

Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe

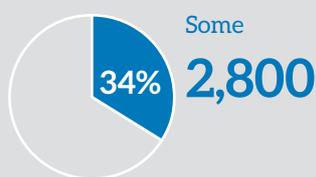
Overview of Trends in January-June 2019



© UNICEF/UNIZ/18434/RF/AAAT



arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain between January and June 2019 (**35% girls and 65% boys**). This is 21% less compared to the first half of 2018 (10,400).



children who arrived in Europe between January and June 2019 were unaccompanied and separated.



Out of the total number of children who sought international protection in Europe between January and June 2019, over **70%** were registered in just four countries: **Germany (39%), France (12%), Spain (11%) and Greece (10%)**.



(24% boys and 27% girls) were being considered for resettlement in Europe.

Arrivals to Europe between January and June 2019¹

Between January and June 2019, **8,236** children arrived in Greece, Spain, Italy and Bulgaria, of whom **2,794** (34%) were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC)². Overall, arrivals of children in the first half of 2019 decreased by 21% compared to the same period in 2018.

Greece

Between January and June 2019, **5,905**³ children arrived in Greece by land and sea, including **994** (17%) UASC⁴. This is an 18% increase compared to children arriving in the same period in 2018 (5,001). The number of children arriving unaccompanied or separated was also 57% higher than in the first six months of 2018 (636). The majority of children, including UASC, were from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Spain

Between January and June 2019, some **1,750** children arrived by land and sea. This is a 20% decrease compared to the first half of 2018, when a total of 2,179 children arrived. Nevertheless, the proportion of children arriving unaccompanied or separated has increased slightly from 65% in January-June 2018 to 69% in 2019. Most children came from Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic, Mali and Guinea. Most of them arrived by sea and rarely applied for asylum.

Italy

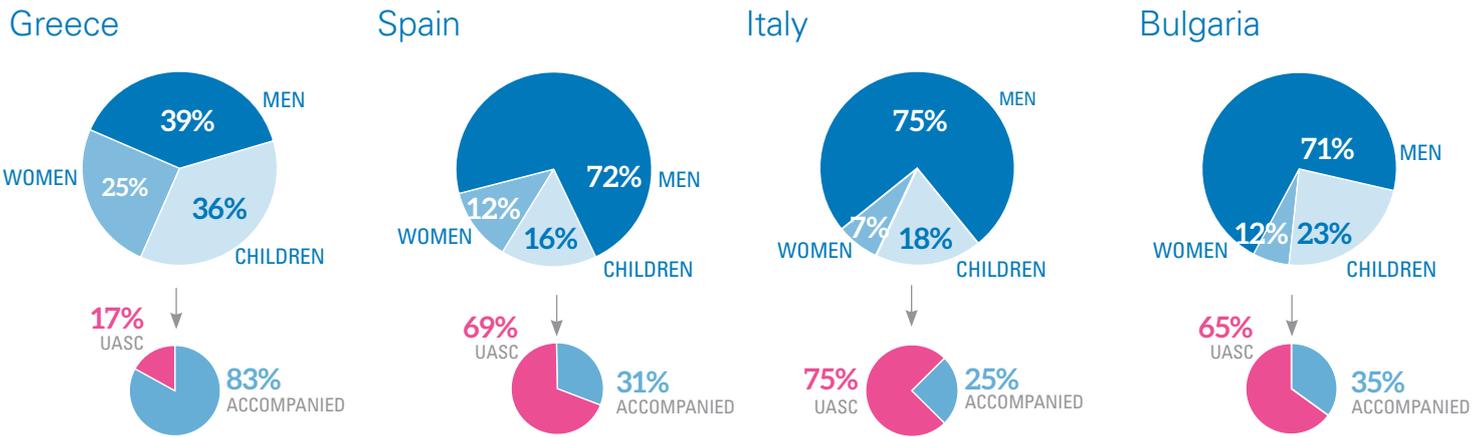
Between January and June 2019, **486** children arrived in Italy. This is a six-fold decrease in comparison to the same period of 2018 (3,096) – in line with the sharp decrease in total sea crossings since July 2017. The proportion of children arriving unaccompanied or separated has also decreased from 84% in January-June 2018 to 75% in 2019.

Most children originated from Tunisia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iraq.⁵

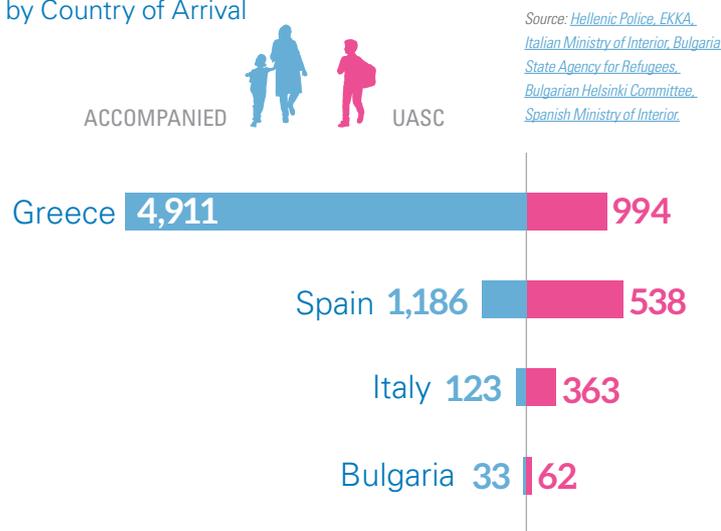
Bulgaria

Between January and June 2019, **95** children were intercepted at border crossing points and within the territory of the country. While this represents an overall decrease of 26% compared to the first half of 2018 (128), the number of UASC (62) nearly doubled compared to the same period in 2018 (35). This meant the proportion of UASC arriving in Bulgaria increased from 27% in the first half of 2018 to 65% in 2019. Most children were from Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.⁶

Demographic of Arrivals, Including Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children



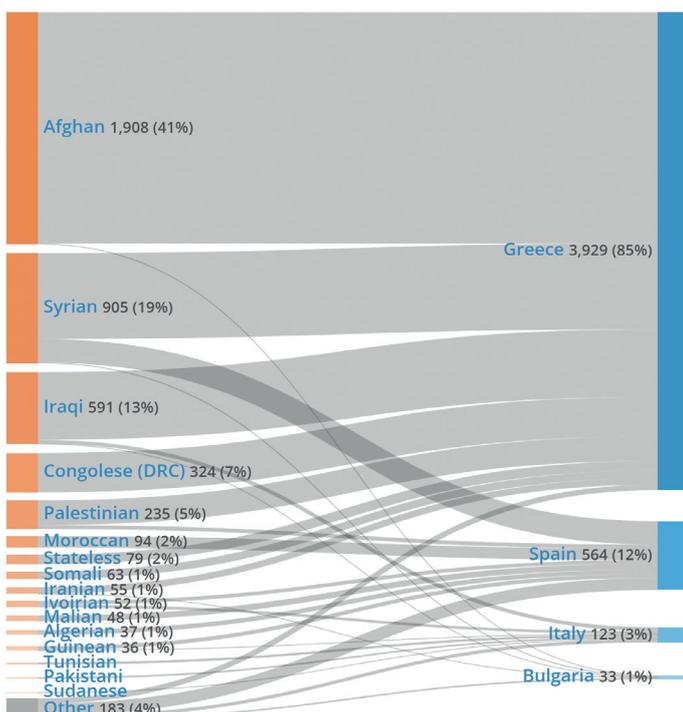
Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival



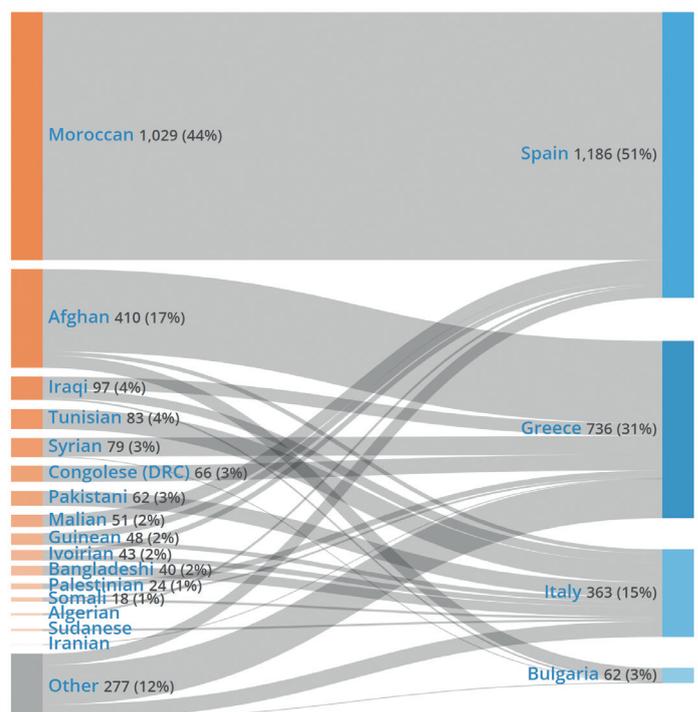
© UNICEF/UN026246/GILBERTSON VII PHOTO

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

Accompanied Children by Country/Area of Origin and Arrival



UASC by Country/Area of Origin and Arrival

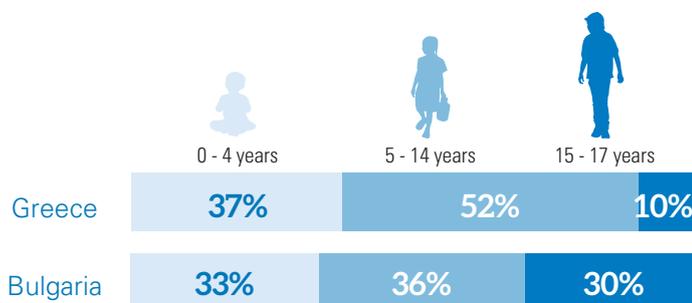


* Data for Greece only reflects sea arrivals as information on nationalities of children arriving by land arrivals is not available.

Age Breakdown of Accompanied and Unaccompanied Children by Country of Arrival

Among the 6,000 accompanied children who arrived in Greece and Bulgaria, 37% were 0 to 4 years old, 52% were 5 to 14 years old and 11% were 15 to 17 years old. An age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy and Spain is not available.

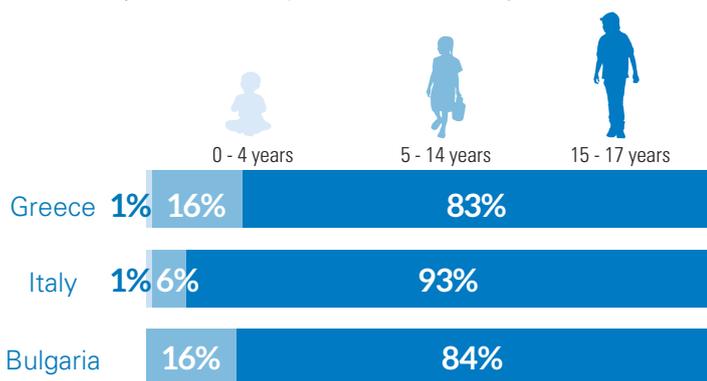
Age Breakdown of Accompanied Children by Country of Arrival



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

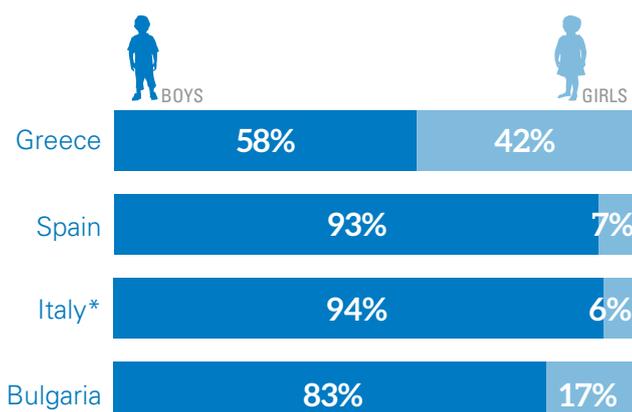
The majority of UASC who arrived in Italy, Greece and Bulgaria between January and June 2019 were between 15 and 17 years old (86% overall). Age disaggregated data on children arriving to Spain is not available.

Unaccompanied and Separated Children – Age breakdown



Sex Breakdown of Children by Country of Arrival

Overall, the proportion of boys among arrivals remains high - nearly two-thirds of children who arrived through various Mediterranean routes in the first half of 2019 were boys. Yet, the proportion of girls arriving to Greece in the same period was significant - 42% of all child arrivals. This is due to the fact that children arriving to Greece are primarily accompanied, and the proportion of girls among accompanied children is overall much higher as compared to children who travel alone.



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

Analysis of available data in Greece, Italy, Serbia and Bulgaria suggests a lack of systematic data collection disaggregated by age and sex, and limited information regarding unaccompanied girls in particular. While it is largely believed that most unaccompanied children arriving in Europe are boys, unaccompanied girls may inadvertently be overlooked due to challenges in identification and registration as such, for example because they are traveling with their husbands, children, or extended or unrelated families.

Children in Reception as of June 2019

Greece

- An estimated **32,000** children were present in Greece as of June 2019, up from 27,000 in December 2018. Of them, 60% live in urban areas (apartments, hotels, shelters for UASC, self-settled, etc.); 26% live in accommodation sites and 1% live in safe zones for UASC⁷. A further 13% are in Reception and Identification Centres, which is a situation comparable to December 2018.
- A total of **682** unaccompanied children remained in Reception and Identification Centres⁸ and **139** were in protective custody/detention (up from 86 in December 2018).
- Out of the total 3,868 UASC present in Greece, **1,862** were placed in dedicated accommodation for UASC (1,010 in long-term accommodation and another 852 in temporary accommodation, such as safe zones and hotel facilities) - a slight increase of 6% compared to December 2018. Despite the progress in creating additional accommodation, however, the increased caseload of UASC in Greece meant that as of June 2019 more than half of all UASC present in Greece (**2,006**) remained outside appropriate accommodation, including 1,060 UASC living in informal/insecure housing conditions.

Italy

- A total of **7,272** unaccompanied children (93% boys and 7% girls) were present and registered in different types of accommodation at the end June 2019. This is a 45% decrease compared to June 2018 - mainly due to a sharp decrease in sea arrivals, as well as adolescents reaching adulthood.
- Most of all registered UASC at the end of June 2019 were in shelters run by state authorities and non-profit entities (79% of the total in second-level reception centres and 5% in first-level reception centres), while 6% were in private accommodation (family care arrangements).
- Additionally, the Italian Government has reported **4,736** registered unaccompanied children to be out of the reception system at the end of June 2019 (in December 2018, this number stood at 5,230).
- There is no information available on accommodation for children with their families in reception facilities.

* For Italy, the calculation is based on the estimated 7,272 UASC registered in reception according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.

Spain

- As of September, **13,400** unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children were accommodated in specialized government-run reception centres across the 17 autonomous communities and the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Regions hosting the vast majority of UASC include Andalusia, Melilla, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Madrid, yet no data is available on their number, age and gender.

Bulgaria

- As of June 2019, a total of **156** children (85% boys and 15% girls), including **54** UASC, were accommodated in reception facilities in Sofia and southern Bulgaria. This represents a 27% decrease in the number of children compared to December 2018, mainly due to continued onward movements.
- In mid-June 2019, a safe zone for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children opened in the reception centre of Voenna Rampa in Sofia. This is the first of its kind in the country, and currently 39 unaccompanied children (mainly from Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan) benefit from its services.

Serbia

- A total of **825** children (18% girls and 82% boys) were present in the country as of June 2019 - a 28% decrease compared to December 2018, but slightly more compared to the caseload in June 2018.
- With **463** UASC present in June 2019, the proportion of UASC among all refugee and migrant children in Serbia increased to **59%**, up from 42% in December 2018 (484). While the reception system for UASC continues to improve, there are an estimated 100 UASC still out of appropriate long-term or temporary care.
- In June 2019, children made up **26%** of the total refugee and migrant population accommodated in state reception and accommodation centres, down from 46% in December 2018.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- As of June 2019, **843** children (26% girls and 74% boys), were present in different accommodation centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina (state-run facilities, IOM-managed reception centres, shelters managed by NGOs) or awaiting the registration of their asylum claim in registered private accommodation - a 43% increase compared to December 2018. Of them, **267** (32%) were UASC, all of whom were boys. No data is available on the number of children among the estimated 3,300 people privately accommodated or squatting in other areas of the country.
- Just over 80 children applied for asylum in the country (43% girls and 57% boys) between January and June 2019.
- 90% of all refugees and migrants continue to be located in Una Sana canton, where restrictions on freedom of movement persist, while access to services and rights remains limited, especially for those residing outside of formal reception centres or NGO shelters.
- Between January and June 2019, of the 11,041 refugees and migrants identified by the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, **227** were UASC.

Montenegro

- Since the beginning of 2019, there has been a steady increase in refugees and migrants transiting through and staying in Montenegro. As of June 2019, **23** accompanied children and **5** unaccompanied children (4% of the total number of refugees and migrants) were present in reception facilities in the country.
- While the caseload appears to be manageable, there is a lack of appropriate accommodation and limited access to basic services for children and families.

Croatia

- As of June 2019, **74** children, predominantly boys (54%) including a small number of UASC, were present in Croatia. In the first six months of 2019, 108 UASC were identified by the Croatian border police, similar to 2018 when 106 UASC were identified.
- Accompanied children were accommodated in two reception centres for asylum seekers, while the child protection authorities mostly accommodate UASCs in juvenile facilities around the country. The children, irrespective of their legal status, are largely entitled to the same protection and care as Croatian children.

Hungary

- As of June 2019, nine unaccompanied children below the age of 14 were accommodated in a designated children's centre, while a total of 32 young adults in aftercare lived in this facility and in two other children's centres.
- In February 2019, the Hungarian Government announced that the designated centre (which is part of a bigger child care institution) would be relocated to another city later this year. However, no further details have been available so far which puts the already understaffed and underfunded centre and the children accommodated there in limbo.
- As of June 2019, a total of 146 children were held in the Roszke and Tompa transit zones (85 boys and 61 girls), which was 55% of the total number of the then-asylum-seeker population. Access to services from the transit zones including education, psychosocial and legal support is limited.

Romania

- Families with children, who do not have sufficient resources for private accommodation, are hosted in reception facilities managed by the national asylum authority. During the first half of 2019, 760 asylum-seekers, including **87** children and **60** UASC had benefitted from accommodation in such facilities. Yet, as of the end of June, around 330 asylum-seekers and refugees, including around 44 children and 16 UASC, were present in reception managed by national asylum authorities.
- Those under the age of 16 are usually referred to national child protection services, while older adolescents typically remain in government-run reception facilities for asylum seekers and refugees of all ages.

Reception systems still vary greatly in quality across and within countries, and when inadequate, can pose 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.

Source: EKKA- Greece, Ministry of Social Affairs- Italy, Bulgaria State Agency for Refugees, UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM

Access to Education for Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe

- Although all children have a fundamental right to basic education, in practice the type, quality and duration of schooling offered to asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children depends more on where they are in the migrant/ asylum process than on their educational needs.
 - All European States that were affected by the 2015–2016 refugee and migrant crisis have made an effort to ensure children can go to school. In Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, for example, **between 50% and 62%** of all school-age refugee and migrant children were **integrated into the formal education system** as of December 2018.
 - **Children of pre-primary and upper secondary ages** (3-5 years and 15+ years) are typically beyond the scope of national legislation on compulsory education and are consequently often excluded from school integration programmes.
 - **Insufficient school capacity** both in terms of resources and staff trained to work with refugee and migrant children, **language barriers, psychosocial issues, as well as limited catchup classes** are among the most common challenges faced by refugee and migrant children in need of education. **Lack of information** on enrolment procedures and transportation to/from remote asylum facilities can also present a barrier.
 - Students with a migrant/refugee background, especially new arrivals, **may initially underperform** academically, especially when they do not receive the required additional support. Yet, **their education performance improves significantly over time** when provided with adequate support, as many show determination to improve their prospects in life.
- For more information see full [Briefing paper](#).*



Asylum Applications and Decisions

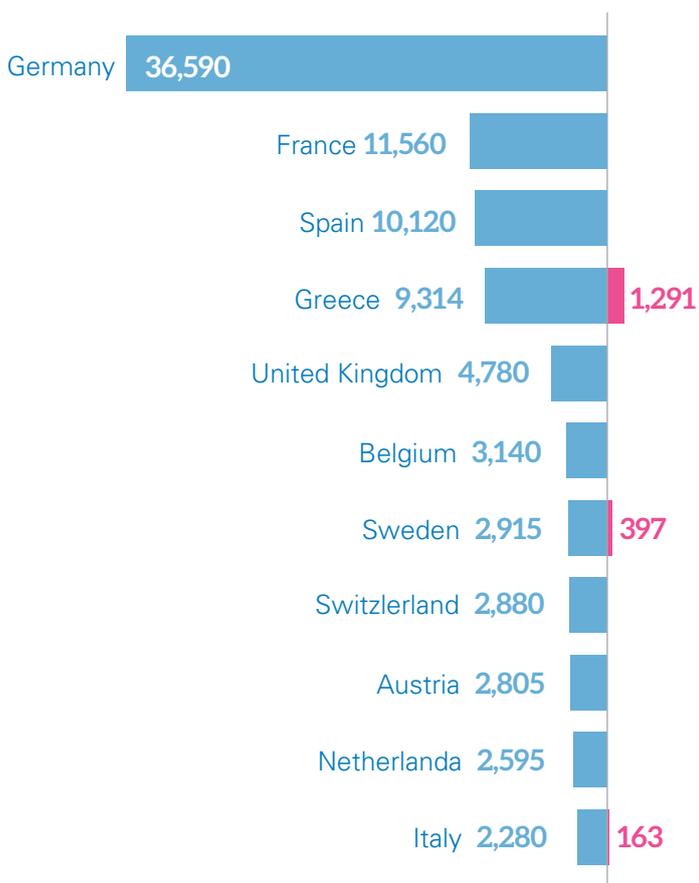
During the first half of 2019, European countries¹⁰ recorded some 297,560 new asylum seekers. Nearly a third of them (**94,040**) were children. This represents a slight increase of **21%** compared to the same period in 2018.

In 2019, the largest proportion of child asylum seekers are from the **Syrian Arab Republic** representing 21% of all child asylum seekers (compared to 28% in all of 2018). Other notable countries of origin among child asylum seekers include **Afghanistan** (9%), **Iraq** (8%), **Venezuela** (5%), **Eritrea*** (4%), **Nigeria** (4%), **Turkey** (3%), **Georgia** (3%), the **Islamic Republic of Iran** (3%) and the **Russian Federation** (3% each).

In general, **45%** of all child asylum seekers in the first half of 2019 were female, and originated from **Nigeria** (51%), **Venezuela** (49%), **Turkey** (48%), the **Russian Federation** (48%), **Syrian Arab Republic** (47%) and **Georgia** (47%).

Similar to previous years, **Germany** remained the top destination for refugee and migrant children, registering 39% of all child asylum applications between January and June 2019 (36,590 children). Other countries that recorded large numbers of child asylum seekers include **France** (11,560 children, 12%), **Spain** (10,120 children, 11%), **Greece** (9,314 children, 10%), and the **United Kingdom** (4,780 children, 5%). Greece remains the country with the highest number of first-time applicants relative to its population, while Spain has marked the sharpest increase in child asylum claims over the first six months of 2019 (double compared to the same period in 2018).

Asylum Applications Lodged by Children, including Unaccompanied and Separated Children between January and June 2019 - by Country of Asylum**



Between January and June 2019, a total of **72,420** decisions were issued by national authorities on child asylum claims across Europe. Yet, due to accumulated backlogs in national asylum systems, over 168,320 asylum applications by children were still registered as pending at the end of June 2019.

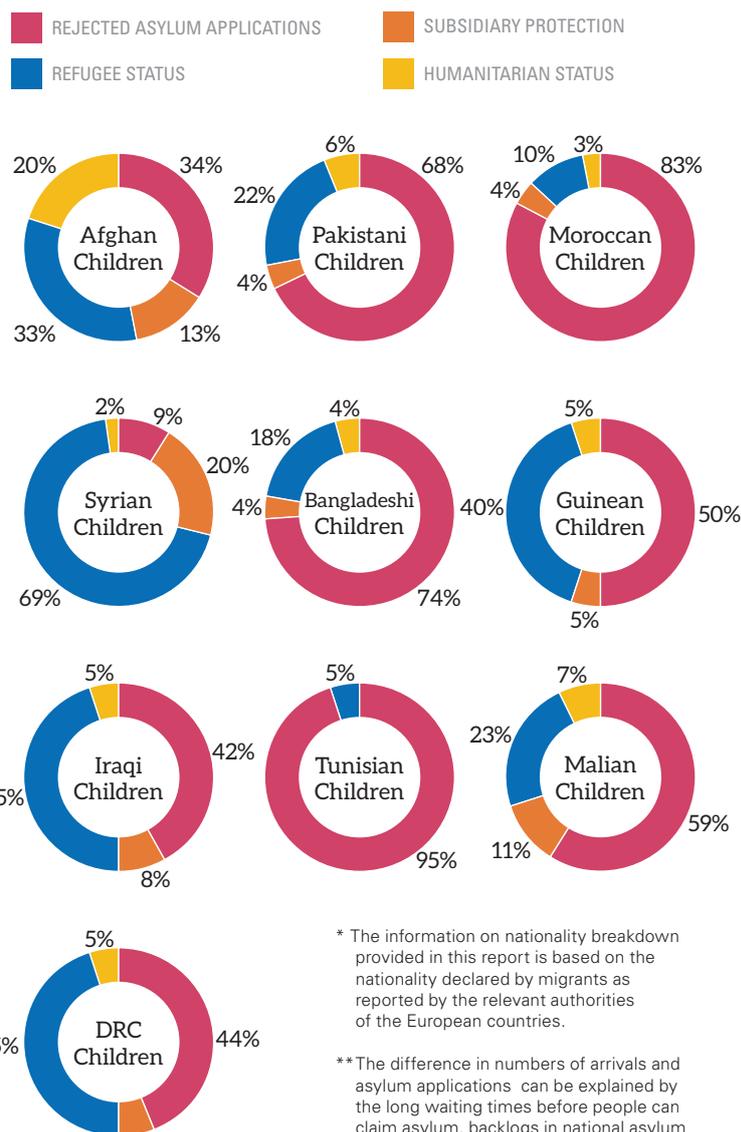
Of all decisions issued in the first half of 2019, **59%** were positive, which is a slight increase compared to 2018 (56%), but significantly lower than in 2017 and 2016, when respectively 63% and 67% of children received positive asylum decisions.

72% of all children who received positive decisions, were granted **refugee status**, while the remaining were provided subsidiary protection. This represents a positive trend over the past years - compared to 63% in 2018, 50% in 2017 and 53% in 2016.

This is particularly visible among Syrian children, for whom refugee status decisions increased from 62% in 2018 to 69% in 2019, while subsidiary protection decisions dropped from 27% to 20%.

Many child asylum seekers received negative decisions, notably among those coming from North African countries (90% on average), as well as children from Bangladesh (74%), Pakistan (68%) and Mali (59%).

Decisions on Child Asylum Applications between January and June 2019



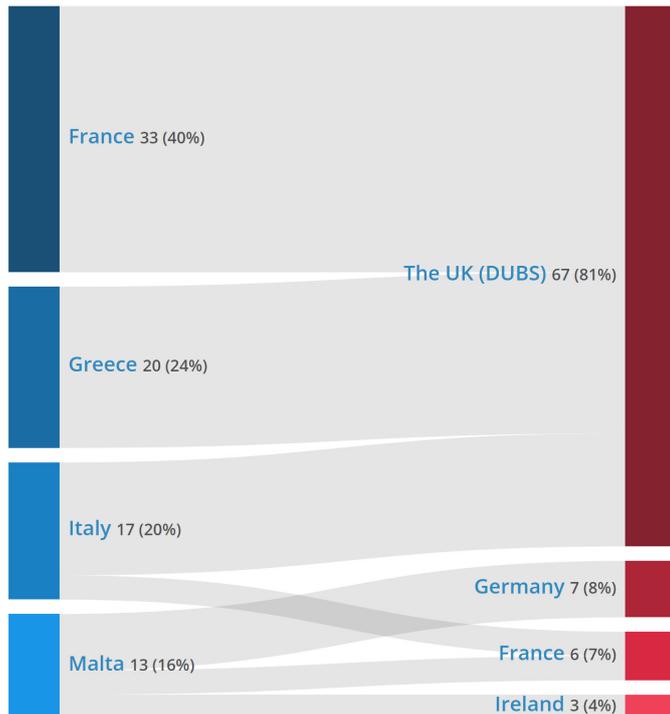
* The information on nationality breakdown provided in this report is based on the nationality declared by migrants as reported by the relevant authorities of the European countries.

**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.

Source: Eurostat, Date: 13 September 2019

Relocation

Despite the official closure of the EU emergency relocation scheme, IOM has continued to support national authorities to relocate migrants and refugees arriving by sea to EU Member States through bilateral agreements between countries involved. Between January and June 2019, a total of 16 unaccompanied children were relocated to Germany (7), France (6), and Ireland (3), primarily from Italy and Malta. Additionally, 67 unaccompanied children were transferred to the United Kingdom within the framework of the DUBS project, mainly from France (33), Greece (20) and Italy (14).



Returns from Greece to Turkey

Of all returnees (1,885) from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement between 2016 and June 2019, only 5% (93) were children. All of whom were returned with their families.

Source: [Returns from Greece to Turkey](#)

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

Between January and June 2019, IOM provided AVRR support to 28,502 migrants globally (5% more than the same period in 2018). In general, 13% of them were children, including 549 UASC. Overall, 14,881 AVRR beneficiaries were assisted to return from the European Economic Area and Switzerland, with 45% (6,715) assisted to return from Germany. 19% (2,701) of AVRR beneficiaries from the European Economic Area and Switzerland were children, including 62 unaccompanied and separated. Over half of the beneficiaries assisted to return from the European Economic Area and Switzerland (7,705) returned to South-eastern and Eastern Europe. Another 19% (2,877) returned to the Middle East and Northern Africa and 17% (2,595) went back to Asia and Pacific region.

Children Resettled to Europe

Of the total 20,200 people being considered for resettlement in Europe as of June 2019, 51% were children (24% boys and 27% girls). Children’s resettlement cases in Europe were most commonly considered by Germany, Sweden, Norway, France and the United Kingdom. The most common countries of origin of children being considered for resettlement included the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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

Definitions:

A **“separated child”** is a child separated from both parents or from his/her previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. This may, therefore, mean that the child is accompanied by other adult family members.

An **“unaccompanied child”** is a child separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by any other adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

[UNHCR](#)

A **“refugee”** is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Article 1 A 1951 Refugee Convention).

An **“asylum seeker”** is a person who is someone who has applied for asylum and is **waiting for a decision** as to whether or not they are a refugee.

Determination of refugee status can only be of a declaratory nature. Indeed, any person is a refugee within the framework of a given instrument if he meets the criteria of the refugee definition in that instrument, whether he is formally recognized as a refugee or not (UNHCR Note on Determination of Refugee Status under International Instruments [UNHCR](#))

A **“migrant”** refers to any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. [IOM](#)

Limitations

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. Where 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).

In 2018, UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, Eurostat and OECD issued a [Call to Action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data](#), which reiterates the fact that to ensure the protection of children affected by migration, data on children should be disaggregated by standard age categories, from early childhood to adolescence; by other demographic and socio-economic characteristics like disability, education level and whether they live with their parents; and by legal status.

These messages were further reiterated and contextualized in UNHCR and UNICEF's suggestions for [Strengthening Current Data on Refugee and Migrant Children in the EU](#).

About the factsheet

This factsheet is jointly produced by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM with the aim to support evidence-based decision-making and advocacy on issues related to refugee and migrant children.

The document provides an overview of the situation in Europe with regards to refugee and migrant children (accompanied and UASC). It compiles key child-related data based on available official sources: arrival, asylum applications, asylum decisions, profiling of arrivals, relocation from Greece and Italy under the EU relocation scheme, as well as returns from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement.

The present factsheet covers the period from January to June 2019 and is produced every six months to provide up-to-date information on refugee and migrant children, including unaccompanied and separated children.



© UNICEF/UN0274745/HAVIV VII PHOTO

Endnotes

- 1 Data on arrivals is partial due to the large scale of irregular movements and reflects only sea arrivals for Greece and Italy. It does not reflect the recent sharp increase of land arrivals in Greece. Data for Spain includes both sea and land arrivals and is based on UNHCR estimates, pending provision of final figures by the Spanish Ministry of Interior. Figures for UASC are only available for arrivals by sea (not for Ceuta or Melilla).
- 2 Separated children are children 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. Unaccompanied children are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. (Inter-Agency Standing Committee)
- 3 Arrival figures for Greece are collected in the framework of UNHCR border activities and are provided by Hellenic Police.
- 4 During the same period of time, a total of 3,404 referrals were made to the Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) based on children identified on islands and mainland Greece, including near the land border with Turkey in January–June 2018.
- 5 Data on arrivals and demographics of refugees and migrants registered in Italy is based on information received from the Italian Ministry of Interior.
- 6 Statistics for Bulgaria are collected by the State Agency for Refugees. Observations on data and trends that are not typically compiled by government institutions are collected by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.
- 7 Safe Zones are designated supervised spaces within accommodation sites which provide UAC with 24/7 emergency protection and care. They should be used as short term (maximum 3 months) measures to care for UAC in light of the insufficient number of available shelter places. Safe Zone priority is given to UAC in detention as well as other vulnerable children, in line with their best interests.
- 8 Also referred to as 'hotspots'.
- 9 Under emergency regulations adopted by the Hungarian government in 2017, unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking children of and above the age of 14 are confined to the transit zones for the duration of the asylum procedure.
- 10 European Union Member States + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland

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

UNHCR:
Edgar Scrase
scrase@unhcr.org

UNICEF:
Tsvetomira Bidart
tbidart@unicef.org

IOM:
Ivona Zakoska Todorovska
izakoska@iom.int