

# Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Europe

## Highlights

- Over 24,000 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) arrived in Italy and Greece to date in 2016.
- 92% of the UASC in care arrangements are boys aged between 14 and 18.
- Only 134 UASC have benefitted from relocation .
- Protection risks faced by UASC include family separation, detention, sexual violence, exploitation, trafficking and severe physical and psychological harm.

## Sea Arrivals

Between 1 January and 31 October 2016, 87,741 children arrived in Italy and Greece, of which **24,135** (28%) were unaccompanied or separated.

Most UASC arriving by sea are boys between 16 and 17 years of age.

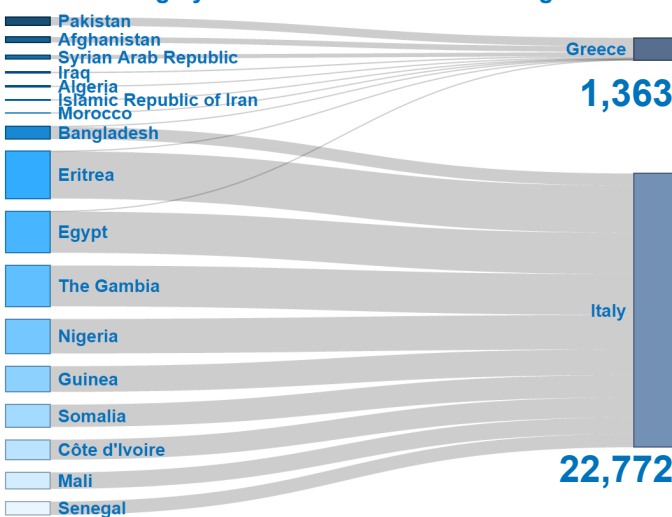
A UNHCR profiling exercise of Afghan UASC in Sweden reported that most UASC left home for protection related reasons including lack of access to human rights and for their own safety and physical protection.

### Italy

Notably, 91% of the 24,902 children who arrived by sea to Italy were unaccompanied (**22,772**). UASC account for 16% of all sea arrivals in the above period, an increase of 110% compared to the same period of 2015.

In 2016, most of the UASC originate from North, East and West Africa.

### UASC arriving by sea in 2016—countries of origin



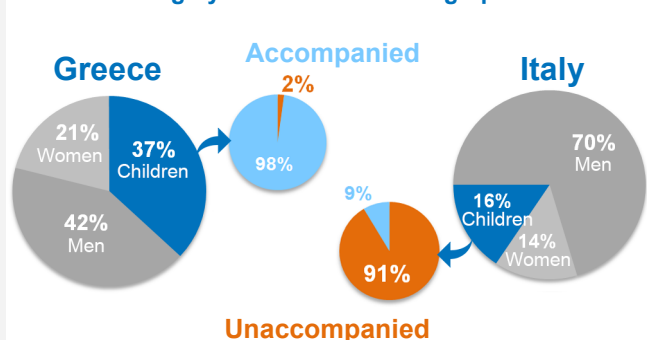
Source— January to October 2016 - data.unhcr.org/Mediterranean \*

### Greece

In the same period, 1,363 UASC children arrived in Greece. These made up 2% of the refugee children who have arrived in 2016.

The largest numbers of UASC arriving to Greece are from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria.

### UASC arriving by sea in 2016—demographics



Source— January to October 2016 - data.unhcr.org/Mediterranean \*

## Protection risks for UASC

- Detention
- Sexual and Gender Based Violence
- Smuggling
- Trafficking
- Sexual exploitation
- Psychological distress
- New family separations
- Lack of education
- No access to recreational activities
- Financial dependency
- Challenges of family unity
- Security risks

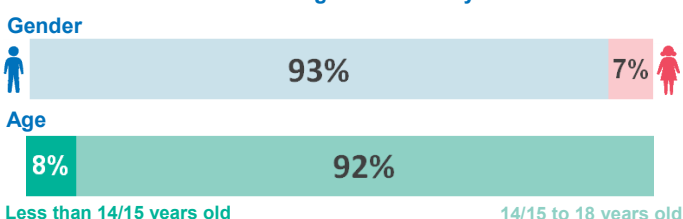
## UASC in care arrangements

Most UASC who have been placed in temporary alternative care in Italy and Greece are boys between the ages of 14 to 18 years old.

There are now an estimated 1,191 UASC in Greece in care arrangements (approximately 50% of the total UASC residing in Greece) and 15,883 in Italy.

There are significant gaps in available and appropriate care arrangements for the UASC in Europe as well as serious concerns regarding UASC in detention.

### UASC in alternative care arrangements in Italy & Greece

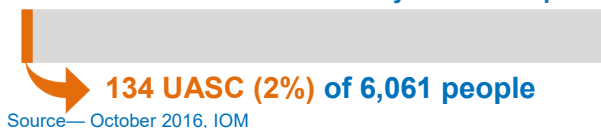


Source— January to October 2016—EKKA in Greece and Lavoro.gov.it in Italy. Note that the age cohorts are approximate as the Italian data also includes 14 year old children.

## Relocation

Only 134 UASC (2%) benefitted from relocation, out of a total of 6,061 people that have been relocated up until the end of October.

### Relocations from Greece and Italy within Europe

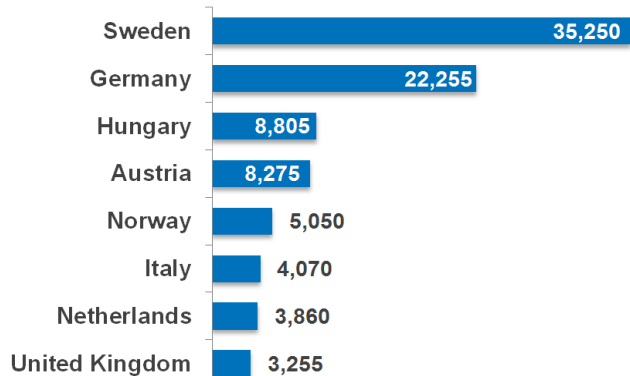


## Asylum Applications

Over 90,000 UASC lodged asylum applications in European Union (EU) Member states in 2015 and UASC accounted for almost a quarter (23%) of all asylum applicants aged below 18 years of age (source—Eurostats). The number of asylum applications do not reflect the total number as not all UASC apply for asylum, there is a backlog of claims to be processed and children move onwards after applying for asylum. Statistics for 2016 are not yet available.

In 2015, the highest number of asylum applications by UASC were registered in Sweden (37%), followed by Germany (23%) and then Hungary (9%), Austria (9%), Norway (6%) and Italy (4%).

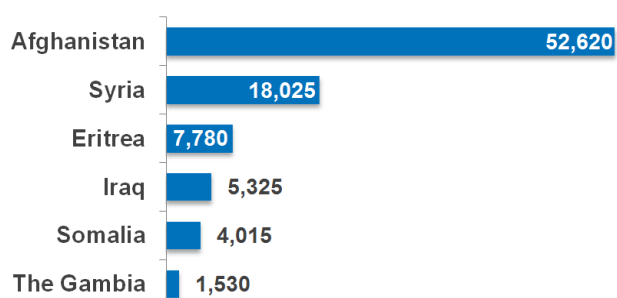
### European countries with the largest number of asylum applications by UASC 2015



Source—2015, Eurostats

Afghan (56%), Syrian (19%) and Eritrean (8%) UASC most commonly applied for asylum in Europe.

### Countries of origin with the most asylum applications in Europe by UASC 2015



Source—2015, Eurostats

## Challenges and gaps

- Barriers to accessing safe/regular pathways to avoid dangerous journeys
- Challenges in the identification process
- Inaccurate age assessments
- Gaps in national systems and service provision such as inappropriate care arrangements and lack of psychosocial support.
- Poor reception conditions which lead to increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation
- Lack of capacity implementing best interest procedures including BIAs and BIDs
- Inadequate family tracing initiatives
- Lack of participation by children in programme planning and implementation
- Absence of functioning case management systems
- Scarcity of qualified independent representation and/or guardians
- Shortage of data and information on the background of UASC and the risks they face

## Response by UNHCR and partners

**Protection and detention monitoring:** regularly monitoring the situation, protection risks children face in key countries and working with governments to address them.

**Alternative care arrangements and alternatives to detention:** actively promoting and developing alternatives for care arrangements and to detention for UASC in key countries.

**Service provision:** identifying and referring children at risk to appropriate service providers, providing legal counselling and identifying safe accommodation.

**Children and Family Support Hubs/ Blue Dots:** UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and other partners developed the Blue Dot Project to provide a minimum set of services at key points along the route. These include restoring family links, child friendly spaces, psychosocial support, legal counselling, safe spaces to sleep for women and children, and an information desk.

**Advocacy:** advocating for child protection standards as well as strengthened legal pathways to Europe.

**Capacity building:** building child protection capacity at the local and national levels.

**Best interest:** Working to ensure that proper BIAs and BIDs are completed and the child's views are obtained in all countries.

**Participation:** conducting participatory assessments, including focus group discussions with UASC, to ensure that their views and opinions are taken into account by local authorities when designing the response.

**Data:** increasing the information base about different girls and boys, their background, their family situation, their experiences during the journey, and their situation in the receiving countries.