who contributed to a 2023 report on migration and information and communication technologies, shared that they conducted a survey to identify the specific needs of children on the move in Greece. The findings revealed that sexual extortion, hate speech, cyberbullying, and scams were among the most pressing issues requiring urgent attention.¹²¹ In Kenya, the use of child sexual abuse material for financial extortion of children was reported by key informants in a study conducted by ECPAT International on sexual exploitation of children in humanitarian settings.¹²²

Child sexual abuse material

Reports on Venezuelan migrant children on the move document instances of girls being exploited to produce child sexual abuse material.¹²³ In the aforementioned report on the sexual trafficking of Venezuelan individuals on the move during COVID-19, it was noted that social media adverts offered work for women as virtual models, which involved sending photos and videos in swimsuits in exchange for money.¹²⁴ There have also been cases of Venezuelan women and girls being recruited to work as models in so-called 'webcam houses', where they were exploited, and in some instances held against their will to produce sexual abuse material.¹²⁵

Online bullying

Most of the literature that explores online risks for children on the move highlights children experiencing persistent online harassment and bullying from peers or others, impacting their mental health.^{126,127}

Studies have reported that online spaces are used to marginalise or discriminate against children based on their migration status, gender, or ethnicity. A 2019 study with children on the move in Spain explored the risks they face when using the Internet. It found that one of the key differences

120 Casado, M. A., Garitaonandia, C., Moreno, G., & Jimenez, E. (2019). [Children on the move and the Internet in Spain: Uses, Opportunities, and Risks](#). Media and Communication, 7(1), 56.

121 Stokowska, A. (2023). [Children with Migration Experience and ICT](#). Warsaw: School with Class Foundation

122 ECPAT International. (2024) [A Call for Nuanced, Contextualised and Coordinated Responses to Complex Manifestations of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Humanitarian Contexts](#). Case Study: Kenya. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

123 Mulier (2024). [Contribución a la solicitud de información sobre las prácticas existentes y emergentes de explotación sexual de menores en el entorno digital. Relatoría Especial sobre la venta y explotación sexual de los niños](#).

124 CEDEX. (2021) [La Trata y el tráfico con fines de explotación sexual de mujeres y niñas venezolanas](#). En Contexto de Movilidad de tiempos de COVID-19. Recomendaciones para la acción.

125 AID for AIDS. (2022). [Sexo por supervivencia en población migrante y refugiada venezolana en Colombia, 2021-2022](#).

126 Casado, M. A., Garitaonandia, C., Moreno, G., & Jimenez, E. (2019). [Children on the move and the Internet in Spain: Uses, Opportunities, and Risks](#). Media and Communication, 7(1), 56.

127 Pottie, K., Ratnayake, A., Ahmed, R., Veronis, L., & Alghazali, I. (2020). [How refugee youth use social media: What does this mean for improving their health and welfare?](#) Journal of Public Health Policy, 41(3), 268–278.

compared to the risks faced by Spanish children is the increased exposure to hate speech.¹²⁸ In a 2020 report by Save the Children, institutional staff in Greece reported concerns that social media was being used to radicalise violence against children and youth on the move.¹²⁹

Doxing, scamming and blackmailing

Children on the move are also at risk of being hacked, scammed, losing personal data, and facing serious privacy risks online. Some children and their families have been targeted by fraudulent schemes, such as fake migration services or false employment offers, which exploit their precarious situations.^{130,131}

Four children on the move who participated in a study conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia shared that children are sometimes kidnapped while travelling, with the aim of extorting money from their families.¹³² They explained that videos are sent to parents or relatives showing the children being threatened with various forms of harm, including rape, if a ransom is not paid. Families are often given very little time to gather the money.¹³³

Sexual exploitation and abuse of boys on the move

While much of the research on sexual violence and exploitation focuses on women, some studies have begun to shed light on the significant risks faced by unaccompanied boys. A 2020 multi-country study conducted in Bangladesh, Italy, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and Kenya examined the characteristics and impacts of sexual violence against men and boys in conflict and displacement settings.¹³⁴ The study, which included focus group discussions with 310 refugees and interviews with key informants, revealed that sexual violence against boys often occurs in highly vulnerable locations, such as border crossings, along roadsides, and during imprisonment. Reportedly, in host countries, boys, particularly adolescents and those with diverse sexual orientation, could also be at risk of sexual abuse, exploitation, and rape. A child protection officer interviewed in Italy described a common grooming tactic targeting refugee and migrant boys: a perpetrator might send a friend request on social media, such as Facebook, initiating a seemingly

128 Casado, M. A., Garitaonandia, C., Moreno, G., & Jimenez, E. (2019). *Immigrant children on the move and the Internet in Spain: Uses, Opportunities, and Risks*. *Media and Communication*, 7(1), 56.

129 Save the Children. (2020). *Digital Safeguarding for Migrating and Displaced Children*: An overview of the current context and trends, potential risks and practical next steps.

130 Save the Children. (2020). *Digital Safeguarding for Migrating and Displaced Children*: An overview of the current context and trends, potential risks and practical next steps.

131 Georgiou, M., Leen d'Haenens, Zaki, A., Donoso, V., & Bossens, E. (2024). *Digital skills of and for lives marked by vulnerability: Being young, refugee, and connected in Europe*. *European Journal of Communication*, 39(3), 277–285.

132 Save the Children's Balkans Migration and Displacement Hub and the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of the University of Sarajevo (2022). *"Wherever we go, someone does us harm". Violence against refugee and children on the move arriving in Europe through the Balkans*.

133 Ibid.

134 Chynoweth, S. K., Buscher, D., Martin, S., & Zwi, A. B. (2020). *Characteristics and Impacts of Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement: A Multi-country Exploratory Study*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(9-10), 088626052096713.

innocent conversation.¹³⁵ This can then progress to invitations to meet, often framed as offers to clean their homes or provide other services for payment. These interactions can escalate to discussions about sex, with boys often agreeing to sexual acts in exchange for money or goods, even without the use of physical force.¹³⁶

Risks and protective factors

Children on the move face many of the same tech-based risks as other children, but their challenging living conditions and limited access to stable housing, education, and financial support can make these risks even more severe.¹³⁷ For example, a study in Uganda examined the experiences of 333 urban refugee and displaced adolescent girls and young women residing in informal settlements.¹³⁸ It found that those who used mobile apps were more likely to experience violence—whether physical, verbal, or sexual—than those who did not use these apps.¹³⁹

Children on the move also use social media to share information about their journeys, but this can make them vulnerable to exploitation. Perpetrators often target children who are in need of money, emotionally distressed, or unable to work legally, making them particularly susceptible to various forms of abuse, including sexual exploitation.¹⁴⁰ However, many of these children develop their own strategies for staying safe online, learning to identify potential scams or fake news through personal experience or by observing the mistakes of their peers.¹⁴¹

Parents' digital skills play a crucial role in children's online safety. In countries where harmful online content is prevalent, but parents have limited digital skills, children are often left to navigate the digital world on their own.¹⁴² When these children move to countries with more developed digital markets and greater access to low-quality or potentially harmful content, they may experience a heightened sense of insecurity and vulnerability in the digital environment.¹⁴³ As observed in various

135 Ibid.

136 Chynoweth, S. K., Buscher, D., Martin, S., & Zwi, A. B. (2020). [Characteristics and Impacts of Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement: A Multi-country Exploratory Study](#). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(9-10), 088626052096713.

137 Georgiou, M., Leen d'Haenens, Zaki, A., Donoso, V., & Bossens, E. (2024). [Digital skills of and for lives marked by vulnerability: Being young, refugee, and connected in Europe](#). *European Journal of Communication*, 39(3), 277–285.

138 Logie, C. H., Okumu, M., Mwima, S., Hakiza, R., Irungi, K. P., Kyambadde, P., Kironde, E., & Narasimhan, M. (2019). [Social ecological factors associated with experiencing violence among urban refugee and displaced adolescent girls and young women in informal settlements in Kampala, Uganda: a cross-sectional study](#). *Conflict and Health*, 13(1), 60–60.

139 Logie, C. H., Okumu, M., Mwima, S., Hakiza, R., Irungi, K. P., Kyambadde, P., Kironde, E., & Narasimhan, M. (2019). [Social ecological factors associated with experiencing violence among urban refugee and displaced adolescent girls and young women in informal settlements in Kampala, Uganda: a cross-sectional study](#). *Conflict and Health*, 13(1), 60–60.

140 Save the Children. (2020seven). [Digital Safeguarding for Migrating and Displaced Children: An overview of the current context and trends, potential risks and practical next steps](#).

141 Georgiou, M., Leen d'Haenens, Zaki, A., Donoso, V., & Bossens, E. (2024). [Digital skills of and for lives marked by vulnerability: Being young, refugee, and connected in Europe](#). *European Journal of Communication*, 39(3), 277–285.

142 Stokowska, A. (2023). [Children with Migration Experience and ICT](#) (6th part of Be Internet Awesome For All Developing digital citizenship in children with various educational needs).

143 Ibid.

humanitarian and non-humanitarian contexts, the risks associated with technologies are amplified by the digital divide, with children frequently navigating the Internet with minimal guidance and limited understanding of digital safety from their caregivers.¹⁴⁴

Children on the Move and Technology

Benefits

- Accessing migration-related information
- Maintaining and developing transnational identities
- Supporting socio-emotional well-being and leisure*
- Accessing education and employment opportunities
- Accessing health knowledge and solutions
- Advocating for their rights and needs*
- Conducting financial transactions*
- *Less evidence



Risks

- Online grooming of children for sexual purposes
- Sexual and financial extortion
- Child sexual abuse material
- Online bullying
- Doxing, scamming and blackmailing



144 ECPAT International. (2024) *A Call for Nuanced, Contextualised and Coordinated Responses to Complex Manifestations of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Humanitarian Contexts*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

6. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND TECH COMPANIES IN PROTECTING CHILDREN ON THE MOVE FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

When looking for information on how digital platforms and tech companies protect children on the move from sexual exploitation, very few documented initiatives were found. Instead, the available tools and strategies mostly come from related areas, including the use of technology to combat technology-facilitated sexual violence against children, in general,¹⁴⁵ address tech-facilitated gender-based violence,¹⁴⁶ and tackle the trafficking and smuggling of individuals on the move.¹⁴⁷

Given the lack of evidence, this section presents insights from the literature on what children on the move need to know and do to stay safe online, as well as how technology can support them, based on lessons from these related fields.

Many children on the move learn to manage online risks through their own experiences or by learning from their peers.¹⁴⁸ Tech-based initiatives could play a crucial role in helping them stay safe by providing clear and accurate information. This review found two illustrative examples of such initiatives that are available online

The “[Be an Internet Awesome](#)” project is implemented in Greece by the Institute of Technology and Research in collaboration with Google.org. The toolkit is hosted on an online platform designed for young people aged 13 to 18 and can be used by teachers as part of relevant lessons or independently by the children. The toolkit aims not only to promote digital literacy and raise awareness about key online issues but also to empower refugee and migrant children and youth in Greece. It provides engaging activities to help children recognise and prevent hate speech, online scams, and misinformation. The educational materials are available in English, Arabic, and Farsi.

145 Suojellaan Lapsia, (2024) [Protect Children ry. “Tech Platforms Used by Online Child Sexual Abuse Offenders: Research Report with Actionable Recommendations for the Tech Industry”](#)

146 World Wide Web Foundation. (2021). [Tech Policy Design Lab: Online Gender Based Violence and Abuse. Outcomes and Recommendations.](#)

147 UNODC (s.f) [Using technology to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants-](#) UNODC Teaching module series: Trafficking in Person & Smuggling of Migrants. Module 14.

148 Georgiou, M., Leen d’Haenens, Zaki, A., Donoso, V., & Bossens, E. (2024). [Digital skills of and for lives marked by vulnerability: Being young, refugee, and connected in Europe.](#) European Journal of Communication, 39(3), 277–285.

The Hungary country office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has developed [Safe Online – A Guide to Being Protected on the Internet](#). This online resource aims to help children understand the various risks they may encounter online and provides specific strategies to protect themselves.

Children on the move rely on the Internet to access information at all stages of their journey, as seen in section 2. However, this information is not always accurate or up to date, which can expose them to various risks, including exploitation. **To address this, tech companies can make a significant contribution by utilising their platforms to share reliable and timely information about migration risks and support services.**¹⁴⁹ A 2020 report on the use of technology tools to combat trafficking in human beings highlighted the importance of providing accurate information about migration risks, including strategies for identifying trafficking threats and reporting mechanisms.¹⁵⁰ This approach can help children on the move make safer, more informed decisions.

Non-governmental organisations working with people on the move have developed apps to support them throughout their journey. These apps primarily provide information and connect users to critical support services. While many of these initiatives are designed for adults, some are specifically tailored for children on the move, including the following examples:

- » ImportaMi, launched in March 2022, is part of the Signpost project by the Rescue Committee, targeting unaccompanied children navigating life in the United States. The app aims to provide information and enable unaccompanied children to connect directly with a community liaison, who can assist them in finding an attorney and accessing long-term support. During its pilot phase, ImportaMi collaborated with partners to support children by providing vital assistance, including helping those fleeing potentially exploitative situations with family or sponsors, and connecting them to specialised resources.¹⁵¹
- » Miniila APP, supported by Missing Children Europe,¹⁵² is designed specifically to meet the needs of unaccompanied children on the move, offering clear and accessible information about local services, such as shelters, food banks, and healthcare. It also provides quick access to the 116.000 missing children hotline and the 116 -111 child helpline, along with guidance on children's rights in the European Union and important procedures, including those related to international protection and family reunification.

149 OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Tech Against Trafficking (2020). [Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: A comprehensive analysis of technology tools](#)

150 Ibid.

151 International Rescue Committee. (2022). Press Release. [IRC launches ImportaMi, in partnership with the Vera Institute, connecting unaccompanied children in US with legal and social services.](#)

152 Miniila App. <https://www.miniila.com/>

At the time of writing this literature review, June 2025, no documents were found evaluating the functioning or impact of such apps on the protection of children on the move.

Technology can also support children on the move through reporting systems, enabling them to access better assistance when they face potential risks or encounter violent or abusive content online. The importance of this role is underscored by existing literature on protecting women and children from technology-facilitated violence.

In 2020, the World Wide Web Foundation organised workshops with major tech platforms (including Facebook/Instagram (now Meta), Twitter (now X), Google/YouTube, and TikTok), civil society organisations, government representatives, and academia. The aim was to generate evidence, build relationships, and engage in constructive dialogue about women's experiences of online gender-based violence and abuse.¹⁵³ One key recommendation from these discussions was that technology should connect women to existing support services. Additionally, reporting systems should allow users to track and manage their reports, address context and language barriers, provide clearer policy and product guidance, and offer more support options for women throughout the reporting process.¹⁵⁴

Children on the move face several challenges in reporting harmful experiences; technology can provide children with accessible and meaningful reporting mechanisms. This includes ensuring that tech companies do not implement end-to-end encryption on their services unless they establish additional safeguards to enable law enforcement access to evidence and maintain the ability to detect and report child sexual abuse material.¹⁵⁵

Technology has the potential to support efforts to prevent, disrupt, and detect trafficking and sexual exploitation. Research on human trafficking and smuggling highlights how tech-based solutions can help identify risks and prevent violence and abuse, though much of this work has focused on adults. These tools can also be adapted to protect children on the move. For example, technology is already being used at borders to identify traffickers by analysing data for suspicious transactions, such as unusual financial transfers.¹⁵⁶ This must be complemented by ensuring that border forces are properly trained and equipped to recognise indicators of smuggling.¹⁵⁷

Identifying suspicious online financial transactions has also been used to detect potential perpetrators of child abuse. A 2021 study by the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre used machine learning to identify patterns among Australians engaging with facilitators of live streaming of child sexual abuse in the Philippines,

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ World Wide Web Foundation. (2021). [Tech Policy Design Lab: Online Gender Based Violence and Abuse. Outcomes and Recommendations.](#)

¹⁵⁵ Suojellaan Lapsia, (2024) [Protect Children ry. "Tech Platforms Used by Online Child Sexual Abuse Offenders: Research Report with Actionable Recommendations for the Tech Industry"](#)

¹⁵⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (n.d.). Module 14. Links between Cybercrime, Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants- The use of technology to facilitate trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/tip-and-som/module-14/key-issues/use-of-technology-to-facilitate-tip-and-som.html>

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

finding that high-frequency offenders typically spent under £55 every 20 days. The study highlights the potential of technology in identifying such offenders.¹⁵⁸

Children on the move are particularly vulnerable to harmful and risky online content, such as scams, hate speech, fake job advertisements, and online grooming. Although many existing tech-based tools were not specifically designed for children on the move, they could be adapted to better protect this group. In the field of child protection, several advanced technologies already exist to detect and remove harmful content. For example, machine learning algorithms and natural language processing tools are being used to quickly identify and take down illegal material^{159, 160} including content on the dark web.¹⁶¹ A global mapping of tools in 2019 identified approximately 50 AI-based technologies that were already enhancing prevention, detection, and prosecution efforts.¹⁶² Most of these tools focus on detecting and removing child sexual abuse material, and many rely on hash-matching technologies to quickly identify known abusive content. An interesting finding from the mapping is that the geographic focus of AI solutions remains limited. Canada, the UK, and the US were leading efforts to combat this crime, supported by strong government initiatives and numerous high-profile cross-sector partnerships involving major technology companies and non-governmental organisations. Nationally based hotlines were found to be the most prominent actors in the global fight against child sexual abuse, often starting with efforts to create a safer internet within their own countries before advocating for global collaboration. However, the borderless nature of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation means that threats to children arise from all regions, rendering national solutions insufficient.¹⁶³

Children on the move often worry about blackmail, privacy, and online safety. Literature on how the tech sector can protect children from online risks and support women facing technology-based gender violence suggests that digital tools can play a crucial role in empowering and safeguarding these groups.^{164,165} For example, a consultation workshop organised by the World Wide Web Foundation recommended that tech design should include more user-friendly privacy settings, simpler language, and better access to safety features

158 Cubitt, T., Napier, S., & Brown, R. (2021). [Predicting prolific live streaming of child sexual. The use of machine learning algorithms helps to identify potentially harmful content quickly and efficiently, and tech-based providers should commit to removing the content once it has been identified abuse.](#) Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice, (634), 1-21.

159 Vogt, M., Leser, U., & Akbik, A. (2021, August). [Early detection of sexual predators in chats.](#) In Proceedings of the 59th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics and the 11th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing (Volume 1: Long Papers) (pp. 4985-4999).

160 Nguyen, T. T., Wilson, C., & Dalins, J. (2023). [Fine-tuning Llama 2 large language models for detecting online sexual predatory chats and abusive texts.](#) arXiv preprint arXiv:2308.14683.

161 Vuong M. Ngo, Susan McKeever and Christina Thorpe. (2023). [Identifying Online Child Sexual Texts in Dark Web through Machine Learning and Deep Learning Algorithms.](#) In APWG.EU Technical Summit and Researchers Sync-Up (APWG.EU-Tech 2023), pp. 1-6, CEUR Workshop Proceedings. DOI: 10.21427/WFN5-RT72

162 Bracket Foundation Artificial Intelligence. (2019). [Combating Online sexual exploitation of children.](#) California: US.

163 Ibid.

164 Suojellaan Lapsia, (2024) [Protect Children ry. "Tech Platforms Used by Online Child Sexual Abuse Offenders: Research Report with Actionable Recommendations for the Tech Industry"](#)

165 World Wide Web Foundation. (2021). Tech Policy Design Lab: Online Gender Based Violence and Abuse. Outcomes and Recommendations.

to help users manage their online experiences and reduce exposure to harmful content.¹⁶⁶

While children on the move can develop their own strategies for identifying false or untrustworthy content, tech-based tools can provide additional support. For instance, fact-checking tools have been shown to reduce the spread of hate speech and misinformation, which can help protect vulnerable groups from extreme violence.

One example is iVerify, a fact-checking initiative developed by the United Nations Development Programme through the Brussels-based Task Force on Electoral Assistance and the Chief Digital Office. iVerify uses artificial intelligence, machine learning, and in-person verification to identify and counter false narratives, particularly during sensitive periods like elections.¹⁶⁷ It was successfully implemented during the elections in Zambia, where fact-checkers worked to identify and remove harmful content, leading to public retractions by content producers. This example highlights how similar tools could be adapted to help children on the move verify information and stay safe online.

This literature review has also identified some initiatives implemented by non-governmental organisations and sharing economy platforms to support children on the move. Sharing economy platforms like Uber and Airbnb have partnered with international organisations to provide safe support for children and their families. For example, Uber has teamed up with the International Rescue Committee in the USA,¹⁶⁸ HIAS in Poland¹⁶⁹ and in the UK¹⁷⁰ to offer free and discounted rides to non-profits, helping refugees access essential services and attend appointments safely. Since 2020, Airbnb.org has provided free temporary housing for over 210,000 refugees and continues to support their resettlement in the US through its Sponsorship Initiative.¹⁷¹ A press release on the work of HIAS and Airbnb in Guatemala shows that HIAS is responsible for collaborating with selected hosts to ensure participants are safe, comfortable, and well-settled, conducting monitoring visits and supporting the check-in and check-out processes. Additionally, HIAS provides hosts with training on protection, gender, and refugee rights to better equip them to host at-risk individuals.¹⁷² These initiatives demonstrate how private sector actors are implementing specific actions to protect children on the move, serving as potential examples for technology companies to follow.

To conclude, this review found limited literature and initiatives addressing how technology can protect children on the move from technology-facilitated sexual exploitation. While technology plays a significant role for adults and children on the move, holding potential for addressing child protection issues, few tools are designed to meet the specific abilities,

166 Ibid.

167 United Nations Development Programme. (2021, November 25). [AI-powered fact-checking tool iVerify piloted during Zambia election shows global promise](#). United Nations Development Programme.

168 International Rescue Committee. (2024, September 10) [How Uber is helping resettled refugee families navigate their new lives](#)

169 Hias.org (2023, June 22) [More Than Just a Free Ride: Uber Fills a Need for Refugees](#)

170 British Red Cross. (2022, June, 7). [Supporting Refugees through Red Cross](#).

171 Airbnb (2024, June 20) [Airbnb.org expands temporary housing support for refugees](#)

172 HIAS (2024, July). [In Guatemala, Airbnb.org Helps Displaced People Find Home](#).

needs, and preferences of refugee children and their caregivers.¹⁷³ It is essential to note that during this review, several technology tools designed to support individuals on the move were identified; however, these initiatives often appear to lack gender considerations and child-centred approaches.

173 Hourcade, J. P., Antle, A. N., Giannakos, M., Fails, J. A., Read, J. C., Markopoulos, P., ... & Palumbos, A. (2019, May). [Child-computer interaction sig: Designing for refugee children](#). In Extended Abstracts of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1-4).

7. CONCLUSIONS

Children on the move face numerous risks, including exploitation, abuse, and xenophobia, with traffickers targeting especially unaccompanied children. The sharp rise in global displacement, driven by conflicts and crises, underscores the need for enhanced protection and support for these children. The literature review provides further evidence of how technology can become a source of entertainment, 'life-saving' and a necessity, as it offers essential information, helps children reconnect with families, and facilitates their integration into host communities, among other benefits. Although less evidence is available, the literature also shows that technology can be 'life-threatening' for children on the move, as it introduces new risks by exposing them to online grooming, sexual exploitation, and other forms of technology-facilitated harm. These harms are compounded by the existing vulnerabilities and socioemotional impacts of displacement.

The literature review provides evidence that there is a concerning gap in the documentation of technology-facilitated harms, particularly for girls and boys on the move. The search focused on reports related to risks and violence, specifically seeking references to technology as a mediator, facilitator, or having any role in the exploitation or harm of children. Few reports address this issue directly, and among those identified, the sources were primarily press releases, investigative journalism or service providers' perceptions.

Limited evidence also exists on the role that digital platforms and tech companies play in protecting children on the move. However, insights from the fields of technology-facilitated gender violence and the use of technology to prevent trafficking and smuggling offer valuable guidance for safeguarding children on the move.

Interestingly, much of the research conducted with children on the move collects information from boys, as unaccompanied children in shelters are often male. However, it is noteworthy that the issue of sexual violence and exploitation continues to be predominantly studied in female samples, leaving a gap in understanding the experiences of boys. Gender biases that perceive boys on the move as invulnerable may shape the analysis of their risks, rendering their vulnerabilities invisible and their experiences of violence overlooked.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ ECPAT International (2024). [Case study: ECPAT France in Calais, France](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

There is also limited literature addressing the experiences of children with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions within humanitarian settings. This gap contributes to a lack of nuanced understanding of how these children use technology and the associated risks they may face, which can, in turn, affect the design of effective interventions. A review of service delivery and funding priorities among humanitarian organisations found that children with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions are often treated as a single group, without recognising or addressing their distinct needs and experiences.¹⁷⁵

Additionally, more intersectional research is needed, particularly focusing on children of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, children with disabilities, and other groups in vulnerable situations. Moreover, while evidence shows that online risks affect children of all ages, most literature on technology-facilitated harm focuses on adolescents, leaving the experiences of younger children underexplored.

¹⁷⁵ Gambir, K., Hutchison, C., Alexander Lillian, & Alessi, E. (2024). [Addressing the needs of cisgender, heterosexual men and LGBTIQ+ survivors of sexual violence: a scoping review of service delivery and funding priorities among humanitarian organisations](#). *Global Public Health*, 19(1, 2371389).



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