

Review Article

# The Global Phenomenon of Migration and Its Predicament for Unaccompanied and Separated Minors

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## Abstract

Migration as a global phenomenon is characterized by the voluntary and involuntary movement of people from their countries worldwide. People voluntarily and involuntarily leave their countries for various reasons. Those migrants who leave their countries of origin become vulnerable during their journey to the country of destination and during their stay in the host country. The most vulnerable segment of migrants is unaccompanied and separated minors. Unaccompanied and separated minors flee from their countries of origin without the support of their parents due to persecution, international conflicts, civil wars, forced recruitment as child soldiers, harmful cultural practices, natural disasters, severe poverty, trafficking in various forms and contexts, including being sold by parents and the search for better economic opportunities. They face risk factors regarding gender status, health, education, and social welfare. The rights and protection of unaccompanied and separated minors are enforced through international legal instruments. They can be enhanced by initiating practical interventions, including improving coordination and communication among various stakeholders rendering services to unaccompanied and separated minors, strengthening a multi-disciplinary approach, and capacity building of personnel working in the field of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors. Essential to achieving realizing the desired outcome in changing the plight of unaccompanied and separated minors is to facilitate fundamental change in the mindsets of authorities and officials towards foreigners and the development of relevant competency skills and knowledge.

## Keywords

Migration, Unaccompanied and Separated Minor, Vulnerability, International Legal Instruments, Migration Journey, Host Country

## 1. Introduction and Background

The voluntary and involuntary movement of people from their countries of origin to settle in foreign countries is a daily occurrence worldwide. People voluntarily leave their countries of origin for various reasons, including economic and education opportunities, career advancement, etc., to better their lives. Others migrate involuntarily due to multiple factors, which may include fear of persecution, human rights

violations, violence, war, and other factors that may be deemed as threats to their lives and well-being. Involuntary migrants become vulnerable during their journey to their country of destination and during their stay in the host country. One of the most vulnerable population groups among migrants is unaccompanied and separated minors [1, 2] According to the United Nations Children's Fund [3], the number

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of migrant children has increased from 24 million in 1990 to 2000 period to 33 million in 2019.

The unaccompanied and separated migrant children often suffer from a broad range of human rights in the context of migration [4]. These children flee from their countries of origin without the support of their parents due to persecution, international conflicts, civil wars, forced recruitment as child soldiers, harmful cultural practices, natural disasters, severe poverty, trafficking in various forms and contexts, including being sold by parents and the search for better economic opportunities [1, 2]. The unaccompanied and separated migrant children may also suffer from sexual exploitation and criminalization [4]. The violation of unaccompanied and separated migrant children may lead to severe human rights restrictions, including restricted access to education, housing, and health care in the host countries [4]. Furthermore, unaccompanied and separated children may resort to illegal means such as trafficking and smuggling while enroute to the country of destination to escape being identified by authorities [1].

Despite all these horrendous challenges faced by unaccompanied and separated migrant children, the debate about migration and displacement on the global stage is not receiving the necessary attention it deserves [4]. Several international treaties make provisions for the rights of children that shall be implemented during or after the migration process [4]. Despite the prevalence of these international treaties for the protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant children, which many states of the world have ratified, the challenges faced by unaccompanied and separated migrant children have not been effectively addressed. Hence, this study brings about further interrogation to the debate on the vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors in search of effective interventions to ease the challenges.

## 2. Research Question

The research question of the study is: What are the subsequent implications of the migration phenomenon for unaccompanied and separated minors?

## 3. Research goal and Objectives

The research goal of the study is to explore migration as a global phenomenon and its subsequent implications on unaccompanied and separated minors. The objectives of the study seek to achieve the following:

1. Describe and synthesize the vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors and risk factors related to healthcare, education, social welfare, and gender.
2. Provide suggestions on possible responses to address the vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated minors and
3. Discussion and conclusion

## 4. Methodology

The study was conducted through a literature review utilizing a semi-systematic review. The semi-systematic is a narrative review approach that reviews topics conceptualized and studied by other groups of researchers within diverse disciplines [5]. As part of the data collection process, the author searched for topics related to migration and its implications for unaccompanied and separated migrant minors. In searching for the topic, the research looked for keywords such as migration, vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated minors, and healthcare, education, social welfare, and gender aspects related to unaccompanied and separated minors. Furthermore, the author searched for journals and published and unpublished information that is relevant to the topic. The author also searched for abstracts and introductions of journals to determine whether the content of the papers and periodicals identified were the most pertinent to the topic [6]. For data analysis, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns in the form of themes within the text [7].

## 5. Literature Review

During the process of literature review, the following themes were identified, analyzed, and reported: migration as a global phenomenon, unaccompanied and separated minors, vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors, responses to address vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated minors, discussion and conclusion.

### 5.1. Migration: A Global Phenomenon

Migration refers to persons who move from place to place [8]. It is also another form of territorial mobility of the population for various reasons regardless of purpose, period, or regularity from one locality to another [9]. Mobility as a fundamental human condition has been behind population migration for most of history [10]. The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the intensification of migration due to various factors, such as globalization and the evolution of the means of transport and communication [11]. The past 50 years have also been characterized by a significant increase in the number of migrants among the world population, from 81.5 million in 1970 to 272 million in 2019 [12].

Regardless of the point of origin or the subsequent destination, migrants eventually belong to one of the four major immigration streams, which include labor migration, which can be permanent, temporary, or circular [11]. Other migration streams are secondary migration, characterized by family reunification, and humanitarian or forced migration, which features asylum seekers and refugees [11]. Irregular migration is demonstrated through the illegal entry, stay, and employment of persons within the destination country [11]. Children

have always constituted migration flows even though there has been limited availability of data on children in migration [13]. Maioli et al. [14] assert that there is a notable increase in the number of unaccompanied and separated children as a group of immigrants. Unaccompanied and separated migrant children, in many instances, fall into forced and irregular migration streams. They are likely to become asylum seekers and refugees and may use irregular means to enter the country of destination and, in many instances, do not have documentation.

## 5.2. Unaccompanied and Separated Minors

Unaccompanied minors are defined as any persons under 18 years who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by any adults who, by law or custom, have a responsibility to do so [15]. Separated minors are those children who have been isolated from both parents or their legal or customary caregivers but may be under the care of other relatives in the form of adult family members [16]. They might have moved from their countries of origin voluntarily or involuntarily for various reasons [17]. The separation of children from parents and caregivers may be due to a child having suffered violence, the disappearance of parents or caregivers on whom the children may have dependent, or persecution of their parents [1]. Sometimes, children get separated from their parents because of discriminatory custody laws or detention of parents [1].

Many countries consider irregular entry as a criminal offense, and unaccompanied and separated migrant children are often dealt with in the same manner as undocumented adults [18]. However, unaccompanied and separated migrant children are supposed to be dealt with differently from adults due to their level of emotional and social status, which makes them more vulnerable to protection risks and child rights violations [19]. It is for that reason that the human rights principles guarantee human rights for all children, and in the context of migration, unaccompanied and separated minors should be treated as children first. Unaccompanied and separated migrant children have specific needs and rights regarding care, education, and special consideration that other children are entitled to, whether documented or undocumented [2]. Some of the unaccompanied and separated migrant children have special needs and, when they arrive in the host country, require specialized professional services due to teenage pregnancy, severe psychological trauma, depression, and other psychosocial needs [1]. Therefore, because of their inherent specific needs and rights, unaccompanied and separated minors must be afforded specific and specialized professional care.

## 5.3. Vulnerability of Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Minors

These children become vulnerable because of the chal-

lenges they face due to their status of being unaccompanied and separated from their parents and customary and legal caregivers. Unaccompanied and separated migrant children become vulnerable because of the lack of care and protection during the process of migration and settlement in the country of destination. Unaccompanied and separated migrant minors are at risk due to the sensitive physical, mental, and psychological development stages of childhood and adolescence that enhance the risk of being prone to diseases and trauma, exacerbated by isolation from a protective family unit [20]. This subsection examines the challenges faced by unaccompanied and separated migrant children between their home in the country of origin and the intended point of destination.

### 5.3.1. Unaccompanied and Separated Minors During the Migration Journey

A safe journey is far from what many unaccompanied and separated migrants will find themselves subjected to during transit to the envisaged country of destination [18]. The unaccompanied and separated minors often flee their countries of origin through irregular means under dangerous conditions and may undertake the journeys without legal documentation and may subject themselves to human smuggling and trafficking, thereby becoming victims of abuse and exploitation [1, 4]. One of the reasons for these minors becoming vulnerable to human trafficking is the inability to have contact with the families left behind or with the authorities of the transit country or country of destination [1]. Other factors that make them prone to human trafficking are specific profiles of the minor children, such as ethnicity, gender, age, social subsets, economic situation, lack of education opportunities, etc. [1].

During the journey, these children are also vulnerable to robbery, extortion, kidnapping, and physical and sexual violence [4, 21, 22]. Unaccompanied and separated migrant minors may be extorted for smuggling fees and then coerced to work to pay off debts in transit countries and may be abused or exploited [23]. During transit, trafficking often occurs to pursue sexual exploitation, although unaccompanied and separated minors may also be forced to work in sectors such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, or begging [24]. The situation of forced labor may also be imposed on unaccompanied and separated minors for months or years in exploitative conditions during transit as part of debt bondage for the payment of smuggling-related debts [25].

Another state of vulnerability in which unaccompanied and separated migrant minors often find themselves is the absence of state authorities from the country of origin or any other adult providing support ([1]). Consequently, their vulnerability worsens as they face obstacles against the complete and adequate protection of their human and child rights [1]. Unaccompanied and separated migrant minors often experience trauma caused sometimes by witnessing the death of a family member or friend or any acts of violence inflicted on them or others and any other traumatic events that they were subjected to when fleeing their countries of origin [26]. Although it may

become difficult to detect trauma among children, it may manifest itself through symptoms such as anxiety, mood disorders, depression, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress disorder, and interpersonal difficulties. These traumatic experiences can profoundly affect the mental health of these children with a direct impact on children's well-being and development [27].

During transit, children may also experience inhumane and harmful detentions with lasting emotional and behavioral consequences during detention and after detention, regardless of the period of detention [28, 29]. Acute and chronic levels of stress have a devastating effect on the development of the brains of children [30], and unaccompanied and separated migrant minors do not feel safe reporting their state of distress due to lack of support and fear that their safety and protection may be further compromised [31].

### 5.3.2. Unaccompanied and Separated Minors in the Country of Destination

In many countries, unaccompanied and separated migrant minors, upon arrival in the country of destination, are routinely denied entry or are detained by immigration officials [4]. In other situations, especially for those seeking asylum, they are admitted but denied access to asylum procedures or their asylum procedures, or in some instances, their asylum claims are not handled in an age and gender-sensitive manner as some of the unaccompanied and separated girl minors are at risk of sexually gender-based violence [4]. In some situations, unaccompanied and separated migrant children do not have access to proper and appropriate identification, registration, age assessment, family tracing, guardianship systems, and legal advice [4].

In countries of destination, there is often a tension between border law enforcement and a rights-based approach when assessing the health needs of minors due to the criminalization of irregular immigration [21]. There are also reports of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse from border enforcement officials [32] and detention conditions that explicitly violate human rights [21]. Upon arrival in the host country, many unaccompanied and separated migrant children often get subjected to prolonged detention, which is associated with adverse mental and physical outcomes [22, 33]. The justification for these prolonged detentions is the alleged unavailability of child welfare spaces, "flight risks," and age determination disputes, which are often coupled with sleep deprivation, inadequate food or water, and denied medical care [34]. They may also face linguistic barriers, discrimination, economic deprivation, violence perpetuated in the community, and uncertainty regarding the fate of their immigration status [21]. The interviews conducted by asylum officials can be frightening for unaccompanied and separated minors, and for them to be recognized as minors depends on the confirmation of their age [35]. Furthermore, unaccompanied and separated migrant minors may decide not to disclose their age as they would want to proceed with the journey unhindered as agreed

or due to threats from the smuggling arrangements or trafficking circumstances or for the sole purpose of hiding their vulnerability [36]. The long waiting periods for obtaining immigration status and the expiry of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors' rights as children, when they turn eighteen years, may leave unaccompanied and separated minors undocumented or in a state of uncertainty and disempowerment [37].

## 5.4. Risk Factors Related to Healthcare, Education, Social Welfare Services, and Gender

There are risk factors in relation to health, education, and welfare services that many unaccompanied and separated minors often face during transit and in the countries of destination. Getting access to healthcare, education, and welfare, and sensitivity towards gender is essential for children's developmental needs. Failure to provide access to health, education, and social welfare to unaccompanied and separated migrant children may have adverse consequences for their physical and mental health, cognitive capacity, and psychosocial well-being during childhood and adulthood. Failure to consider factors intrinsic to the gender status of the minors may cause more harm, particularly to female minors. In this section, risk factors about health, education, social welfare, and gender concerning unaccompanied and separated migrant minors are examined.

### 5.4.1. Healthcare

Even though unaccompanied and separated migrant children are entitled to the same rights of access to healthcare as national children in the country of origin [38], there are no interventions to address the health needs of migrant refugees and unaccompanied and separated minors [39]. As mentioned above, unaccompanied and separated minors often experience a wide range of traumatic events that result in mental health conditions. According to Beier and Fredricks (2023), most unaccompanied and separated migrant minors are physically healthy but require only routine preventative healthcare management appropriate for all children of their age and any sporadic acute care that may be needed for common childhood illness or injury. Be that as it may be, a small percentage of children require more specialized healthcare, either for the already known conditions or conditions that have been diagnosed in the country of destination [40].

Some of the unaccompanied and separated migrant children come from countries with limited infrastructure that could only implement vaccination programs [3] and might not have received the standardized newborn screening regular check-ups, which may lead to a greater likelihood of unidentified asymptomatic conditions that may only be diagnosed in the host country [40]. They may also experience delays in receiving treatment for chronic diseases or severe conditions, which may further deteriorate their health and well-being [40].



Unaccompanied and separated migrant minors who do not receive timely and appropriate health care may not be able to participate fully in school learning and society [40].

#### 5.4.2. Education

All children are guaranteed a human right of access to education [41]. Therefore, unaccompanied and separated migrant children are entitled to have access to education during transit and particularly upon arrival in the country of destination. Adequate education is core for socioeconomic success and dealing with adverse hardships in societies. Unaccompanied and separated minors have specific social needs and emotional needs that quality education can help overcome [42]. Good quality education facilitates social inclusion, economic growth, and innovation [41], and it is a social investment for unaccompanied and separated migrant children in the long term [43].

Access is a prerequisite for any successful educational journey, and in some situations, access to education is limited to unaccompanied and separated migrant children. According to [41], there is a difference between obligation and the right to education. Although the right to education may sound more positive, it does not translate into being easily implemented by authorities until families and pupils claim that right [41]. Despite the obligation to ensure that unaccompanied and separated migrant children access quality education [41], in schools where there is no existence of obligatory school attendance, the right to access education is denied [44]. Another challenge faced by unaccompanied and separated migrant children in accessing education is the barrier of age limit concerning the transition from primary to secondary education and the prescribed age for remaining in school, which does not consider the probably missed years of education due to war or flight from conflict [41].

Another factor that limits unaccompanied and separated migrant children from accessing quality education is limited education and education gaps [45]. When children arrive in the host country, they have limited literacy in the language of instruction [45], and schools are not designed to meet gaps in education and deal with learners with limited academic capabilities [46]. Attending a school in the host country might encounter barriers such as unwelcoming and hostile school environments, school norms, and preferences by teachers that discriminate against them and the surrounding hostile local, social, and political environment [47]. Unaccompanied and separated migrant children also experience marginalization and stigmatization in the schools where they attend [46]. Other forms of discrimination that act as a deterrent to educational success for unaccompanied and separated migrant children are low levels of teacher support, insensitivity to cultural differences, the lack of understanding of diverse cultures, and negative comments from school staff and other learners [47, 41]. Furthermore, administrative and legal restrictions for unaccompanied and separated migrant children also act as barriers to access education due to undeclared

status [48].

#### 5.4.3. Social Welfare Services

The provision of psychosocial support to unaccompanied and separated migrant children is critical for their well-being, considering the traumatic experiences suffered from the country of origin, during traveling, and in the country of destination. The provision of social welfare services for unaccompanied and separated migrant children by some countries becomes a challenge due to the greater complexity of social needs relating to formal status, health education, and social inclusion that requires significant coordination among service providers [49]. Therefore, countries that provide social welfare services by international law must provide differentiated welfare structures for unaccompanied and separated migrant children [50]. In the coordination of unaccompanied and separated migrant children, the clarity regarding the roles of different service providers is pivotal so that gaps that could be created by role duplication are avoided and any possible harm is minimized [51].

Notwithstanding other role players, social workers play a critical role in the case management of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors. Case management of cases for unaccompanied and separated migrants within the child protection system is a necessary process, and how it is done is a challenge to most social workers [52]. The challenges besetting case management within child protection are the lack of legal documentation, delays in processing documents, and the lack of adequate knowledge by social workers and magistrates or judges about the legal framework and procedures that are followed when processing cases involving unaccompanied and separated migrant children [2].

#### 5.4.4. Gender

Although all unaccompanied and separated migrant minors are subjected to the same protection risks, girls are likely to become exposed to more risks than their male counterparts. According to UNICEF [53], migration is gendered, with gender roles, relations, and inequalities that influence who migrates, how the migration is carried out, and the intended point of destination. Gender plays a crucial role in shaping the risks and threats that males and females may experience during their journey and on arrival, including how they cope and the protection mechanisms in place [53]. Girls can face more challenges than boys in their countries of origin, and these challenges may include lack of access to quality education, risks of child marriage, and gender-based violence [53]. During transit, girls are more vulnerable to risks. Risks are more likely to include deportation, being kidnapped by criminals, facing more extended periods in detention with less access to basic amenities, and being more likely to have started the journey alone [53].

There has been a significant increase in the number of girls in migration who are unaccompanied and separated from their loved ones [55]. Primarily, human trafficking affects women

and children, and girls constitute most of the known trafficking victims worldwide [56]. During the onset of the trafficking journey, the girls might be coerced or instructed by traffickers or smugglers to conceal their age of being below 18 years and pretend to be above 18 years, and fake documents that link girls to old age and may create stories to avoid being identified as children [57]. The sole purpose of concealing the age of girls' smugglers and traffickers is to ensure that girls are kept away from the child protection systems dedicated to unaccompanied and separated migrant children and, in worse scenarios, keep these girl children firmly in the hands of traffickers.

## 6. Responses to Address the Vulnerability of Unaccompanied and Separated Minors

Guidance to address unaccompanied vulnerability is enunciated in various international legal instruments. There are also other possible practical interventions that multiple countries may initiate and develop to advance the provisions of international instruments to ensure the protection and well-being of unaccompanied and separated migrant children.

### 6.1. International Legal Frameworks

International legal instruments discussed in this paper are the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Labor Organization Minimum Age Convention No. 138 of 1977, and the International Labor Organization Convention 182.

#### 6.1.1. Convention on the Rights of the Child

Various international legal instruments address and uphold the rights of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (CRC) [58] is the foundational international legal instrument to address children's rights. According to CRC, a child is any person below the age of 18 years. The CRC (1989) provides the specific minimum standards regarding the treatment of children that shall be complied with by authorities in the respective territories where children reside. In terms of the CRC in Articles 24, 28, and 29, it is obligatory for State Parties to ensure the rights of children to have access to all fundamental needs, such as health and education pertinent to their physical and mental development, culture, and language of the children. When providing these services to achieve these fundamental needs, Article 37(3) states that children should be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human being, which should be appropriate to their developmental stage.

Pertinent to the protection of the rights of unaccompanied and separated minors is Article 2(1), which obliges the State Parties to ensure that the rights of each child within their jurisdictions without discrimination of any kind, irrespective

of the child's or their parent's legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. In addition, Article 22(1) makes it an obligation for the State Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure that a child with refugee status or who is considered a refugee shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and human assistance. Article 22(2) states that the child shall be accorded the same protection given to other children who are permanently or temporarily deprived of their family environment for any other reason. Article 22 (1) obliges the State Parties to develop appropriate measures to protect the child against discrimination or punishment based on status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardian, or family members. Article 3(1) emphasizes the importance of the primary consideration of the principle of the best interest of the child in any decision to be made about all actions to be undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, and administrative authorities of legislative bodies.

#### 6.1.2. International Labor Organization Minimum Age Convention No. 138 of 1977 and International Labor Organization Convention 182

Articles 1 and 2 ensure the effective abolition of child labor and set a minimum age of 15 years and above for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the entire physical and mental development of minors. Article prescribes an age of not less than 18 years for admission of young persons to employment or work which, by its nature or circumstances under which it is performed, is likely to jeopardize their health, safety, or morals. In Article 33, State Parties are obliged to take appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures, to protect children from being made to work in the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and prevent the use of children in the illegal production and trafficking of such substances.

Article 1 of the International Convention 182 commits State Parties to urgently take immediate and effective measures to prevent and eliminate the worst forms of child labor. These forms of worst labor are described in Article 3 as all practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflicts; the use and procuring or offering of children for prostitution for the production of pornography or pornographic performance; the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs; and work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

## 6.2. Proposed Practical Interventions

This paper suggests three practical interventions that can be implemented to improve the care and protection of unaccompanied and separated minors, and these include improving coordination and communication among various stakeholders rendering services to unaccompanied and separated minors, enhancement of a multi-disciplinary approach, and capacity building of personnel working in the field of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors.

### 6.2.1. Improvement in Coordination and Communication Amongst Stakeholders

The coordination of interventions by various stakeholders providing services to unaccompanied and separated migrant minors leads to the sharing of critical information and facilitation of referrals and makes it easier for minors to access fundamental needs [59]. The improved coordination of interventions prevents stakeholders from operating in silos to avoid role duplication and uncertainty in role clarification and delays to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions targeting unaccompanied and separated minors.

### 6.2.2. Enhancement of Multi-disciplinary Approach

Unaccompanied and separated migrant minors have psychosocial, health, legal, educational, and material needs that require assessment and interventions of various disciplines. A team of multi-disciplinary professionals can more effectively and efficiently synthesize information across disciplines in a coordinated approach to support minors and their families [59]. The multi-disciplinary approach may further assist in reducing logistical barriers that discourage families from accessing the specialized services they need [59].

### 6.2.3. Capacity Development of the Workforce

As mentioned earlier, multicultural and linguistic barriers remain a challenge among workers serving unaccompanied and separated minors. Therefore, it becomes necessary to develop linguistic and multicultural expertise and training in trauma-informed and resilience [59]. The specific training may include training officials on the principles and provisions of the CRC, knowledge of the country of origin of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors, appropriate interview techniques, child development, and psychology, cultural sensitivity, and intercultural communication [38]. Due to the shortage of qualified staff, the priority should be the recruitment of the most critical competencies and job responsibilities while introducing professional development and staff care strategies as crucial tools to find and retain staff who are well qualified to serve unaccompanied and separated migrant minors [59].

## 7. Discussion

Despite the existence of international legal instruments, the

rights of unaccompanied and separated minors are still violated by those entrusted to serve them, and inadequate measures and systems to uphold the provisions of the international legal instruments. According to the European Parliament [4], some countries put in place measures for migrants to register with the government before they can access certain public services, which subsequently leads to individuals who do not regularly reside in those countries being inhibited from accessing those services. Due to the lack of information, interpretation, and guidance provided to unaccompanied and separated minors, they are likely to experience restricted access to such services [4]. Some countries lack the procedures to determine the best interest of children, which may lead to many human rights violations, including detention, deportation, as well as separation of children from their parents, which is a violation of Article 3 of CRC.

The deprivation of unaccompanied and separated minors from accessing quality education is a grave concern, as education is critical for determining a secure future. IOM (2016) contends that access to quality education should be applied and continued during all phases of the migration cycle. Unaccompanied and separated migrant minors should attend the local schools where formal education is provided, and in situations when schools are not locally available, education facilities provided for unaccompanied and separated minors should also be opened to other children [61]. Access to quality education should be made available to unaccompanied and separated minors with special needs.

Separation of children from their parents is often associated with short and long-term mental health and physical health issues [33]. Unaccompanied and separated migrant children are entitled to the right to have access to healthcare, the same as the children of the host nation. Under the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health stipulated in Article 24 of the CRC, the health facilities should consider the mental and physical vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors and ensure that the psychological stress and traumas suffered by most of them are addressed [60]. Unaccompanied and separated minors should be provided with mental healthcare that is culturally and gender sensitive [60]. Qualified psychosocial counseling should be provided during the provision of mental health care in healthcare facilities [62].

Despite the challenges faced by officials in the social welfare sector, particularly social workers, there is a global recognition of the demanding nature of designated child protection social workers [63] who should predict the underlying circumstances and make decisions about the safety of the implicated unaccompanied and separated migrant minors [52]. The designated social workers are often expected to discharge their statutory responsibilities within limited time and resources to investigate and reflect, which becomes a constraint on its own [52]. The effectiveness and efficiency of social workers' statutory responsibility roles are further inhibited by the language barrier, which be-

comes a challenge when assisting young minors [64]. While translation resources are available in some situations, they are often limited, and informal mechanisms to assist with translation are used [52]. Furthermore, Westwood [65] argues that even the use of interpretation to assist in dealing with the language barrier could be better, as social workers are always worried about whether children are getting the correct information from the interpreters. Social workers must acquire the necessary competency skills that are appropriate for the management of cases for unaccompanied and separated migrant children in the child protection system [52]. Therefore, social workers practicing in the case management of unaccompanied and separated children require capacitation on relevant evidence-based knowledge and skills to enhance effective interventions.

## 8. Conclusion

The plight of unaccompanied and separated migrant minors is a worldwide challenge. Its prevalence varies from country to country and from region to region, depending on the push and pull factors that propel minors to leave their countries of origin. Unaccompanied and separated migrant minors remain one of the most vulnerable segments of the population within the population cohort of children. Because of being in a state of being unaccompanied and separated from their parents or guardians and being separated while in transit or a foreign country, they are prone to be subjected to gross violations of their rights as humans and as children. A plethora of international legal frameworks were developed to protect the rights of children from any abuse, exploitation, and violations. However, despite the ratification of these international legal instruments by various countries, unaccompanied and separated minors are still subjected to violations of the same legal instruments due to inadequate and lack of systematic measures to uphold and enforce them.

Most countries have ratified international legal instruments, particularly the CRC, and have developed national policies and legislative frameworks per the CRC. However, there are still challenges to establishing fully functioning appropriate structural arrangements and systems to implement what the legislations seek to achieve. Although insufficient financial resources might derail the implementation of these legal frameworks, there is an array of other factors that may inhibit the full realization of the rights and protection of unaccompanied and separated minors. Some of these factors may include negative attitudes towards foreigners, lack of political will from the authorities, lack of coordination among stakeholders, multicultural and linguistic barriers, and lack of relevant competent skills appropriate for dealing with unaccompanied and separated minors. Key to bringing about the desired outcome in changing the plight of unaccompanied and separated minors is to facilitate fundamental change in the mindsets of authorities and officials towards foreigners and the development of relevant competency skills and

knowledge.

## Abbreviations

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ILO	International Labor Organization
ILM	International Organization for Migration
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child

## Author Contributions

Ntobeko Bambeni is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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