**CONCEPT NOTE**

**RCM´s 3rd Ad Hoc Group on Migrant Children**

**(El Salvador, August 2015)**

In response to the challenges related to the surge of unaccompanied Central American migrant children attempting to migrate to the United States, primarily from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, during the first semester of 2014, the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) Member Countries agreed during the XIX Vice-Ministerial Meeting held in Nicaragua in June 2014 to constitute, for the first time, an Ad Hoc Group on Migrant Children.

The first meeting of this Group took place in Guatemala (28-29 August, 2014) with the participation of representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Migration Directorates and Child Welfare Institutions from all Member Countries (except Belize); IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and the Regional Network of Civil Society Organizations for Migration (RNCOM) also participated as observers. During this meeting, Member Countries discussed the trends, actions underway and challenges faced by migrant children in the region, especially considering returning unaccompanied children (UAC) and how to best manage these flows. Furthermore, participants identified specific actions (both at the national and regional level) to respond to the challenges faced by the countries in the region, which were consolidated into four different matrixes related to prevention, protection, reception and psychosocial assistance, and reintegration.

The second Ad Hoc Group meeting took place in Mexico City on 15-16 April, 2015, during which Northern Triangle countries presented their advances and challenges in addressing UAC management and assistance whilst other countries, such as Mexico and Costa Rica, presented examples of best practices in the development of interdisciplinary tools and protocols on migrant children. Member Countries also developed, as part of working groups, per country, general guidelines on how to implement effective mechanism - at the borders- for UAC protection. Participants also stressed the need to build institutional capacity through training sessions on how to best respond, on the ground, to UAC management and specific case scenarios, referring to the importance of exchanging experiences in this field.

The **third RCM´s Ad Hoc Group meeting is scheduled to take place in El Salvador, during the week of 17-21 August** (exact dates to be confirmed). The main objective of this meeting will be to continue supporting the process of making operational the pertinent frameworks and guidelines for UAC migration management, as laid out by the RCM[[1]](#footnote-1).

Specifically, the next Ad Hoc Group meeting will follow up on the agreements reached during the previous meeting in Mexico, particularly to:

* Allow Northern Triangle countries to present the advances accomplished for a multi-disciplinary response to the UAC, with a focus on child protection and the identification and referral of specific cases detected at the borders. The latter as follow up to the protection mechanism strategies developed, by country, during the 2nd Ad Hoc Group Meeting, as well as the efforts implemented in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala during the last months to develop route maps (*hojas de ruta*) to provide effective protection to unaccompanied children during any phase of the migration flow[[2]](#footnote-2), in the framework of IOM´s Regional Mesoamerica Program supported by the U.S. State Department.
* Advance on the drafting of a regional UAC protection manual. This document was reiterated as a high-priority during the second 2nd meeting of the RCM´s Ad Hoc´s Group on Migrant Children in April 2015. The purpose of this manual is to lay-down in practical actions and recommendations the regional protection framework included in the 2014 RCM-approved document, constructed through a collaborative interagency effort: “*Towards a regional integral protection mechanism for migrant and refugee children and adolescents*”.
* Identify major challenges for UAC management in the “Southern (Central American) Triangle” (Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama).
* Advance on how to share key information on UAC, both at the national and regional level, to enable cross-cooperation, monitoring and assessment of trends and specific cases, as well as avoiding revictimization of children by repeatedly asking the same information.

**Regional Workshop for government officials on how to best manage UAC cases**

Prior to the 3rd Ad Hoc Group´s meeting, and following up on the reiterated interest of RCM Member Countries to receive specific and pragmatic training[[3]](#footnote-3), a two-day regional workshop will be organized for government officials to train them on how to best manage UAC cases. The workshop content will focus on better understanding the obligations and guiding principles necessary to guaranteeing the rights of children in the context of migration. Reference will also be made to the main child protection issues that countries in the region are confronted with. To learn from successes and failures in other countries in the region, the participation of experienced OPI officials from Mexico will be encouraged. Reference will also be made to the RCM-approved *Regional Guidelines for the Preliminary Identification and Referral Mechanisms for Migrant Populations in Vulnerable Situations* andthe Guidelines on Return and Repatriation of Children, as applicable. Taking into account the specificities of each country, regional actions for child protection will be discussed so that they may be incorporated into the draft manual that will be presented during the 3rd Ad Hoc Group´s Meeting.

1. For example, taking into consideration the *Regional Guidelines for the Preliminary Identification and Referral Mechanisms for Migrant Populations in Vulnerable Situations (2013)* and document: *Towards a regional integral protection mechanism for migrant and refugee children and adolescents (2014).* To date, RCM has also developed a) Guidelines for the Signing of Multi and/or Bilateral Agreements between Countries for the Repatriation of Migrants by Land; b) Regional Guidelines for the Special Protection in Cases of Repatriation in Cases of Repatriation of Child Victims of Trafficking; c) Regional Guidelines for the Assistance of Unaccompanied Children in Cases of Repatriation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Consultation meetings with relevant government and civil society actors were held on 24 March and 30 April in Honduras; 9-10 April in El Salvador; 23-24 April in Guatemala; and 27-28 April in Honduras, with the participation of 131 persons. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As expressed during the last two RCM Ad Hoc Group on Migrant Children meetings. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)