

Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe

Overview of Trends 2017



© UNICEF / IN089362 / ROMANZI



Some
20,000
unaccompanied
and separated
children



arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain in 2017. Although this is an almost 70% decrease compared to 2016, in 2017 the proportion of children arriving unaccompanied or separated (UASC) has increased by 31%.

arrived in Europe in 2017. **4 in every 5** UASC arrived in Italy. On average 86% of children arriving in Italy and Spain are UASC.

benefited from the EU relocation scheme in Greece and Italy by the end of 2017. Among them were **465** UASC. The number of relocated children increased two times in 2017 compared to the previous year - 3,474 versus. 7,763.

7 in every 10 children sought international protection in just four European countries: **Germany** (89,205), **France** (20,970), **Greece** (19,790) and **Italy** (16,309).

Arrivals to Europe in 2017¹

In 2017, **32,963** children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, of whom **19,858** (60%) were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC)². Arrivals of children overall in 2017 decreased by 67% compared to 2016 (100,264). Nevertheless, the proportion of children arriving unaccompanied or separated has increased from 34% in 2016 to 60% in 2017.

Greece

In 2017, **11,032**³ children arrived to Greece by sea, including **1,458** (13%) UASC.⁴ While this is an 83% decrease compared to 2016 (63,920), 72% (8,014) of children arriving in 2017 were registered during the second half of 2017. Between July and December 2017, the number of UASC identified (1,049) was more than double the first half of the year (409).

The majority of children arriving to Greece by sea were from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Afghanistan or Stateless⁴. Most common nationalities of UASC were the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Italy

Among the **17,337** children who arrived to Italy in 2017, **15,779** (91%) were unaccompanied or separated. This is a 33% decrease compared to 2016 (25,846). This decrease is mainly due to the overall drop in the number of people crossing the Central Mediterranean since July 2017. Most children originated from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Bangladesh and Nigeria.

Bulgaria

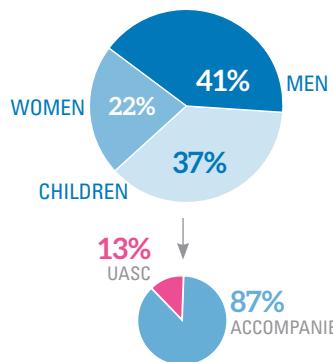
In 2017, **714** children were intercepted at border crossing points and within the territory of the country, an 89% decrease compared to 2016 (6,447). Among those, 27% were unaccompanied or separated children (195) which presents a 93% decrease compared to 2016 (2,768). Most children were from Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan.

Spain

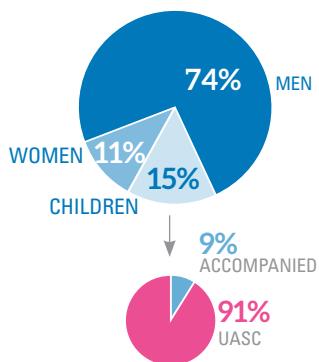
Between January and December¹ 2017, **3,880** children arrived to Spain by sea and land. Based on a response to a parliamentary question, at least 63% of all child arrivals (**2,426**) were UASC. Most children came from Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic, Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Child arrivals in the second half of 2017 were 44% higher than in the first six months.

Demographic of Arrivals, Including Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children

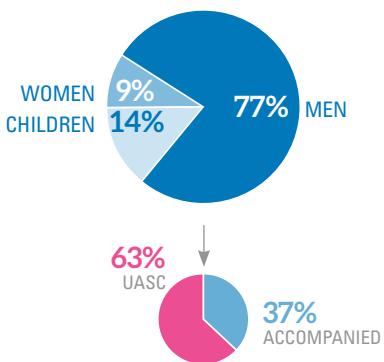
Greece



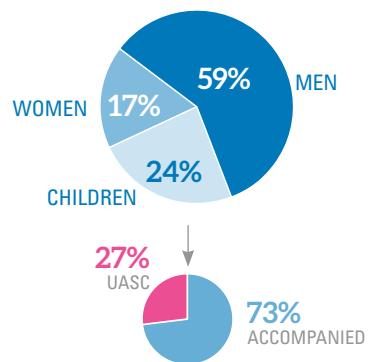
Italy



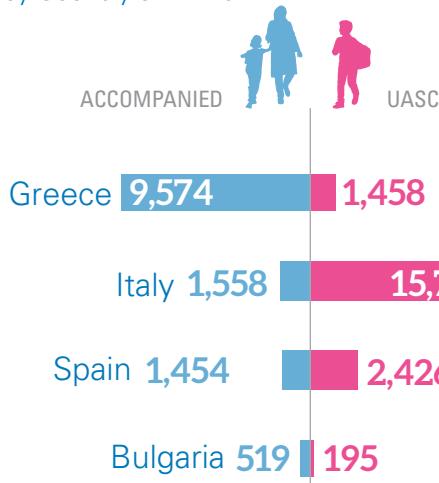
Spain



Bulgaria



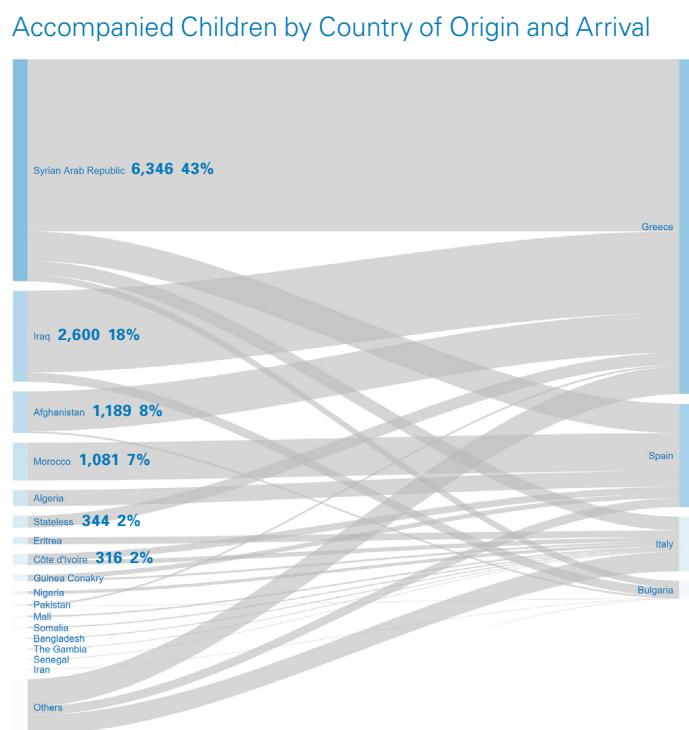
Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival



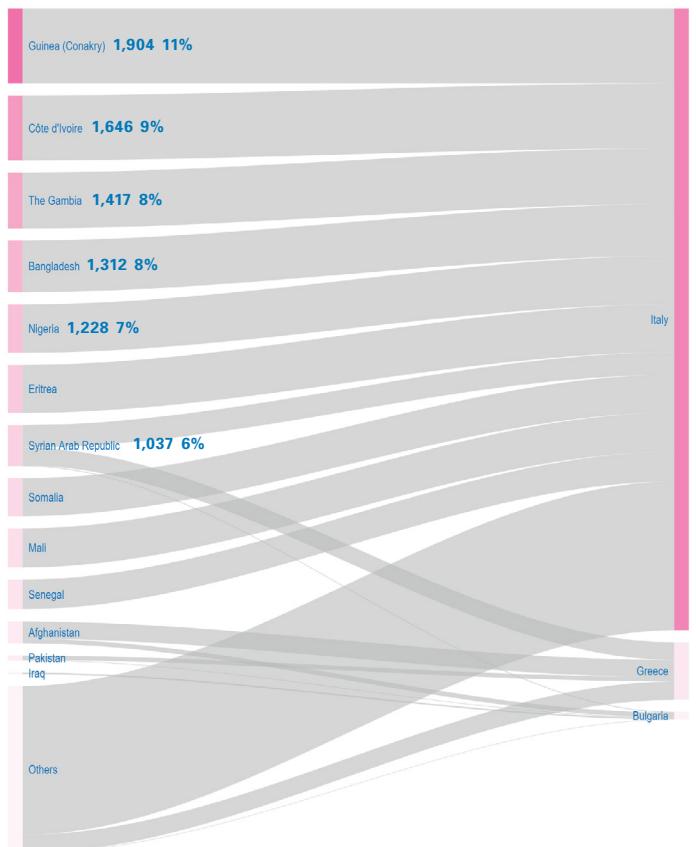
Source: [Hellenic Police](#),
[EKKA](#), [Italian Ministry of Interior](#), [Bulgaria State Agency for Refugees](#), [Bulgarian Helsinki Committee](#), [Spanish Ministry of Interior](#).



Nationality of Accompanied and Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival

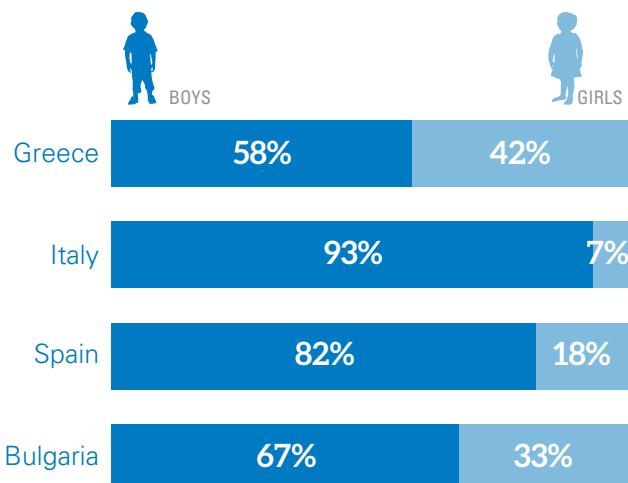


UASC by Country of Origin and Arrival



Gender Breakdown of All Children by Country of Arrival

Overall, the proportion of boys compared to girls among arrivals remains higher (on average 4 boys for every 1 girl).

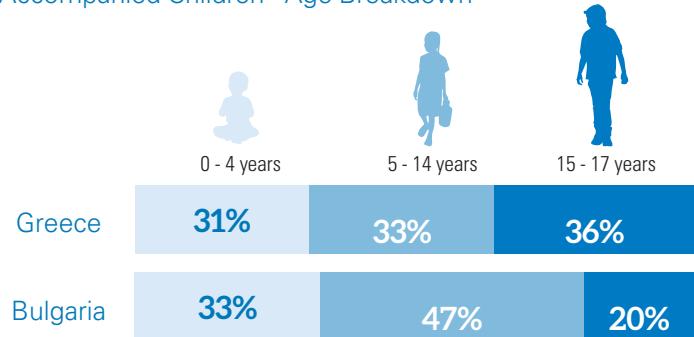


Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Italian Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Spanish Ministry of Interior

Age Breakdown of Accompanied and UASC by Country of Arrival

Among the **10,093** accompanied children who arrived to Greece and Bulgaria, 31% were 0 to 4 years old, 34% were 5 to 14 years old and 35% were 15 to 17 years old. An age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy and Spain is not available.

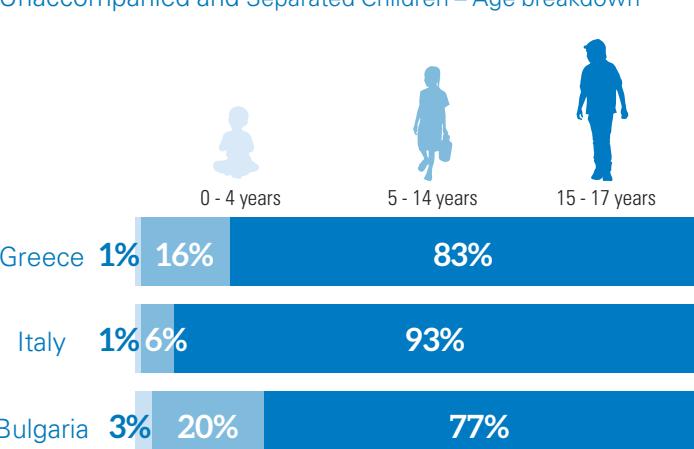
Accompanied Children - Age Breakdown



Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees

The majority of UASC who arrived to Italy, Greece and Bulgaria between January and December 2017 were boys between 15 and 17 years old (93% overall).

Unaccompanied and Separated Children – Age breakdown



Reception on Arrival in 2017*

Greece

- An estimated 21,000 children were present in Greece as of 31 December 2017. Of them, 53% are in urban areas (apartments, hotels, shelters for UASC, etc.); 29% are in accommodation sites and 1% are in safe zones for UASC. A further 12% are in Reception and Identification Centres.
- In total, 438 unaccompanied children were in Reception and Identification Centres (a two-fold increase since September 2017) and 54 were in protective custody/detention (down from 106 in September 2017).
- 1,101 UASC were in shelters for UASC, with an additional 2,290 on the waiting list for shelter. Due to increased arrivals and limited places, the number of children on the waiting list for shelters increased by 88% during the second half of 2017.

Italy**

- 18,303 UASC (93% boys and 7% girls) were present in shelters for UASC, run by State authorities and nonprofit entities at the end of 2017. This is only 500 more than in June, although during the same period of time 6,217 UASC arrived in Italy. 93% of all UASC in the shelters in December were between 15 and 17 years old.

Bulgaria

- 348 children, including UASC, were accommodated in reception centres in Sofia and Southern Bulgaria in December 2017. This represents a two-fold decrease compared to June 2017 and a five-fold decrease compared to March 2017.
- All persons intercepted, including children and UASC, continued to be routinely detained until they claim asylum. Overall, in 2017, children spent an average 10 days in detention before being transferred to a reception centre. In January, May, July and November children spent over 20 days in detention on average.

Serbia

- A total of 1,444 children were present in the country in December 2017, a 44% decrease compared to June 2017 and 51% decrease compared to March 2017.
- Children comprise 34% of the total number of refugees and migrants in the country, 94% of whom are accommodated in state reception and accommodation centres, including 279 UASC.

The reception systems still vary greatly in quality across and within countries, sometimes even posing protection risks. The large number of children who are not in shelters have either moved onwards or found themselves destitute on the streets or in informal accommodation.

* Figures reflect the situation as of end of December 2017

Sources: EKKA-Greece, UNHCR, UNICEF, Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

** For Italy, the calculation is based on the estimated 18,303 UASC accommodated in the government shelters according to the Ministry of Labour and not the total number of UASC who arrived in between January and December 2017.

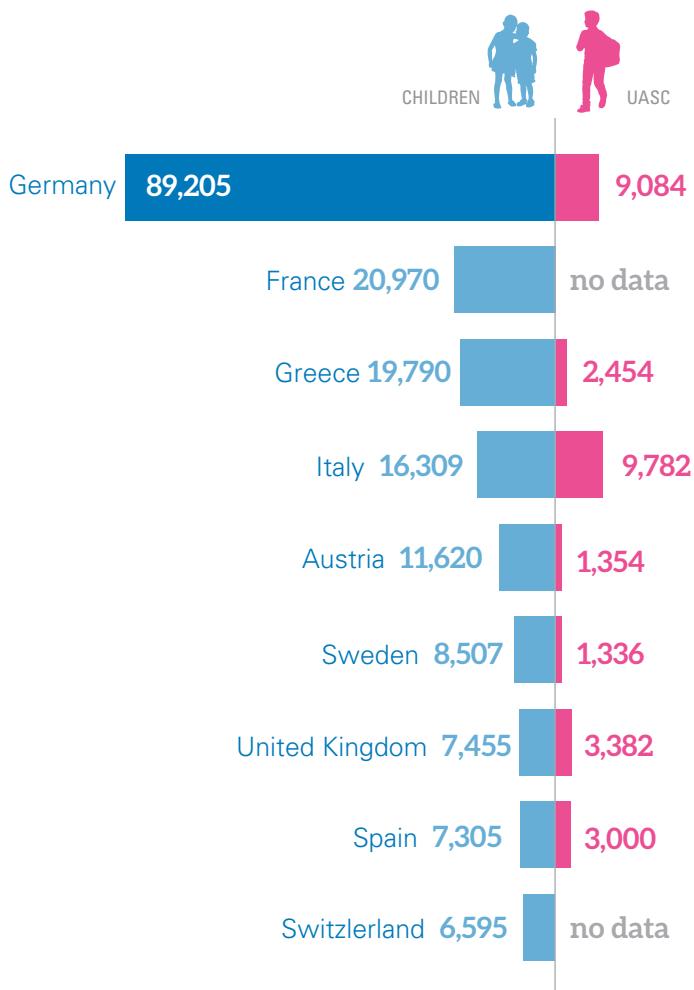
Asylum Applications and Decisions

In 2017, European countries recorded **209,756** asylum claims by children, including **50,325** newly registered asylum claims during the last quarter of 2017. This represents a 47% drop from 2016, when 396,740 children claimed asylum in Europe.

Children make up more than 30% of all asylum seekers across Europe. Half of all child asylum seekers came from just three countries: Syrian Arab Republic (27%), Iraq (10%) and Afghanistan (10%). A total of 42% of all child asylum seekers are girls.

Germany is still the top destination for refugee and migrant children, registering close to half of all child asylum applications in 2017 (**89,205** children of whom 9,084 UASC). France, Greece and Italy also recorded large numbers of child asylum seekers (20,970, 19,790 and 16,309 respectively). Greece also had the highest number of first-time applicants relative to the population.

Asylum Applications Lodged by Children, including Unaccompanied and Separated Children between January and December 2017 – by Country of Asylum



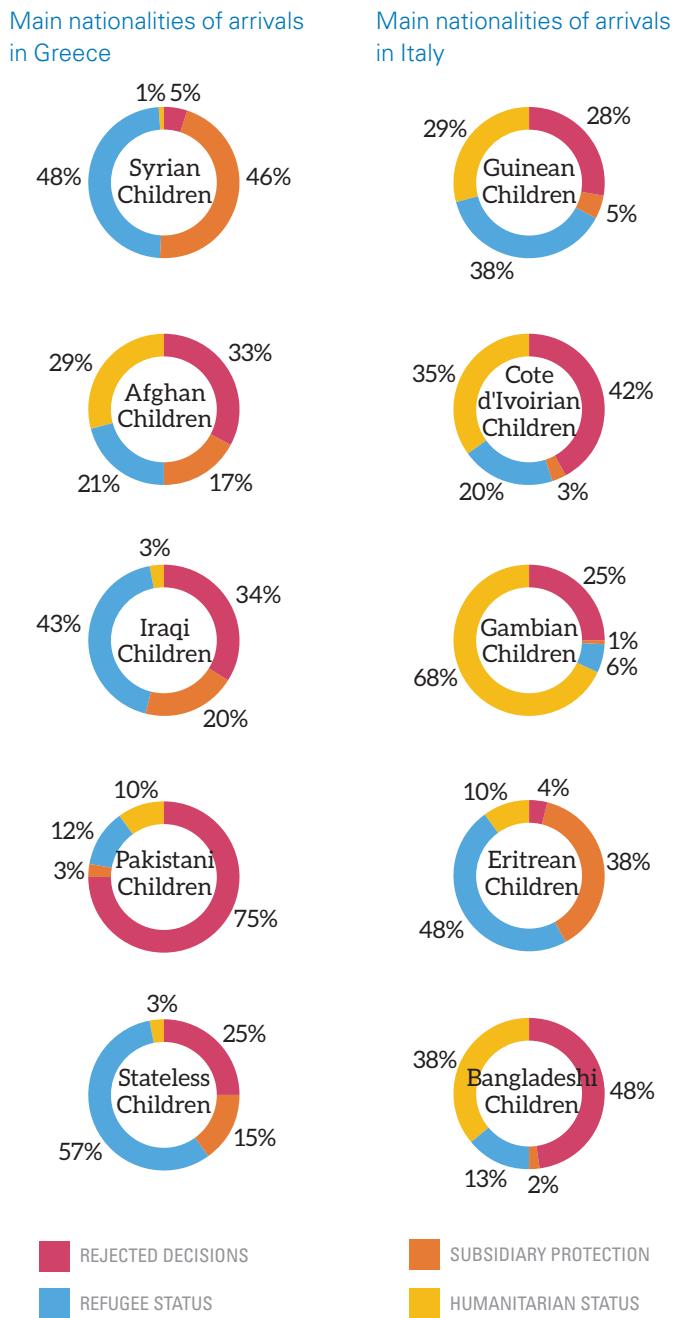
* The difference in numbers of arrivals and asylum applications can be explained by the long waiting times before people can claim asylum, backlogs in national asylum systems, as well as the fact that applications can be submitted by persons who have arrived previously or did not necessarily come through the Mediterranean Routes.

In 2017, a total of **303,360** decisions on asylum claims by children were issued. Of them, **63%** were positive and **37%** rejected. This represents a slight decrease of the proportion of positive decisions compared to 2016, when **69%** of children saw their asylum claims accepted. Among children with positive decisions, **52%** received refugee status (down from 53% in 2016), **37%** were granted subsidiary protection and **11%** received humanitarian status (up from 9% in 2016).

Throughout the year there was a clear trend of countries granting subsidiary protection, and especially humanitarian protection, rather than refugee status. This was visible across nationalities, including Iraqi, Syrian, Afghan and Stateless children, for whom refugee status decisions dropped by 30%, 17%, 9% and 6% respectively just between the third and last quarter of 2017.

Many children saw their asylum claims rejected, particularly Pakistanis (75%) but also Bangladeshis (48%), Cote d'Ivoirian (42%), Iraqis (34%), Afghans (33%) and Guineans (28%).

Decisions on Child Asylum Applications



Relocation

Between October 2015 and December 2017, a total of **33,154** refugees and migrants benefited from the EU relocation scheme. This number includes **11,237** children, out of whom **465** UASC (368 from Greece and 97 from Italy).

More than half of children relocated from Greece were transferred to Germany (24%), France (20%) and the Netherlands (8%). Another quarter was relocated to Sweden (7%), Finland (7%), Spain (6%) and Portugal (5%).

One third of all relocated children from Italy departed to Germany (33%). Eighteen percent of children were transferred to the Netherlands, 11% to Sweden and 10% to Switzerland.

In 2017, a total of 300 UASC children benefited from the relocation scheme, 203 from Greece and 96 from Italy. This is a 80% increase compared to 165 relocated by the end of 2016. During the full duration of the scheme since October 2015, almost 70% of all relocated children were transferred in 2017.

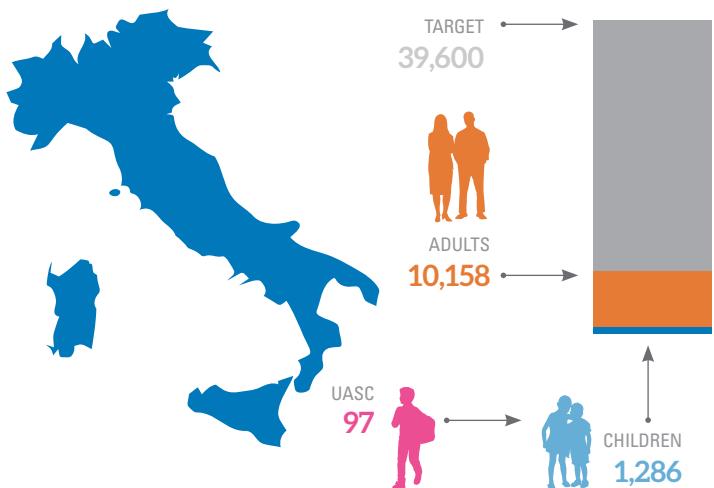
Greece

By the end of December 2017, a total of **21,710⁵** people were relocated from Greece to other EU Member States (14,430 between January and December 2017). 45% of all beneficiaries were children - **9,583** in total, including **368** UASC. The majority, **6,476** children were relocated in 2017 only, a two-fold increase compared to the **3,104** children who benefited between October 2015 and December 2016. In terms of relocations of UASC, 204 were transferred in 2017. This is a 25% increase compared to 164 who benefited from the relocation scheme in previous years.



Italy

Since the beginning of the relocation scheme in October 2015, a total of **11,444** refugees and migrants were relocated from Italy to different EU Member States. **11%** of all beneficiaries were children (1,286), out of whom **97** are UASC. Almost all UASC were relocated in 2017 - 96, while only one was transferred in 2016. Moreover, **85%** of all child beneficiaries were transferred in 2017 (1,079 vs. 192 in 2016 and 13 in 2015).



Only a few Member States of Relocation have made places available for unaccompanied children and many more places are needed. As of 31 December 2017, only 368 unaccompanied or separated children were relocated from Greece to Belgium (20), Croatia (2), Finland (109), France (5), Germany (24), Ireland (26), Lithuania (1), Luxembourg (27), Malta (1), the Netherlands (69), Norway (23), Portugal (9), Romania (1), Spain (36) and Switzerland (15). In addition, 97 unaccompanied or separated children were relocated from Italy to Austria (2), Belgium (12), France (1), Germany (4), the Netherlands (70), Norway (3) and Switzerland (5).

Returns from Greece to Turkey

Of the total returnees (1,484) from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement since the start of 2016 until the end of December 2017, **79** (5%) were children. All of them were returned with their families.

Assisted with Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) to Children and UASC⁶

Between January and December 2017, IOM provided AVRR support to more than 72,000 migrants (36% less than the same period in 2016). 25% of migrants availing AVRR support were children, including 4% UASC. 71% of the AVRR beneficiaries returned from the European Economic Area and Switzerland. Among these, 58% returned from Germany. **27%** of beneficiaries returning from the European Economic Area and Switzerland were children, among whom **2.5%** were UASC.

Children Resettled to Europe

Of the total number of refugees submitted for resettlement (38,881) to Europe in 2017, **53%** were children (29% boys and 24% girls). During the year, 26,468 resettled refugees departed to European countries.⁷

Source: Europe Resettlement 2016, UNHCR

Sources: Hellenic Police, Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), Italian Ministry of Interior, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Spanish Ministry of Interior, Eurostat, BAMF-Germany, IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF

Children's vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation

Travelling alone, long duration of travel, no or low level of education, high cost of the journey (above USD 5,000) and no close family in country of destination are some of the predictors of the higher positive responses of refugee and migrant children's vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation indicators on the migration routes to Europe, a recent IOM study has shown.

Travelling alone - 86% of children who travelled alone reported experiencing events described in at least one of the listed human trafficking and exploitative practices indicators, compared to 63% of adults; 75% of those interviewed in Italy and 27% of those who arrived via Eastern Mediterranean Route. More boys (66%) than girls (50%) travelling without their families on both routes reported experiencing some form of exploitation.

Long duration of travel - children who reported travelling for more than 6 months were more likely to report experiencing some form of exploitation. Children on the Central Mediterranean Route

recorded longer journeys from the departure country (more than 5 months) than those who travelled on the Eastern Mediterranean Route (in average 3 months in more than 70% of cases).

No or low level of education - children with the secondary level of education are less likely (61% of positive responses) to be vulnerable than those with primary (68%) or no formal education (78%).

Cost of the journey - children on the Eastern Mediterranean Route reported paying more than USD 5,000 in 44% of cases compared to 16% on the Central Mediterranean Route. However, children who arrived in Italy are more frequently unable to calculate the total amount paid.

Family at the intended destination country - having a family member in the intended country of destination appears to be a protective factor for refugee and migrant children as they are less likely to report exploitation than those without relatives in the intended country of destination.

(Source: IOM study on Migrant Vulnerabilities to Human Trafficking and Exploitation http://migration.iom.int/docs/migrant_vulnerability_to_human_trafficking_and_exploitation_November_2017.pdf)

Limitation of available data on Children and UASC:

There is no comprehensive data on arrivals (both adults and children) in Europe, especially by land and air, as such movements are largely irregular and involve smuggling networks, which are difficult to track. If collected, data is rarely disaggregated by nationalities, risk category, gender or age.

Reliable data on the number of UASC either arriving to, or currently residing in, different European countries is often unavailable. The number of asylum applications filed by UASC is used to provide an indication of trends but does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the caseload due to backlogs in national asylum systems, onward irregular movements or not applying for asylum at all. In addition, due to different definitions and national procedures and practices, collecting accurate data on separated children specifically is very challenging (e.g. separated children being registered as either accompanied or unaccompanied). It should also be noted that complete data for the period January to December 2017 on children and UASC asylum applications for all EU member states was not available on the Eurostat website at the time when this factsheet was released.

Sources: Hellenic Police, Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), Italian Ministry of Interior, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Spanish Ministry of Interior, Eurostat, BAMF-Germany, IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF

For further information or any questions concerning this factsheet please contact:

UNICEF:
Tsvetomira Bidart
tbidart@unicef.org

UNHCR:
Javed Khan
khanjav@unhcr.org

IOM:
Ivona Zakoska Todorovska
dtmmediterranean@iom.int

Jointly compiled and produced by: