

GLOBAL YOUTH REPORT:
**WORKING TO
END CHILD
IMMIGRATION
DETENTION**

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MAY 2023

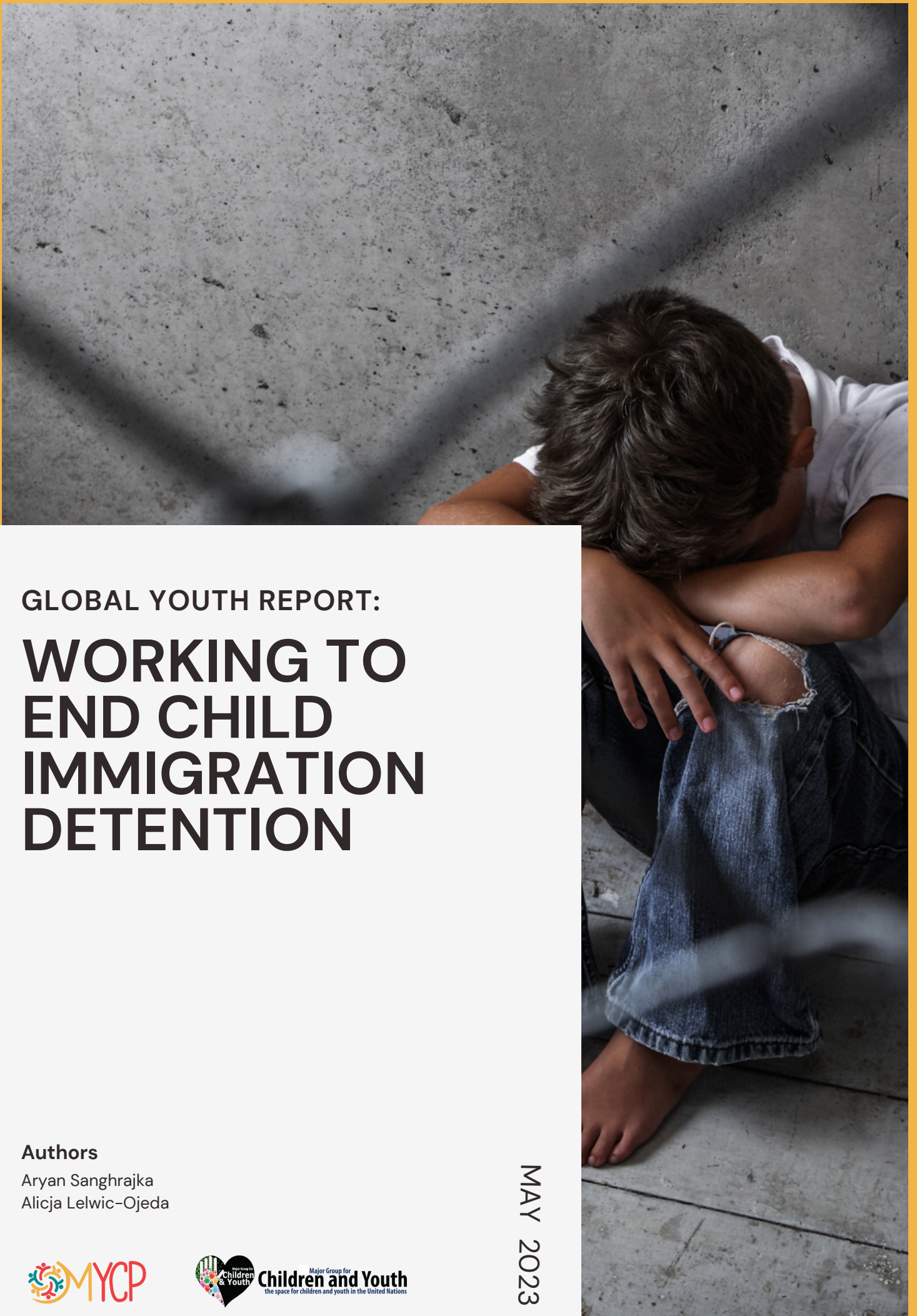


Table of Contents

01

Executive Summary

02

Overview

03

Youth
Recommendations

04

Key Takeaways

10

Conclusion

12

Annex A

14

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

The Global Youth Consultation on Ending Child Immigration Detention, organised by the Migration Youth & Children's Platform in collaboration with UNICEF, IDC, UNHCR, and UNNM, brought together over 80 young participants from around the world to discuss and share their ideas on ending child immigration detention. The consultation resulted in key youth recommendations for both Member States and youth advocacy. The recommendations for Member States include: involving children and youth in policy formulation and decision-making processes, stopping the politicisation of the issue, replacing detention with community-based support and access to services, and creating economic, educational, and social opportunities for formerly detained children and youth. For youth advocacy, the recommendations include: educating others on the issue, highlighting the stories of those with lived experience, and directly engaging and supporting children in detention or those who have been previously detained. These recommendations aim to promote inclusivity, human rights, and the well-being of children and youth who have been detained, and are grounded in their experiences.



Overview

May 8 Global Youth Consultation

The Migration Youth & Children's Platform (MYCP), Migration Constituency of the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), in partnership with with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Detention Coalition (IDC), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and the United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM), through its workstream on alternatives to immigration detention, hosted the first ever Global Youth Consultation on Ending Child Immigration Detention ('the consultation') – GCM Youth Talk – on 8 May 2023, in order to provide a space for young people to share their knowledge, experiences and ideas on ending child immigration detention [1]. The consultation was conducted online in English, French, Arabic and Spanish with language-based roundtables for discussion, and was attended by over 80 young people from across the world [2]. This report outlines key takeaways from the consultation and youth recommendations for both Member States and youth advocacy.

[1] The United Nations defines any person who is 30 years of age or younger as 'youth'. This definition is used for the purposes of this report.

[2] See Annex A for the statistics and methodology of the Global Youth Consultation on Ending Child Immigration Detention, held 8 May 2023.

The importance of youth advocacy

Meaningful youth engagement on this issue has the potential to make a significant impact on States' policies and practices. Migrant youth, including those young people who have some lived experience of immigration detention (either themselves or within their families or communities) bring a different and key perspective to the discussions with government representatives on this issue. When States take steps towards alternative approaches to migration governance, without resorting to detention, they need input from migrant youth voices to help them devise appropriate systems that work for all sections of the community as well as for governments.

80+
youth
attendees
from six
continents

Youth recommendations

Member States

- 1 Include children and youth, especially those with lived experience, in policy formulation and decision-making processes
- 2 Stop the politicisation of the issue of children and youth on the move.
- 3 Replace child immigration detention with community-based support including access to services
- 4 Create economic, educational and social opportunities for children and youth who were formerly detained

Youth Advocacy

- 5 Educate others on the issue of child immigration detention, highlighting the stories of children and youth with lived experience
- 6 Support, and directly engage with children in, and those who have previously been in, immigration detention

Key Takeaways

I. Member States

The consultation raised wide-ranging issues on the topic of ending child immigration detention which can directly be addressed by Member States. Concerns were specifically raised in relation to; the lack of engagement with children, youth, and persons with lived experience in policy making, the slow progress towards non-custodial alternatives to detention, as well as the hindered development and protection of the rights of the child. Thus, the following youth recommendations come in response to frequently identified gaps by young people. These recommendations are grounded in hearing experiences from children and youth on the move who have experienced immigration detention, and include implementable actions in relation to Member States' commitment to end child immigration detention.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATION 1: INCLUDE CHILDREN & YOUTH, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE, IN POLICY FORMULATION AND DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

Youth, including children who have previously been detained, are all too often excluded in policy formulation and decision-making spaces. The participants frequently raised the value in hearing from children and youth, especially people with experience of being in immigration detention, when deciding upon policy. Therefore, governments must allow for the consultation of young people and persons with lived experience when formulating policy and in decision-making processes. To do this, governments should hear from youth-led and youth-run non-profit organisations working with young migrants, and young migrants themselves, about their experiences and ideas for alternatives to detention due to the detrimental effects detention has on a child. Participants also recommended the establishment of youth councils at a sub-national, national, and international level in order to provide adequate representation of youth voices in processes, and deal with the intersectional issues present in international migrations. These voices should not only be heard, but given serious consideration when deciding policy. Involving children, youth, migrants, and people with lived experience in government policy processes ensures that policies are grounded, targeted, and positively impactful upon the communities which they affect.

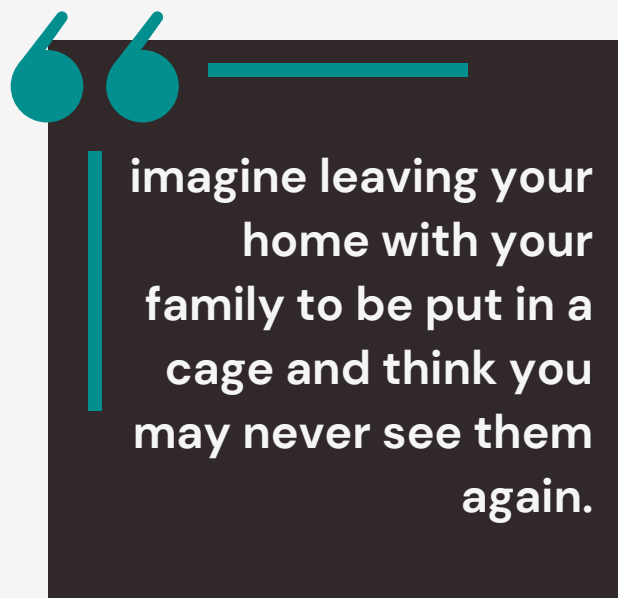
YOUTH RECOMMENDATION 2: STOP THE POLITICISATION OF THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH ON THE MOVE

Participants in the consultation noted how an increasing number of governments are politicising the issue of international migration. This leads to the dehumanisation of migrants and forcibly displaced people. One participant with lived experience highlighted the impact of this saying they had a feeling of “complete hopelessness” as they felt like no one wanted them. The politicisation of migration results in policy responses which young people feel “go against the very nature of our humanity” including child immigration detention. Thus, governments must conduct sensitisation programmes in collaboration with non-governmental organisations to promote acceptance and the inclusion of migrants within communities. Moreover, governments should develop a positive and welcoming rhetoric towards international migration, as this enables young people who have previously been detained to feel welcomed into communities. This approach will also set the tone domestically amongst national populations, and internationally – helping to foster global collaboration to address the root causes of migration.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATION 3: REPLACE CHILD IMMIGRATION DETENTION WITH COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT INCLUDING ACCESS TO SERVICES

Immigration detention prevents the realisation of many rights of the child. Therefore, member states, having stated the favorability of community-based care arrangements as an alternative to immigration detention in the Global Compact on Migration, must adopt sustainable and long-term strategies to implement their commitment to this approach. The basic human and child rights afforded to all children must also be upheld for migrant children, and not discriminate against them on the basis of their status under Article 2 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Therefore, governments must also ensure adequate access to education and healthcare, and respect their right to family unity. Participants raised the impact of child immigration detention on families, with an individual saying “imagine leaving your home with your family to be put in a cage and think you may never see them again”. Consequently, at a very minimum, the practice of child separation must end.



YOUTH RECOMMENDATION 4: CREATE ECONOMIC, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WHO WERE FORMERLY DETAINED

Participants were concerned by the lack of opportunities for children and youth who were formerly detained. Detention heavily prevents the development of a child – as such, governments must commit to address the needs of released young people when they enter the community setting. Governments should develop a comprehensive framework that encompasses economic, educational and social opportunities for their well-being and reintegration into society. Furthermore, governments should work with sub-national governments and authorities for community engagement and capacity building. Education as both a child and human right should be a priority, as participants with lived experience reported “never having a normal childhood”. Consequently, support should be provided in the form of remedial education programmes, scholarships, and work-training programmes allowing children and youth on the move to gain the vital skills they need to enter the labour market and aid their development. Community organisations should also play an integral role in providing guidance, support, and promoting social inclusion. Involving the wider community in these efforts, and building the capacity of local actors, reduces stigma and xenophobia often faced by migrants, as well as fostering an understanding for young migrants and displaced people. In turn, an environment is created that supports the well-being of children and youth with lived experience of immigration detention.



II. Youth Advocacy

Action must not only be taken by Member States but also youth-led advocacy groups and non-governmental organisations. Participants in the consultation identified these groups as people who can champion this issue and make a meaningful impact in shaping the narrative around international migration, and supporting the well-being of those in, or who have previously been in, child immigration detention. Thus, youth recommendations 5 and 6 relate to this fact.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATION 5: CREATE ECONOMIC, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WHO WERE FORMERLY DETAINED

Young people have the power to shape the narrative, working to increase public awareness and support to end child immigration detention. An invaluable tool is enabling the public to hear directly from children and youth who have experienced immigration detention. As such, non-governmental organisations and youth-led advocacy groups should make a substantial effort to champion those with lived experience. Furthermore, participants highly recommended to utilise the reach of social media platforms to help influence public opinion. Thus, advocacy groups and non-governmental organisations should develop a well-rounded communication strategy with a three-pronged approach: (i) education on the issue, (ii) narrative using the experiences of children and youth who have been detained, and (iii) encouraging direct engagement and activism.



Stakeholders must also collaborate with one another to effectively demonstrate a united youth front to Member States and multilateral organisations, calling for concrete and implementable actions.

As an aside, youth noted the importance of holding governments accountable for their actions. Participants shared examples from Egypt and Italy where youth-led non-governmental organisations advocated for the rights of child migrants in detention, and were able to secure their release. Organisations in States such as Zambia and Kenya are also trying to do this. In other countries, including Morocco and Libya, participants shared stories where “a lot of money” was required to secure the release of a child in detention. Therefore, advocacy which incorporates accountability for Member States’ child immigration detention practices is also vital.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATION 6: SUPPORT AND DIRECTLY ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN IN, AND THOSE WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN IN, IMMIGRATION DETENTION

Community support and direct engagement with children who are currently detained, or have been previously detained, is critical to ensuring their safety and well-being. This is notably important for those who have been separated from their families. Therefore, young people recommend that youth groups and non-governmental organisations, who are on the ground, make capacity provision to support those in, or have formerly been in, detention. These efforts can make children and youth on the move feel supported and included – showing them that there are people, especially other youth, who care about them and their welfare. Thus, direct engagement can help to mitigate the psychological trauma caused by detention, in particular the feeling of “total isolation”. Organisations are encouraged to work with communities to enhance local level action for children in detention, improving the relations between migrants and local citizens. Knowledge-sharing is also helpful between organisations in providing an open dialogue about best practices and to identify common areas for improvement.



III. Identified intersections

Ending child immigration detention is part of the broader topic of international migration. Featured heavily in discussions was the role of multilateral organisations in facilitating conversations and action on this issue. Participants shared that knowledge on Member States' commitments in relation to ending child immigration detention was weak, and further called upon intergovernmental organisations to improve education on this issue, relating to youth recommendation 5. Moreover, it is not only Member States who need to improve the consultation of youth in policy processes but international exchanges and dialogues must enable youth participation. Thus, participants thanked UNNM, and its alternatives to immigration detention workstream co-leads and members for including youth speakers as equal panellists at the fourth intergovernmental peer-learning exchange on May 24 2023.

Youth are calling for the inclusion of all stakeholders from grassroots organisations, Member States, and international organisations and agencies, in dialogues surrounding efforts to end child immigration detention.

Participants also identified that addressing the drivers of displacement will aid efforts to reduce the number of youth on the move placed in immigration detention. Thus, international cooperation on climate change and forcible displacement should be strengthened. Moreover, youth also called for enhanced legal and policy frameworks at both the domestic and international level including stronger protections for children, especially to protect those still in detention centres and to promote their release.

Lastly, conversations around the multidimensional nature of efforts to end child immigration detention were held. Subsequently, participants further called for the inclusion of all stakeholders from grassroots organisations, Member States, and international organisations and agencies, in dialogues surrounding efforts to end child immigration detention. As well as the collaboration and partnerships between local level actions and international policy making.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the recommendations provided by youth in response to the issue of child immigration detention highlight the urgent need for action and collaboration from Member States and youth-led advocacy groups. These recommendations address the key gaps identified by young people with lived experience and aim to ensure the protection of children's rights and well-being.

The first recommendation emphasises the importance of including children and youth, especially those with lived experience of immigration detention, in policy formulation and decision-making processes. Governments should actively seek the input of young people and engage with youth-led non-profit organisations working with young migrants. By incorporating their experiences and ideas for alternatives to detention, policies can be more targeted, grounded, and positively impactful.



The second recommendation calls for an end to the politicisation of the issue of children and youth on the move. Participants highlighted the dehumanisation and hopelessness experienced by migrants when international migration is politicised. Governments should collaborate with non-governmental organisations to promote acceptance, inclusion, and a positive rhetoric towards international migration. This approach fosters global collaboration to address the root causes of migration and creates an environment where young people feel welcomed and supported.

The third recommendation stresses the need to replace child immigration detention with community-based support and access to services. Member States should adopt sustainable strategies to implement their commitment to non-custodial alternatives to detention. All children, regardless of their migration status, should be afforded basic human and child rights, including access to education, healthcare, and family unity. Ending the practice of child separation is a crucial step in preventing further harm to children and ensuring their well-being.

The fourth recommendation focuses on creating economic, educational, and social opportunities for children and youth who have been previously detained. Governments should develop comprehensive frameworks that address the specific needs of released young people and facilitate their reintegration into society.

Education should be a priority, and support should be provided through remedial education programs, scholarships, and work-training initiatives. Community organisations play a vital role in providing guidance, support, and promoting social inclusion.



For youth advocacy, the fifth recommendation highlights the power of young people in shaping the narrative and increasing public awareness. Non-governmental organisations and youth-led advocacy groups should educate the public about child immigration detention, amplify the stories of children and youth with lived experience, and utilise social media platforms for outreach. Collaboration among stakeholders is essential to demonstrate a united front and hold governments accountable for their actions.

The sixth recommendation emphasises the importance of community support and direct engagement with children in, or formerly in, immigration detention. Youth groups and non-governmental organisations should provide capacity and support to ensure the safety and well-being of these young individuals. Direct engagement can help mitigate the psychological trauma caused by detention and foster a sense of inclusion and support.

Furthermore, the conversations held in the consultation underscored the need for international cooperation, stronger legal and policy frameworks, and inclusive dialogues involving all stakeholders. Efforts to end child immigration detention should be part of broader discussions on international migration, addressing the drivers of displacement, and protecting the rights of children.

Overall, these recommendations provide actionable steps for Member States and youth-led advocacy groups to work towards ending child immigration detention. By involving young people with lived experience and addressing the gaps identified in policy and decision-making processes, significant progress can be made in protecting the rights and well-being of children on the move. Collaboration, accountability, and the inclusion of all stakeholders, especially youth, are essential to end child immigration detention.

Annex A

I. The Methodology of the May 8 Global Youth Consultation

The Global Youth Consultation on Ending Child Immigration Detention (‘the consultation’) – GCM Youth Talk – was held online on 8 May 2023 from 14:30–16:15 CET. The consultation was open to anyone aged 30 or under (all youth), and was hosted in English, Arabic, French, and Spanish. There was no cost to attend the consultation either. It was organised by the Migration Youth and Children’s Platform, in partnership with UNICEF, UNHCR, IDC, and UNNM through its alternatives to immigration detention (ATD) workstream.

The consultation consisted of an opening ceremony, where the Co-Leads of UNNM ATD workstream and the Migration Youth & Children’s Platform delivered remarks, and participants heard from Mr. Hayat Akbari, IDC Board Member and human rights advocate, about his experience in detention and the work he does to inform their discussions.

Participants were then invited to join a language-based roundtable discussion of their choice (in either English, Spanish, Arabic or French) [3], around a set of four questions [4].

The roundtable discussions took up the majority of the consultation’s allotted time, and were facilitated by youth (UNICEF Youth on the Move Fellows and MYCP volunteers). In every roundtable, one participant volunteered to be a rapporteur – a person who would report the key findings of that roundtable in the plenary discussion which was held directly after the roundtables.

The consultation concluded with a closing ceremony with final remarks from UNICEF, IDC and MYCP, and closed at 16:34 CET. The youth facilitators, and rapporteurs submitted outcome documents and their notes to MYCP which have formed the basis of this report.

[3] No participants selected the Spanish or French roundtables, but the option was available. There were 3 roundtables hosted in English and 1 in Arabic. Roundtable sizes ranged from 9 to 25 participants.

[4] The questions were:

1. What do you know about child immigration detention, and are there any experiences you would like to share?
2. What are the consequences of child immigration detention on children and youth, including on their communities?
3. Governments are concerned about managing migration. In that context, how can governments in your country or region be persuaded away from using child immigration detention?
4. What can be done by children and youth to bring a focus onto this issue, globally and regionally? What can be done by governments to incorporate children and youth perspectives and input on this issue?

II. Statistics on the participation in the consultation

The Consultation garnered 160 registrations [5], 35% identified as male, 65% identified as female. Therefore, to preface the attendance statistics, it does not reflect the true number of participants who participated in the consultation. The following statistics of participation were recorded at the end of the event, counting those who participated in the full length of the consultation.

At the end of the consultation, there were 60 attendees, with an average age of 24 years old. 13 of the attendees were from the MENA region, 21 from the rest of Africa, 7 from Europe, 8 from Asia, and 6 from the Americas.

Of the recorded attendees, 12 people identified as a refugee, migrant or person with lived experience of immigration detention. 21 people were from a minority group, and 2 people identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ community. A total of 34 people were female, 21 people were male.

The attendance rate recorded at the end of the consultation therefore was 37.5%.

[5] With a regional breakdown: 38 registrations from the MENA region, 53 registrations from the Rest of Africa, 16 registrations from Europe, 32 registrations from Asia, and 21 registrations from the Americas.

No child should be placed in detention because of their status.

Acknowledgements

We thank the United Nations Network on Migration for hosting the Global Youth Consultation on Ending Child Immigration Detention, its Workstream on alternatives to immigration detention co-leads: UNICEF, IDC & UNHCR for their continued support and expertise. As well as the MYCP volunteers and UNICEF Youth on the Move Fellows who facilitated the language-based roundtables at the event. Finally, we would like to thank every young person who attended the May 8 event, and gave their perspective and shared their stories with us. This report and the May 8 Global Youth Consultation was made possible through the financial support of UNICEF.

Migration Youth & Children Platform

MYCP is part of the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) – the official, formal and self-organised space for children and youth (aged below 30) to contribute to and engage in certain intergovernmental and allied policy processes at the UN since 1992. Our mission is to bridge children and youth and the UN system, with a focus on migration issues, in order to ensure that their right to meaningful participation is realised. We do so by engaging children and youth entities in formal and informal forms in the design, implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review of sustainable development policies at all levels in four areas: Policy & Advocacy, Capacity Building, Youth Action and Knowledge.