

# Examining the viability of family reunification as a third country solution for unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents (UASC)

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Research Summary

MA Thesis, Masters in International and Development Studies (Migrations), Geneva Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies (IHEID)

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# RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

KEY WORDS: REFUGEE • MIGRATION • SOLUTIONS • PROTECTION • CHILDREN • POLICY • RIGHTS • FAMILY



## EXAMINING THE VIABILITY OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION AS A THIRD COUNTRY SOLUTION FOR UNACCOMPANIED & SEPARATED CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS (UASC)

### WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This empirical research project examined the viability of family reunification as a third-country protection solution for UASC, situated within the commitments of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The project aimed to address gaps in the literature, generate new insights to inform policy and practice and contribute to advancing UASC access to family reunification. A global level inquiry was combined with some focus on East Africa.

### WHAT WERE THE RESEARCH METHODS & SCOPE?

#### QUALITATIVE, MIXED METHODS

Preliminary interviews

Literature review

Participant observation

Semi-structured interviews

Thematic analysis

Fieldwork – Nairobi, Kenya

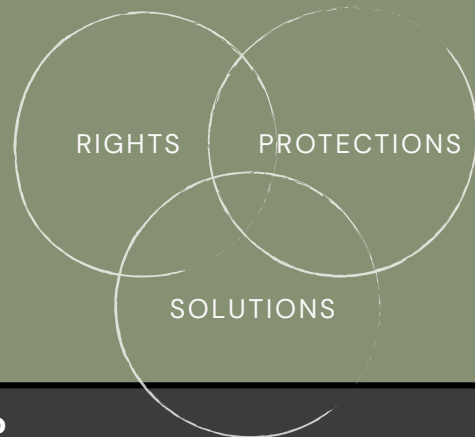
35 INTERVIEWS,  
41 PARTICIPANTS

Expert, purposive & snowball sampling – practitioners from RLOs, INGOs, NGOs, international organisations working at global, regional, national levels in law, child protection, policy.

Exploring conceptualisations of family reunification as a third country protection solution; obstacles to family reunification for UASC; good practices that facilitate access.

#### LIMITATIONS

- Sampling: limited insights from children & young people with lived experience of family reunification; no insights from states who create & implement law & policy
- Language: English only
- Sector context: current funding crisis impacted practitioner availability, program closures



#### WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER?

- Addresses a gap in the literature through practitioner insights & inquiry outside the geographical region of Europe.
- UASC face acute, heightened vulnerabilities, protection risks & gaps in forcibly displaced contexts.
- UASC numbers are significant & rising; children & child protection programs are disproportionately impacted by the current funding crisis.
- Extremely limited third country solutions & safe, regular migration pathways for UASCs.
- Right to family life & unity through family reunification is enshrined in human rights law, *the* sustainable protection solution in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Commitments to expand family reunification – third country solution & safe, regular pathway – under GCR & GCM.

## 01 It is a rights-based solution



The right to family life and family unity through family reunification is enshrined in international and regional human rights law, including the CRC – the most widely ratified international treaty. Vulnerabilities and special protections for refugee and migrant children, including UASC, are recognised in the CRC and in soft law, where family reunification is considered to be the sustainable protection solution, in accordance with the best interests principle. Family reunification restores safety and dignity, identity and belonging, resolves unaccompanied status, reduces trauma and distress associated with family separation, supports integration and, as a safe, regular pathway, addresses risks associated with irregular migration.

## 02



### It is supported by established expertise that enables access

Facilitated by existing good practices and specialised expertise of legal, policy, child protection, and refugee-led actors, pathways for family reunification are being supported. This is complex, specialised work at the intersection of human rights, migration law, child protection, refugee & migrant child & adolescent practice. Good practices include: free legal counsel, trauma-informed child & adolescent-centred casemanagement, cross-border collaboration, flexible evidentiary requirements, capacity building, strategic litigation, multistakeholder coordination.

### However, its viability is undermined & challenged

## 03



UASC face significant legal, procedural, practical, administrative, and political barriers when trying to access family reunification. Strict evidentiary requirements, complex laws, prohibitive costs, poor best interests procedures, lengthy timeframes, limited knowledge about family reunification as a protection solution, and prioritisation of migration control over children's rights/protections routinely restrict eligibility and delay processes. These protection gaps leave many children unable to realise their right to family unity or choosing precarious, irregular migration journeys to reunite with family.

### A relatively nascent third country solution with potential to expand

## 04



Despite persistent obstacles & gaps, strong potential exists – grounded in existing expertise, good practices and commitments under the Global Compacts. Realising this potential requires improved data, expanded coordination, capacity building & systems strengthening, tailored practice tools, and sustained advocacy with states and civil society – to build an integrated, ecosystem-level approach to family reunification for UASC.

## RESEARCH & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

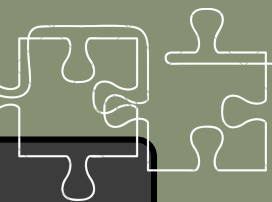
### FOR RESEARCH

Data collection & analysis to address knowledge gaps & build the evidence base, including:

1. Qualitative data – from states, those with lived experience of family reunification, focused on 'departure' countries (East Africa & Asia regions)
2. Quantitative data – numbers of UASC accessing family reunification, departure & destination countries, age, gender, country of origin
3. Qualitative & quantitative data – social & economic impact of family reunification in destination countries
4. Qualitative inquiry into the inclusion of third country family reunification (as a protection solution) in Best Interests Procedures (BIPs)

### FOR POLICY

1. Utilise global governance accountability mechanisms (e.g. GRF Progress Review 2025, GCM IMRF 2026, GRF 2027) to support advocacy efforts & progress commitments
2. Utilise treaty body mechanisms for systems-change: e.g. CRC Committee jurisprudence, explore CRC Committee 'General Comment' on Family Reunification for UASC
3. Leverage existing good practice & multistakeholder coordination mechanisms to continue building an ecosystem for capacity strengthening, referrals, advocacy
4. Develop tailored practical guidance tools & resources
5. Continue advocacy with states for flexible, protection-centred procedures & civil society & international organisations to increase access to family reunification



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## Acknowledgments

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The author acknowledges each of the research participants for sharing their expertise so generously and to those colleagues who kindly facilitated my field work within very tight timeframes - particularly given the complex operational context in which this study was conducted. Thanks also to MA supervisors, Prof. Vincent Chetail and Dr. Claudia Seymour for their guidance and support. This research seeks to recognise the expertise and sustained efforts of practitioners supporting unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents to access family reunification, and to contribute to strengthening family reunification as a fundamental protection solution.

# Executive Summary

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This Research Summary has been prepared to support the dissemination of research undertaken for an MA thesis. Under the supervision of Prof. Vincent Chetail and Dr. Claudia Seymour, this research was undertaken in 2025 as part of an MA thesis in International and Development Studies at the Geneva Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies (IHEID).

This empirical study examined the extent to which family reunification, as a rights-based, sustainable and third-country protection solution - affirmed under the Global Compacts and supported through commitments under the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) - offers a viable protection and third country solution for unaccompanied and separated refugee children and adolescents (UASC). The research was conducted from February - August 2025 through a literature review, preliminary consultations, semi-structured interviews with practitioners working in law, policy and practice at the global, regional and national levels, and a thematic analysis. Field work was undertaken in Nairobi, Kenya.

The study explored the extent to which family reunification as a third country solution is conceptualised within protection frameworks for UASC, identified the key factors that enable or hinder its access for UASC, and highlighted how existing obstacles and systemic gaps are being overcome. The study aimed to build on existing literature and generate new insights to inform policy and practice. Its relevance lies in the intersection of critical policy and protection considerations: the significant numbers and protection risks - as well as the capabilities and agency - of UASC in forced migration contexts; their acutely limited protection solutions and access to safe, regular migration pathways; the global migration governance architecture and GRF commitments to expand family reunification as a complementary pathway and third country solution; existing data and research gaps; and existing expertise and good practice. The research provides nuanced, practitioner perspectives on conceptualisations of family reunification as a protection solution, as well as the obstacles and enablers to family reunification for UASC in the context of GCR commitments - perspectives not previously documented and/or available in the public domain. Findings are complemented by recommendations for future research and for policy and practice.

The research found that family reunification, as a rights-based solution, is a viable protection solution for UASC in accordance with the principle of best interests, based on known good practices and expertise. However, current law, policy and procedures are largely not fit for purpose for refugees and those in need of international protection and obstacles to accessing family reunification abound. For UASC to realise their right to family life, states, civil society and international organisations must continue investing in processes and good practices that facilitate access to family reunification as *the* sustainable protection solution for UASC affirmed under the Global Compacts. Good practices include dedicated coordination structures; knowledge and technical skills development in family reunification for UASC; cross-border collaboration; free legal counsel for UASC; and improved data collection to build an evidence base and support advocacy efforts. As a nascent third country solution and complementary pathway, family reunification also needs continued investment in building an ecosystem - the 'infrastructure' to support its accessibility and expansion.

The viability of family reunification as a protection and sustainable solution for UASC relies on leveraging existing, significant expertise and good practices. This is particularly critical in the current context of limited protection solutions and complementary pathways for UASC, their increasing numbers and acute heightened vulnerabilities in the forced displacement context, as well as the disproportionate impact of the current funding crisis on children and child protection programming.

# 01. INTRODUCTION

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There are approximately 17.3 million refugee children globally [1]. This is more than half of the world's refugee population. Comprising less than a third of the world's population, children are over-represented among the global refugee population[2]. Not only have they been forced to leave their homes, living as all refugees do in situations of protracted insecurity, risk, and uncertainty, children do so without the rights, resources, or development that adults enjoy. Refugee children face distinct risks and heightened vulnerabilities due to their age and developmental stage [3]. These risks are compounded for unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents (UASC) who are without the protection or support of family [4] and consequently face distinct protection risks and heightened vulnerabilities. These are widely understood and include sexual exploitation and trafficking, high-levels of violence and gender-based violence, forced marriage, neglect, detention, forced labour, and recruitment into armed forces or militia [5].

International law, policy and practice recognise that children are entitled to special protections and specialised responses, including the right to family unity [6] the right to access family reunification processes [7], and the right to family reunification for UASC [8]. The Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] and several other international human rights treaties establish that family, as the natural and fundamental unit of society, is essential to a child's development and wellbeing [9], and establish the right to respect for family life and unity [10]. The importance of family reunification to realise the right to family life, when it is in a child's best interests, is also reflected in soft law, policy and practice [11].

Given the significant and distinctive impact of forced migration on family separation and unity, realising the right to family life through family reunification (the state-facilitated mechanism to achieve family

unity) is a particularly pertinent right for refugees and those seeking international protection [12]. The CRC recognises that family reunification is the principal durable, or sustainable, solution for children and for UASC in accordance with the principle of best interests of the child [13].

Family reunification is also affirmed in contemporary migration governance - the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) - as a rights-based complementary pathway, third country solution and a safe, regular migration pathway [14]. Through the GCR and Global Refugee Forums, States, UN organisations, and civil society have made commitments to expand complementary pathways and access to family reunification as a third country solution for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection [15]. Facilitating family reunification can prevent onward, perilous migration journeys that compound protection risks and vulnerabilities, particularly for UASC, and can contribute to more successful integration outcomes [16].

Despite protections enshrined in law and policy, it is widely understood that UASC are unable to adequately or consistently realise their rights [17]. This includes accessing protection solutions like family reunification which enable them to create safe and secure futures [18]. Throughout my work with and for refugee and migrant children and young people, I have frequently observed these protection gaps. Further, conversations about securing protection solutions for UASC often 'default' to the complexities in securing solutions, including upholding robust safeguarding. Undoubtedly, this is a highly complex area of policy and practice. However, complexity should not constrain the urgency of finding solutions for a population whose rights are so clearly enshrined in international and regional law and who are some of the most vulnerable yet most resilient and resourceful refugees and migrants.

## Research Aim, Scope, Methods

The research aimed to understand the obstacles that UASC face in accessing family reunification, how these obstacles are being overcome, and the extent to which UASC access to family reunification might be expanded in the context of commitments under the Global Compacts. Family reunification procedures are those where UASC are either 'sponsors' or 'beneficiaries'.

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The research was designed to:

- Build on existing academic and grey literature.
- Address a gap in the literature in relation to the specific factors that enable and impede UASC access to family reunification, particularly outside the European context.
- Create new knowledge about if and how family reunification, as a rights-based, third country protection solution and safe, regular, legal migration pathway, endorsed under recent global migration governance frameworks, offers a viable protection solution for UASC that should be expanded.
- Consider interventions in policy and practice that would support its expansion.
- Contribute to advancing knowledge for policy and practice outcomes in the context of commitments under the GCR and the GCM.

Family reunification procedures included UASC as either 'sponsors' or 'beneficiaries'. Beyond the literature review, the research intentionally focused on refugee UASC given the increased focus on complementary pathways, third country solutions and commitments to expand family reunification under the GCR.

While the study has a global lens, it includes some focus on the East Africa region, and excludes the Americas.

The research sits at the intersection of human rights law, policy, practice and intentionally explores practitioner insights rather than undertaking a legal analysis.

### Research Question

*To what extent is family reunification, as a complementary pathway and third country solution, a viable protection solution for unaccompanied and separated refugee children and adolescents (UASC)?*

## Methods

The study utilised a qualitative mixed-methods approach to generate data and insights. This approach included:

- Preliminary interviews
- Participant observation
- A review of academic and grey literature
- A thematic analysis of 33 semi-structured interviews with 41 experts on family reunification with UASC.

Through expert, purposive and snowball sampling, research participants included practitioners working in law, child protection and policy, from INGOs, RLOs, international organisations, academia, as well as young people with lived experience. Participants were working at the global, regional and country levels. Interviews were designed to test and explore findings of the literature review.

## Limitations

These include:

- Sampling - limited insights from children and young people with lived experience of family reunification and no insights from states who create and implement law and policy.
- Language - literature review and interviews conducted in English only
- Sector context - current funding crisis impacted on program closures and practitioner availability.

## Definitions

### **Unaccompanied and Separated Children and Adolescents (UASC)**

'UASC' is a legal and humanitarian category defined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. 'Unaccompanied' refers to "children (or minors) who are separated from parents and living without their parents or any other relatives or legal/customary guardians who are responsible for their care and support". 'Separated' children are those "who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members [19]. Refugee and migrant children and young people within these categories have complex, nuanced and heterogenous identities.

### **Family Reunification**

Anchored in the right to family unity and family life, family reunification is a migration pathway managed through state-governed immigration laws, policies and procedures that facilitate the right to entry and stay for migrants, refugees and beneficiaries of international protection. For refugees and beneficiaries of international protection, family reunification may also occur through other pathways including resettlement, community sponsorship initiatives, and other humanitarian admission schemes.

### **Protection Solutions for UASC**

Protection solutions encompass (i) the legal term pertaining to international protection for those determined to be refugees or beneficiaries of international protection under international refugee law and (ii) a broader definition pertaining to child protection as enshrined in international regional human rights law, and implemented in practice through state welfare systems and institutions. Child protection practice is supported through soft law, policy and guidance tools, including specifically for UASC.

## 02. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research findings from the literature review, practitioner insights from the semi-structured interviews and cross-cutting themes include:

- Family reunification as a third country solution for UASC is underrepresented in the literature, particularly outside the European geographical context and outside the discipline of law. There are known factors - legal, practical and political - that can both obstruct and enable access to family reunification as a third country protection solution for UASC, but these have not been explored or documented widely outside Europe, or in the context of current commitments under the GCR.
- There is no publicly available quantitative data on UASC access to family reunification to understand need, eligibility, or numbers (and demographics) of UASC accessing family reunification.
- Supporting UASC to access family reunification is complex, highly specialised and niche work at the intersection of child protection, child and adolescent-centred casework and refugee and migrant rights, supported by those with working in child protection, refugee rights, law, and policy, in NGOs, RLOs and international organisations.
- Family reunification is the sustainable solution for UASC, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as the fundamental protection measure in accordance with the principle of best interests of the child. The CRC sets out special protections for refugee and migrant children, including definitions and guidance on how protections for UASC are conceived and implemented. These protections are also articulated extensively in soft law and policy.
- Family reunification as the primary protection solution:
  - \* **Restores** - safety & dignity, emotional wellbeing, security, psychological stability, development; cultural identity & belonging
  - \* **Resolves** - unaccompanied status & legal status as an asylum seeker/refugee (restores rights lost through forced displacement)
  - \* **Reduces** - trauma & psychosocial distress caused by loss of and separation from family, by the refugee and forced displacement experience, and prolonged uncertainty about locating family and the possibility of reunification
  - \* **Supports** - integration/long term outcomes in third countries
  - \* **Addresses** - protection risks associated with irregular migration pathways/dangerous journeys

“...(family reunification) is also a vital protection and durable solution for unaccompanied children because it addresses multiple layers of (a) children's, a child's, vulnerability (and) legal, emotional and developmental needs...”  
**(Research participant, March 2025)**

“...reuniting with a family member in a third country not only improves their protection situation but also offers long term opportunities for stability...for integration as well. So, it's not just a legal entitlement, it's a psychosocial necessity for the child and also for the family members...in our field experience we have seen clear differences between children who managed to reunite with their family members and those who don't.”  
**(Research participant, April 2025)**

“Family reunification, as a safe and regular pathway, is a protective measure; it's one that protects children and having that in place stops children taking a dangerous route. If family joins them in a country, then they provide the protective unity...ensuring we have that in place is the best way to protect UASC...that seems clear and basic and international law supports this.”  
**(Research participant, April 2025)**

## Barriers to accessing family reunification for UASC

Legal, practical, psycho-social and political barriers impede UASC from reuniting with family through family reunification procedures. These barriers or protection gaps include:

- **Legal:** Complex and restrictive laws that commonly lack a protection dimension, i.e. not designed for refugees or beneficiaries of international protection, with restrictive eligibility requirements, e.g. narrow definitions of family, lack of harmonisation across jurisdictions (e.g. in relation to guardianship)
- **Administrative requirements:** High threshold evidentiary/documentation requirements; high costs (application fees, translations, logistics to secure documentation e.g. via consular appointments)
- **Practical:** Lengthy processes; lack of adequate resourcing/capacity/knowledge of family reunification for UASC as a protection solution and the requisite knowledge/expertise to facilitate access (incl. BIPs/BID panels; lack of SOPs/tailored practice guidance)
- **Evidence-base:** Lack of data on family reunification for UASC to inform policy and practice, e.g. identification of UASC, understanding the need for family reunification, under reporting/lack of publicly available quantitative data on family reunification for UASC, and lack of qualitative data on family reunification for UASC – e.g. good practices, outcomes
- **Psycho-social:** Traumatic nature of the application process (recalling/demonstrating separation; complex and protracted processes)
- **Political:** Prioritisation of migration management and border security over protections for children under international and regional laws

Often the lack of (clear, comprehensive guidelines) prevents others from doing it...because of the complexities and the multitudes of things, I can see it...people want to do something, really recognise that something has to be done but because there isn't a package, or a process or a procedure, something that they can confidently use, people don't do it....When there is something, people are more inclined to support...when there is this guidance...the fact that it doesn't exist and it's not out there is a barrier, it's a barrier out there on the ground.

(Research participant, March 2025)

"We need to build systems that get over the barriers - changes in laws or procedures, but also simply connecting, a coalition of the willing; people coming together and working to overcome all the barriers that are there. Good family reunification doesn't activate itself, it needs different people coming together..."

(Research participant, March 2025)

## Consequences of these barriers

These barriers to accessing family reunification can result in increased protection risks for UASC, including: embarking on precarious, irregular migration journeys; trafficking; psychological distress and associated long-term impacts; withdrawal from education/employment pathways; possibility of losing contact with family due to further displacement or migration to seek safety/security (including reuniting with family outside formal procedures). 'Ageing out' is an additional protection risk, as young people are no longer eligible for specialised child supports and may no longer be eligible for family reunification.

## Good practices in family reunification for UASC

The research revealed a range of good practices or ways in which identified barriers are being overcome. These include:



*"It's only possible because we have a direct connection to community and young people themselves. We are able to speak with family and provide support and advice and also make an assessment (information gathering) before we determine if family should pursue it. We then collate information and share with others to pick up and support family reunification."*

**(Research participant, March 2025)**



- **Cost-free**, specialised legal counsel to navigate a highly complex, protracted legal & administrative process
- **Child/adolescent-centred**, trauma-informed case management that supports autonomy, prioritises a child and family's direct participation in decision-making about family reunification, considers family reunification in BIPs holistically, in the context of a child's migration/refugee journey and as one of several solutions, and provides support to children throughout the family reunification journey (including where possible, in destination countries)
- **Cross-sector & cross-border collaboration** to facilitate securing documentation as well as supporting UASC throughout the family reunification process, along a continuum from departure countries & post arrival in destination countries
- **Dedicated**, multistakeholder coordination mechanisms (global, regional, national, sub-national levels) – to support referrals, knowledge sharing, peer learning and advocacy efforts on the importance of family reunification as the sustainable solution for UASC
- **Protection-centred, flexible** law and policy - e.g. broader definitions of family, evidentiary/documentation requirements
- **Capacity** building with those engaging with or supporting UASC in civil society, international organisations and states - to build skills and knowledge about family reunification as a protection solution/pathway & to support referrals/access to family reunification (e.g. state child protection/welfare systems - guardianship services, BIPs); with Refugee-Led Organisations given their significant contribution to facilitating access to family reunification
- **Strategic** litigation & utilising jurisprudence from treaty mechanisms, e.g. CRC Committee
- **Programmatic** examples that streamline the process and support UASC to navigate the process (e.g. Germany's Family Assistance Program (FAP), UNHCR's Central Mediterranean Family Reunification Project, the Central American Minors Project (CAM))



*"...so, while authorities or family members may work toward a particular solution or pathway, so the children must be informed and included in the discussions and decision making...failing to do so often leads to confusion, distress or even resistance from the child, which can significantly complicate the results, the outcome.*

*...ensuring post destination support as well...I often think that gets forgotten...the whole principle of family being that protective unit, if we forget about it and don't look at it across the whole, we're not being true to that principle."*

**(Research participant, March 2025)**



### Family reunification as a nascent third country solution

Family reunification is a nascent third country solution and complementary pathway for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection, with its origins in the GCR. Participants consistently highlighted, notwithstanding family reunification being a rights-based solution, for family reunification to be a viable third country solution for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection, including UASC, it must evolve and establish itself like resettlement has done over decades. This includes developing soft law, operational guidance and policy to support its implementation.

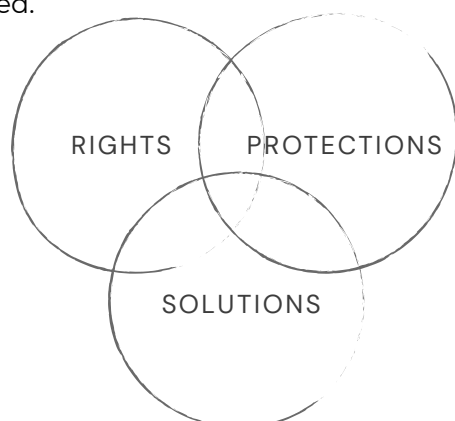
“ I think it (family reunification) is also a pathway of great potential because we see that there are already large numbers of refugees, including UASC, accessing family reunification and that is independent of any great systems to support them. And so, I think we can only imagine the potential volume of beneficiaries or individuals who are able to navigate these pathways...if we can put in place effective systems to support them in their efforts to do so..... We have the models to build on from resettlement, from labor mobility, from other pathways

(Research participant, April 2025)

## 03. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Children’s right to family life and family unity through family reunification is established in international and regional law and supported in its implementation through soft law and policy. So too are the special protections afforded to refugee and migrant UASC given the acute vulnerabilities and protection risks they face.

Despite these rights and protections, the ability of UASC to access family reunification is hampered by legal, practical, administrative and political barriers. Conversely, access to family reunification is also facilitated by good practices and specialised expertise of those working across law, child protection, refugee rights and by refugee-led organisations. There are good practices - programmatic approaches and models - that could be replicated, adapted or expanded.



The research found that family reunification as a rights-based solution, with current good practices and expertise, as well as some momentum from the GCR, is a viable protection pathway and third country solution for UASC. Commitments under the GCR provide important momentum to expand family reunification for UASC, irrespective of the current challenging policy and political environment.

However, family reunification as a third country solution for UASC receives scant attention in policy and scholarship and is a relatively nascent complementary pathway and protection solution. Ongoing investments into building a family reunification ‘ecosystem’ are needed. This includes continuing to develop coordination structures and practice models, and collecting quantitative and qualitative data to build the evidence base and inform good practice and advocacy. This will support the recognition and profile of family reunification as a rights-based, third country protection solution for UASC among policy makers and practitioners across states, international organisations and civil society.

## Research recommendations

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These recommendations for further research are designed to address gaps in quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, and contribute to building the evidence base on access to family reunification for UASC. Future research could be undertaken to:

- 1.** Understand the perspectives of states, including comprehensively mapping laws and good practices in law and policy, especially outside the European geographical context.
- 2.** Understand the perspectives of those with lived experience and ensure their insights are included in policy and advocacy efforts. This could focus on the East Africa context and include Egypt (as a country of first asylum for many UASC from the East Africa region, particularly Ethiopia and Sudan). This would complement research with UASC in relation to family reunification in the European setting and fill an apparent gap in the literature on the experiences of UASC accessing family reunification from 'departure' countries and the geographical region of East Africa. This research should include quantitative data analysis (from states, civil society, UN) to understand the numbers and demographics of UASC in this context, and need for family reunification, alongside qualitative analysis to understand the gaps in accessing sustainable or durable solutions for this cohort.
- 3.** Understand the social and economic impact or outcomes of family reunification for UASC, including the economic contributions of young refugees and migrants to host societies, to inform policy and advocacy efforts.
- 4.** Explore the concept of 'anchor' children from the perspective of states and civil society as it manifests in relation to UASC access to family reunification.
- 5.** Better understand the inclusion of third country family reunification (as a protection solution) in Best Interests Procedures (BIPs).

## Policy recommendations

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The following policy recommendations are designed to build on good practices and expertise and contribute to improving UASC's access to family reunification and ensuring their inclusion in GCR and GCM commitments to expand family reunification as a complementary pathway and third country solution.

- 1.** Further develop and sustain 'multistakeholder' coordination mechanisms to support the expansion of UASC access to family reunification. This includes supporting knowledge sharing, peer support, referrals, advocacy efforts, practice development and systems strengthening.
- 2.** Develop a tailored practice handbook or guidance tools on family reunification for UASC. This would address an identified gap in operational or practice guidance tools specifically in relation to family reunification for UASC, build on existing expertise and good practices and support the application of the CRC in practice in relation to family reunification as the primary sustainable solution for UASC. Such a handbook would also complement similar existing soft law and guidance tools designed to support the application of the CRC in practice for UASC, including Best Interests Procedures, and general guidance designed to support family reunification as a complementary pathway.

**3.** Continue advocacy efforts with states for flexible, protection-centred procedures and systems change to increase UASC access to family reunification.

This includes recognising the specific context and needs of refugees and beneficiaries of international protection in accessing family reunification, including the unique context and needs of UASC. This includes advocacy with states, other decision-makers and civil society to build understanding of the complexity of forced migration for UASC, the interplay between vulnerability, agency and capabilities of UASC, their limited access to protection solutions, the contributions they make to host societies, and the significance of family reunification as enshrined in the CRC as the fundamental protection solution.

**4.** Utilise the GCR and GCM monitoring and accountability mechanisms (GRF Progress Review in December 2025, and GCM International Migration Review Forum 2026, GRF 2027) to progress existing and/or generate new commitments (pledges) from states and civil society in relation to family reunification for UASC, in collaboration with the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN) and the Initiative on Child Rights in the Global Compacts. This includes (i) promoting family reunification rights and needs of UASC and the significance of family reunification as a safe, regular migration pathway that can address protection risks, and (ii) highlighting good practices and challenges in family reunification for UASC.

**5.** Utilising existing treaty body mechanisms, explore and advocate for a CRC Committee General Comment on Family Reunification for UASC. This would complement existing soft law and strengthen the alignment between refugee rights, migrant rights and child rights, in the context of contemporary migration governance architecture.

## ENDNOTES

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1. International Data Alliance for Children on the Move [IDAC], 2025
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