

# Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe

## Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated

Mid year Overview of Trends  
January - June 2017



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Over  
**16,500**  
children

arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain in the first six months of 2017 (16% of all arrivals), of whom more than **11,900 (72%)** were unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Arrivals in the second quarter of 2017 were more than double the first quarter (11,100 compared to 5,400).

On the Central Mediterranean Route, **access to education** and **respect for human rights** were the most important factors which influenced children's decision to choose Europe as destination upon departure.



A total of  
**11,400**  
unaccompanied  
and separated  
children

**93%** of all children who arrived to Italy through the **Central Mediterranean Route** were **UASC**.



Almost  
**7,600**  
children

benefited from the **EU relocation scheme** in **Greece** and **Italy** by the end of June 2017, which is more than the total number of children relocated last year. Among them, **109 were UASC**.



**Germany**

received almost half of all child asylum applications in the first six months of 2017 (**44,300**) including **5,700 applications by UASC**.

## Arrivals to Europe in First half of 2017<sup>1</sup>

In the first half of 2017, **16,524** children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, of whom **11,918 (72%)** were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC)<sup>2</sup>.

### Greece

In the first half of 2017, **3,020<sup>3</sup>** children arrived to Greece by sea, including 411 (14%) UASC,<sup>4</sup> a 95% decrease compared to the first half of 2016 (60,089).

The majority of children arriving to Greece by sea were from Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait, while UASC were most commonly from Pakistan, Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

### Italy

Among the **12,239** children who arrived to Italy, **93%** (11,406) were unaccompanied or separated. The number of UASC arriving increased by 7% compared to the first six months of 2016 (10,640). Almost half of them (46%) originated from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh and The Gambia.

### Bulgaria

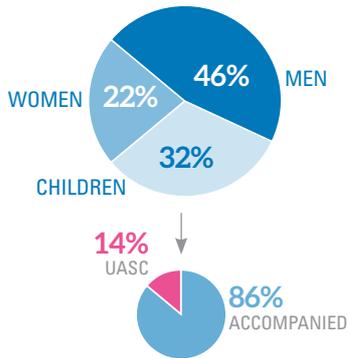
In the first half of 2017, **270** children were intercepted at border crossing points and within the territory of the country.<sup>5</sup> 37% were unaccompanied children (101) representing an eight-fold decrease compared to the first half of 2016. Most children were from Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

### Spain

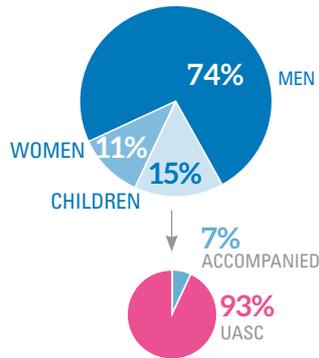
In the first half of 2017, **995** children arrived by sea and land, most commonly from the Syrian Arab Republic (373) and more recently, Morocco (272). Data on unaccompanied children is not available from the Spanish Ministry of Interior.

Demographic of Arrivals, Including Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children

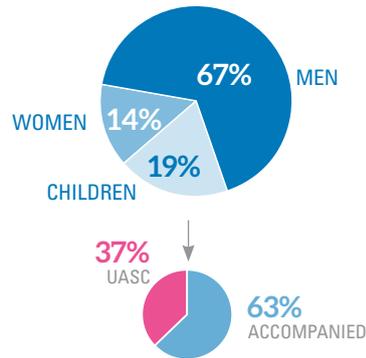
Greece



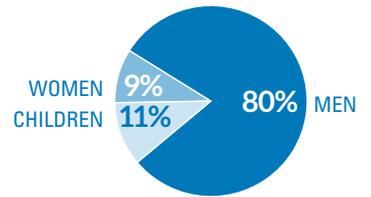
Italy



Bulgaria



Spain

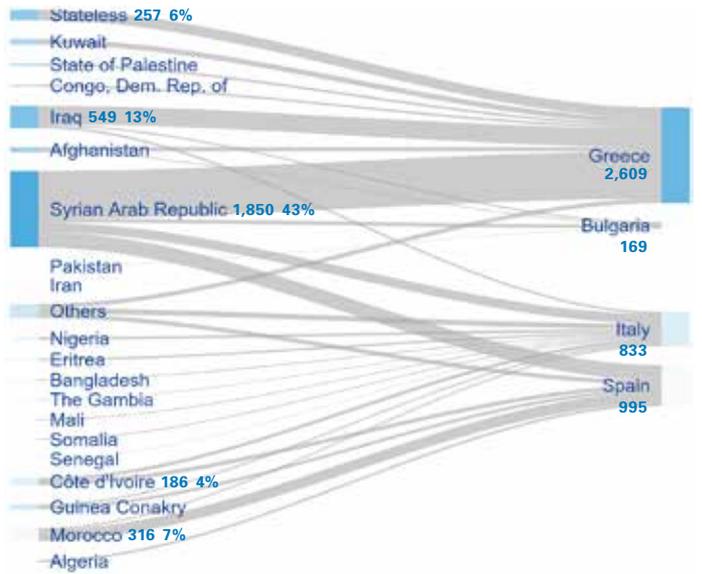
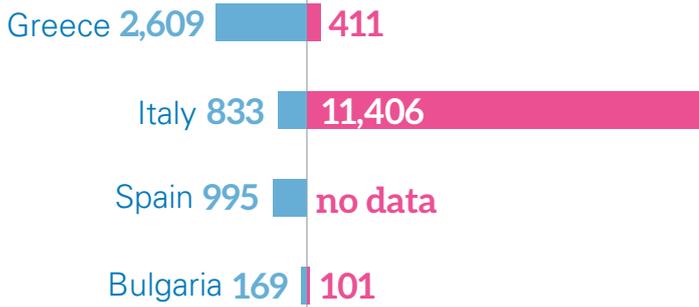


Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival

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



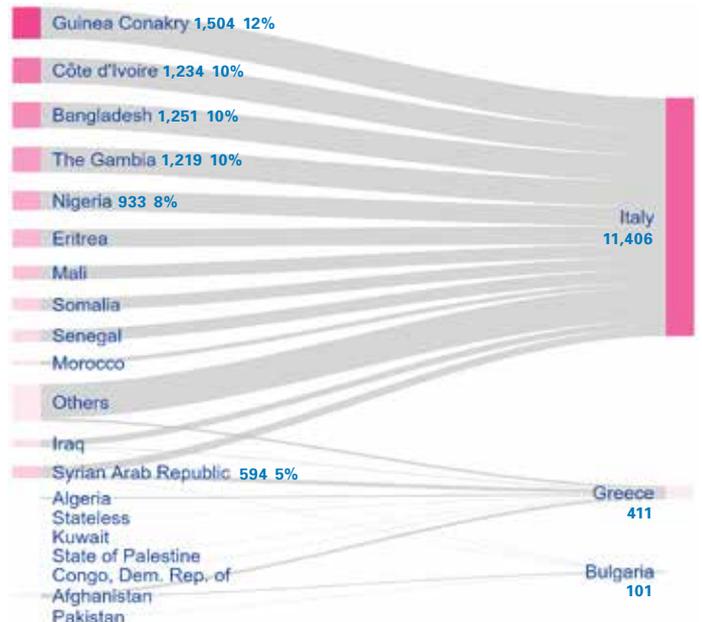
Accompanied Children by Country of Origin and Arrival



Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Italian Ministry of Interior, Bulgaria State Agency for Refugees, Spanish Ministry of Interior.

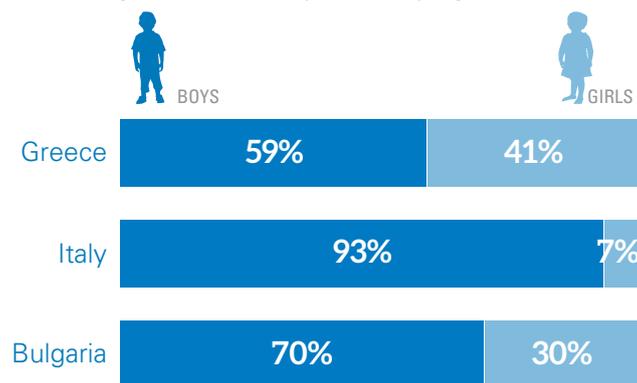


UASC by Country of Origin and Arrival



### Gender Breakdown of All Children by Country of Arrival

In all countries of arrival, the proportion of boys compared to girls remains higher (almost 9 boys for every 1 girl).



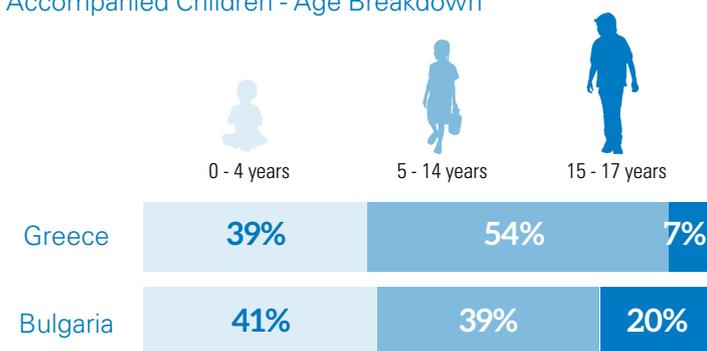
While for accompanied children across all countries this ratio is still 3:2 (59% boys vs. 41% girls), on average, 93% of all UASC were boys.

For Italy, the calculation is based on the estimated 17,864 UASC accommodated in the government shelters according to the Ministry of Labour and not the total number of UASC who arrived in first half of 2017.

### Age Breakdown of Accompanied and Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival

Among the 2,508 accompanied children who arrived to Greece and Bulgaria, 39% were between 0 and 4 years old, 53% were between 5 and 14 years old and 8% were between 15 and 17 years old. An age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy is not available, but their proportion is very low compared to the 93% of children arriving in the first half of 2017 through the Central Mediterranean Route that were UASC.

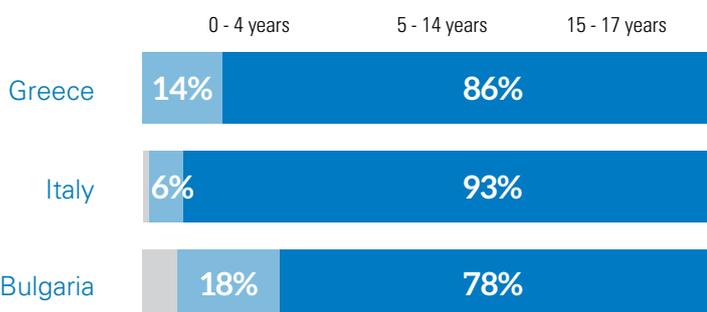
### Accompanied Children - Age Breakdown



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

The majority of UASC who arrived to Italy, Greece and Bulgaria in the first half of 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 18,500 children are in Greece on the mainland and the islands. Of them, 50% are in urban areas (apartments, hotels, etc.), 7% fewer than in March; 34% are in accommodation sites and 6% are in shelters for UASC. A further 10% are in Reception and Identification Centres, a threefold increase since March 2017.
- In total, 217 unaccompanied children are in Reception and Identification centres (up from 184 in March 2017), and 94 unaccompanied children are in protective custody/detention, three times more than in the first quarter of the year.
- 1,131 UASC are in shelters for UASC, with an additional 1,218 on the waiting list for shelter.

#### Italy

- 17,864 UASC are present in shelters for UASC, which are run by State authorities, non-profit and private sector entities, 16% more than in March 2017 (15,458). This includes UASC who arrived in Italy both prior to and during 2017. Sixty per cent of the UASC in the shelters are 17 years old. 5,226 UASC had reportedly left the reception system and were unaccounted for.

#### Bulgaria

- 741 children, including UASC, are accommodated in reception centres in Sofia and southern Bulgaria, a 20% decrease since March 2017.
- All persons intercepted, including children and UASC, are routinely detained until they claim asylum. During the second quarter of 2017, children spent an average of 10 days in detention before being transferred to a reception centre (37% shorter than the 16 days during the first quarter of 2017 but longer than the 8 days in 2016).

#### Serbia

- A total of 2,577 children are present in the country, some 350 less than in March 2017. Children comprise 40% of the total number of refugees/migrants in the country, 94% of whom are accommodated in state reception and accommodation centres.

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 June 2017

Sources: EKKA-Greece, UNICEF, Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgaria State Agency for Refugees



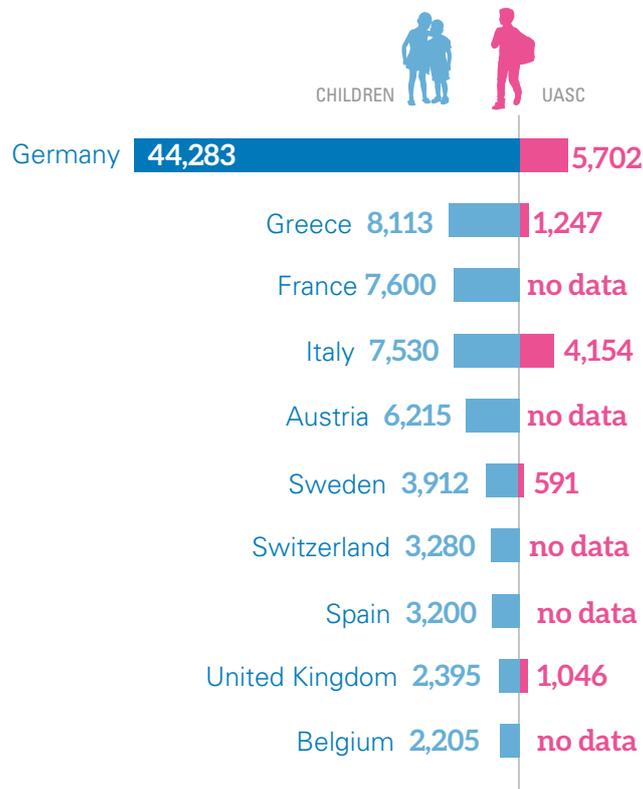
## Asylum Applications and Decisions

During the first half of 2017, European countries recorded **96,882** asylum claims involving children - a third of all asylum claims. This is comparable to the number of applications registered in the first quarter of the year. Half of all asylum seeking children in 2017 came from only four countries: Syrian Arab Republic (26%), Afghanistan (12%), Iraq (9%) and Eritrea (5%).

In 2017, as in 2016, almost half of all children (**44,283**) sought international protection in Germany. Close to **60%** of them are young children (0 to 5 years old) and another **5,702 (13%)** are UASC.

Other countries that received large numbers of child asylum seekers in 2017 include Greece (**8,113**), France (**7,600**), Italy (**7,530**), Austria (**6,215**), Sweden (**3,912**), Switzerland (**3,280**) and Spain (**3,200**).

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

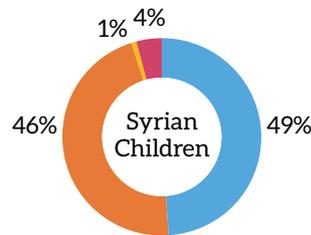


During the first half of 2017, a total of **174,020** decisions on asylum claims involving children have been issued. Of them, **65%** were positive and **35%** rejected (compared to 68% and 31% respectively in 2016). Among children with positive decisions, **50%** were granted refugee status (a slight decrease of 3% compared to 2016), **32%** received subsidiary protection and **17%** received humanitarian status (up from 10% in 2016).

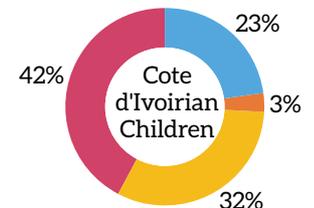
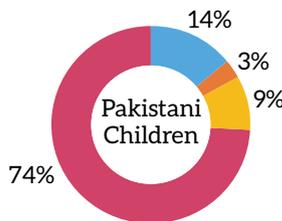
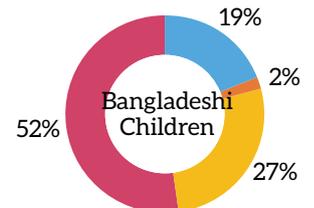
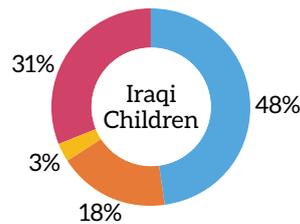
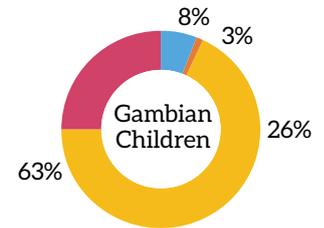
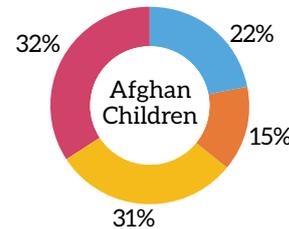
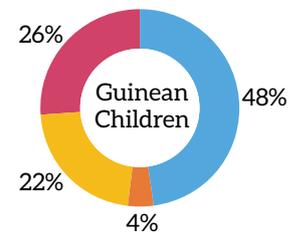
The trend of granting subsidiary protection and humanitarian status rather than refugee status has continued in 2017, including for Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis. Moreover, many children saw their asylum claims rejected, particularly Pakistanis (74%), Nigerians (60%), Bangladeshis (52%), Afghans (32%), Iraqis (31%) and even Syrians (4%).

### Decisions on Child Asylum Applications

Main nationalities of arrivals in Greece



Main nationalities of arrivals in Italy



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## Refugee and Migrant Children's Journey to Europe<sup>7</sup>



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• **Decision-making and mode of travel:** 75% of children interviewed in Italy during February-April 2017<sup>8</sup> made the decision to leave individually. In contrast, children in Greece tend to have taken a joint decision within their family to flee countries marked by years of conflict and generalised violence, like the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Additionally, 85% of children interviewed in Italy reported to have travelled alone and 11% to have travelled with non-family members. Children travelling via the Eastern Mediterranean route were less likely to have travelled alone (57%), but more likely to have travelled with non-family members (24%). In the second quarter of 2017, just 4% of children in Italy and 19% of children arriving via the Eastern Mediterranean reported to have travelled with family members.

• **Intended destination:** Less than half of UASC interviewed in Italy reported that they left home with the aim of reaching Europe, including Italy (46%). The majority had other closer intended destinations, including Northern Africa (20%) or neighbouring countries such as Mali and Senegal (12%).

Once children arrived in Italy, almost three-quarters (73%) of the 449 interviewed by DTM in the second quarter of 2017 expressed the intention to stay in the country. The remainder of the children interviewed cited other European countries as their intended destination, including Germany (7%), France (5%) and the United Kingdom (4%).

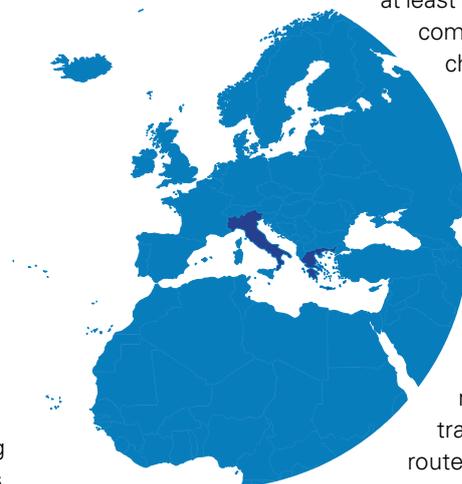
• **Push factors:** 70% of children interviewed reported to have left their country of origin because of violence, conflict or exploitation. In almost one third of cases, children coming from West Africa decided to leave because of violence at home (as high as 47% of children coming from The Gambia). One in five girls overall stated that they left because of early, forced or child marriage. Another 18% of respondents reported that they left their homes due to political or religiously motivated persecution (as high as 31% of children from Guinea).

• **Pull factors:** Among UASC who intended to reach Europe, access to education (38%) and respect for human rights (18%) were important factors which influenced children's decision to choose Europe as destination. In contrast, for children who planned to travel to neighbouring countries in West or North Africa, work was the primary reason to move.

• **Length of the journey:** 56% of UASC spent more than 6 months travelling to Italy; for 23% of them the journey lasted between 3 and 6 months; 13% reported travelling between 2 weeks and 3 months and only 8% reached Italy less than 2 weeks after leaving their departure country. Another survey found that children arriving to Italy travelled for one year and two months, but sometimes this could take up to two years.<sup>8</sup> Children from The Gambia and Guinea took longer to arrive in Italy than, for instance, children from Nigeria and Egypt. The length of the journey was related to the distance travelled, but also to children's need to work to finance the journey. Among children in Greece, the length of travel varied significantly, but was overall shorter than for children arriving to Italy.

• **Risks along the journey:** Almost half of UASC interviewed in Italy (47%) reported to have considered risks they could encounter on their journey before leaving, including being injured, killed, drowned at sea, robbed or imprisoned. Yet, just 1% had considered the risk of sexual abuse or consequences of discrimination.

Based on the 2,580 interviews conducted with refugees and migrants between April and June in Italy, similar to the previous quarter, 89% children interviewed responded positively to at least one of the exploitative practices indicators compared to 77% of adults. Significantly fewer children and adults arriving via the Eastern Mediterranean route responded positively to at least one of the exploitative practices indicators (11% and 10% respectively based on 2,452 interviews).



• **Family separation:** One in six UASC in Italy who left home with a sibling were accidentally separated from them during the journey, mainly prior to reaching Italy. Family separation was also reported as a key challenge for children travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route.

• **Exploitative work:** Although UASC were reportedly aware that they would have to work temporarily along the way to raise enough money to continue their journey, most of them were not aware of the intensity of the work and the often exploitative practices they could face. The majority of UASC traveling along the Central Mediterranean route worked throughout their journey, often in heavy physical labour and most commonly in key transit sites in Niger (25%), Algeria (17%) or Libya (98%).

• **Kidnapping, arrest and violence:** UASC unanimously spoke of their stay in Libya and the sea crossing as the most traumatic parts of their journey. Almost half of them (47%) reported to have been kidnapped against ransom in Libya, and one in four children (23%) reported to have been arbitrarily arrested and held in prison without charges. Children participating in focus group discussions described witnessing daily tortures, killings and sexual violence and reported having been beaten, burned and/or tortured. 63% of children, who went to Libya with the intention to work, left for Italy because they were terrified by the generalised violence in the country. Children in Greece were also exposed to a number of risks along the journey, including violence and exploitation.

Sources: UNICEF-REACH, *Children on the move in Italy and Greece*; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring Surveys Analysis (FMS) [https://www.unicef.org/eca/REACH\\_ITA\\_GRC\\_Report\\_Children\\_on\\_the\\_Move\\_in\\_Italy\\_and\\_Greece\\_June\\_2017.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eca/REACH_ITA_GRC_Report_Children_on_the_Move_in_Italy_and_Greece_June_2017.pdf) <http://iom.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapAndAppGallery/index.html?appid=3af3e9630ab649e99e6970a29aa25f15>

## Relocation and Family Reunification

During the first half of 2017 a total of **3,806** children were relocated from Greece and **468** from Italy, including **109 UASC** (103 from Greece and 6 from Italy).

Overall since the launch of the Emergency Relocation Scheme, as of 30 June 2017, 23,228 refugees and migrants, including **7,582** children, benefitted from relocation arrangements in Greece and Italy under the EU relocation scheme. Among them there were only 275 UASC (268 from Greece and **7** from Italy).

Most children from Greece were relocated to France (22%), Germany (22%) and the Netherlands (8%), while the children relocated from Italy were transferred mainly to Germany (34%), Switzerland (14%), Norway (12%) and the Netherlands (12%).

Although the number of relocated UASC remains low with just 275 UASC benefitting from the scheme as of June 2017, this is a tenfold increase compared to the end of June 2016, when just 26 UASC had been relocated. Most UASC have been relocated to Finland (107).

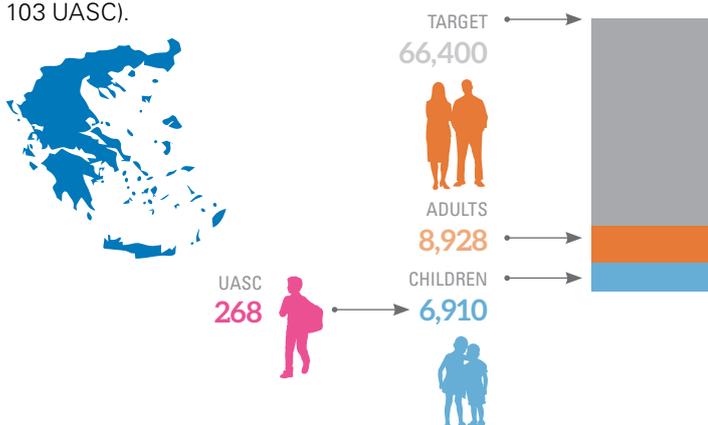
According to newly released Eurostat data, of the 761,000 residence permits for family reunifications reasons issued in Europe in 2016, just 16% (123,204) were granted to people of the 10 most common nationalities of arrival, including 47,786 Syrians. The majority of permits were issued in Germany (mainly to Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans), Sweden (for Syrians, as well as Eritreans and Iraqis), Italy (mainly to Nigerians and Pakistanis) and the United Kingdom (mainly to Pakistanis and Nigerians).

The number of children in family reunion procedures under the Dublin regulations is underreported across Europe, but just in Greece during the first half of 2017 there were 625 requests registered for family reunification.

Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 required the UK government to specify a total number of unaccompanied children to be transferred from Europe to the UK under the "Dubs" scheme. In February 2017, the UK Government announced that the scheme would be capped at a total of 480 children. Only around 200 children have been relocated under this scheme to date, all in 2016.

### Greece

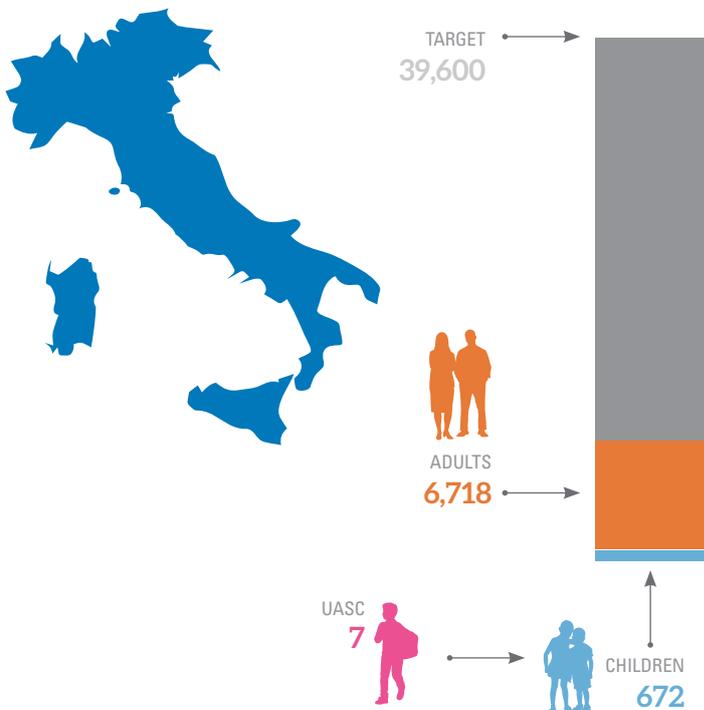
Out of the 15,838<sup>9</sup> people, who were relocated from Greece to other EU Member States by the end of June 2017, **6,910** (44%) were children, including **268** UASC. The majority of children have been relocated in the first half of 2017, totalling 3,806 (55% of all children relocated since the launch of the scheme and including 103 UASC).



### Italy

As of June 2017, only 7,390 refugees and migrants were relocated from Italy, including **672** children (9% including 7 UASC).

Among the 672 relocated children, more than two thirds (468) departed during the first six months of 2017. In contrast, during the same period in 2016, just 7 children benefitted from the relocation scheme.



## Returns from Greece to Turkey

Of the total returnees (428) from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement in the first half of 2017, **25** (6%) were children<sup>10</sup>. All of them were returned with their families.

## Assisted with Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) to Children and UASC<sup>11</sup>

From 1 January to 30 June 2017, IOM provided AVRR support to **38,019** migrants, 25% less than the same period in 2016 (51,031). In 2017, **27%** of migrants availing AVRR support were children, including 5% UASC).

In the second quarter of 2017, IOM assisted **19,088** migrants to return voluntarily from 81 host countries to 135 countries of origin. 73% were returned from European countries and almost a quarter (**24%**) of all beneficiaries were children, among which 5% were UASC. Returns were most commonly from Germany (42%).

## Children Resettled to Europe in 2016

Of the total resettled refugees (18,175) to Europe in 2016, **49%** were children (27% boys and 22% girls). In the first six months of 2017, cases relating to 22,000 refugees were submitted for resettlement to European countries.<sup>12</sup>

Source: Europe Resettlement 2016, UNHCR



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## 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 first half of 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

## Endnotes:

1. Data on arrivals is partial due to the large scale of irregular movements and reflects only sea arrivals for Greece and Italy. Data for Spain include both sea and land arrivals.
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. (IASC)
3. Arrival figures for Greece are collected in the framework of UNHCR border activities and are provided by Hellenic Coastguard and Hellenic Police.
4. During the same period of time, a total of 2,557 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.
5. During the same period of time, 599 children applied for asylum in Bulgaria, of which 253 were UASC. The higher number of asylum applications is due mainly to the fact that there is no systematic registration of people arriving in the country, and some children may have claimed asylum in reception centres without being intercepted or identified by national law enforcement authorities at border crossing points or within the territory of the country.
6. Figures reflect the situation as of the beginning of July 2017
7. Findings in this section are based on interviews with children more than 14 years of age. As a result, UASC on the Eastern Mediterranean Route may be overrepresented and findings may not be representative for all children arriving to Greece.
8. Interviews were conducted as part of the published study by UNICEF-REACH, 'Children on the Move in Italy and Greece', June 2017
9. This number reflects all relocations since the launch of the EU relocation scheme in late 2015. In Greece, 23% or 15,838 out of 66,400 originally foreseen have been relocated, while for Italy, the equivalent figures are 18% or 7,390 out of 39,600 originally foreseen.
10. Since the start of 2016, 1,229 people have been returned from Greece to Turkey, of which 69 were children (6%).
11. The data provided here is provisional and should therefore be considered as an estimation.
12. UNHCR assisted submissions for resettlement - demographic information is only available annually

## 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 first half of 2017 and is produced on quarterly basis to provide up-to-date information on refugee and migrant children, including unaccompanied and separated children.

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