

Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe

Overview of Trends
January - December 2018

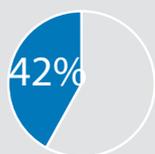


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Some
30,000
children

arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain between January and December 2018 - a 9% drop compared to 2017.



A total of
12,700

children who arrived in Europe in 2018 were unaccompanied and separated.



Some
14,600
refugee children

were resettled in Europe in 2018, mostly to the United Kingdom, France and Sweden.



Out of the total number of children who sought international protection in Europe in 2018, almost 70% were registered in just three countries: Germany (78,280), France (24,135) and Greece (21,770)

Arrivals to Europe between January and December 2018¹

Between January and December 2018, some 30,085 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, of whom 12,717 (42%) were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC)². Arrival of children overall in 2018 dropped by 7% compared to 2017 (32,963).

Greece

Between January and December 2018, 17,123³ children arrived to Greece by land and sea, including 2,369 (14%) unaccompanied and separated children⁴. Despite the overall decrease of child arrivals in Europe in 2018, the number of children who arrived in Greece increased by 55% compared to 2017 (11,032) with the proportion of unaccompanied and separated children remaining the same.

The majority of children, including UASC, arriving to Greece were from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Pakistan.

Italy

Among the 4,278 children who arrived in Italy between January and December 2018, 3,536 (83%) were unaccompanied or separated. While the proportion of unaccompanied and separated children remains comparably high to previous years, this is a 78% decrease from the 15,779 unaccompanied and separated children who arrived in 2017. This is in line with the sharp decrease in sea crossings through the Central Mediterranean route since July 2017.

Most unaccompanied and separated children originated from Tunisia, Eritrea⁵, Guinea, Iraq, Pakistan and Sudan.

Bulgaria

Between January and December 2018, 891 children claimed asylum on arrival in the country, a 28% decrease compared to 2017 (1,145). At the same time, the proportion of children arriving alone was higher - 52% in 2018 as compared to 38% in 2017.

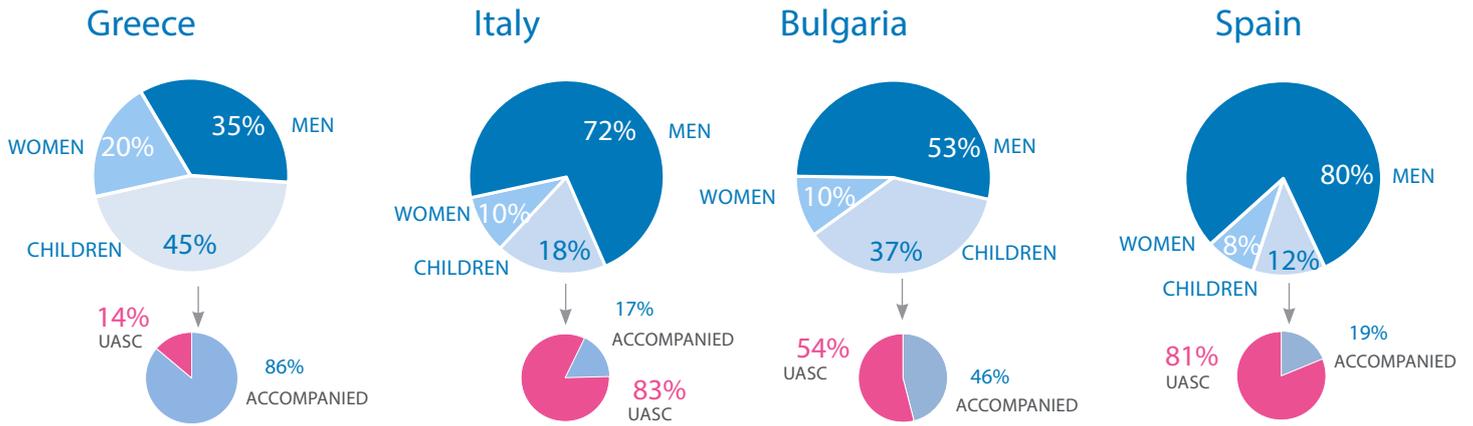
Most children were from Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic⁶.

Spain

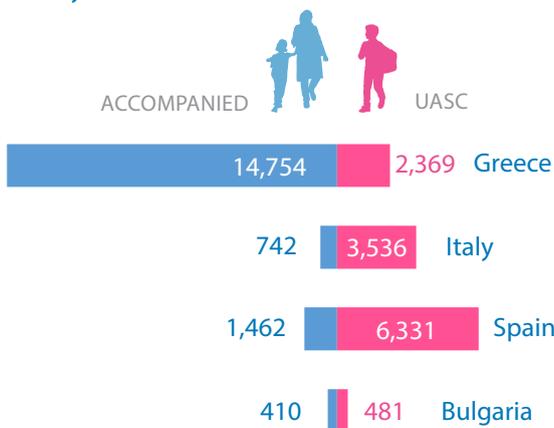
Between January and December 2018, 7,793 children arrived by land and sea. Among those, 6,331 were unaccompanied or separated who had mainly arrived by sea⁷. This is a two-fold increase compared to 2017, when a total of 3,880 children arrived. Moreover, the proportion of unaccompanied and separated children among these also increased from 63% in 2017 to 81% in 2018.

Most children came from Morocco, Guinea, the Syrian Arab Republic, Algeria and Mali.

Demographic of Arrivals, Including Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children



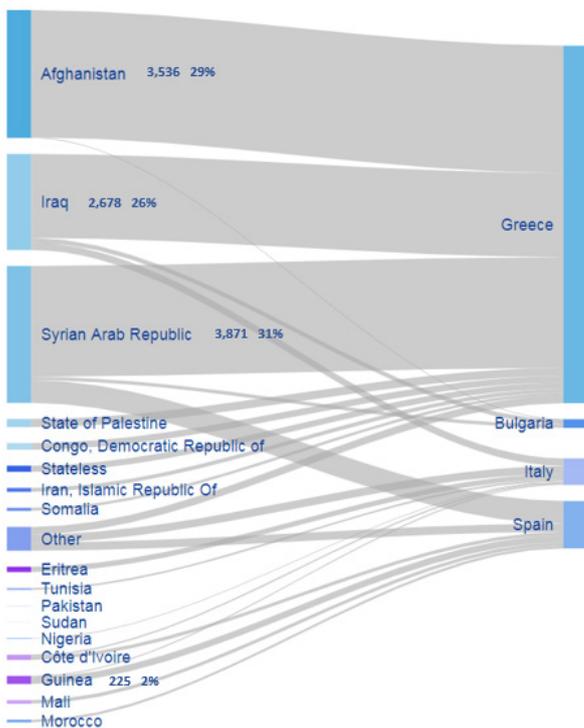
Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival



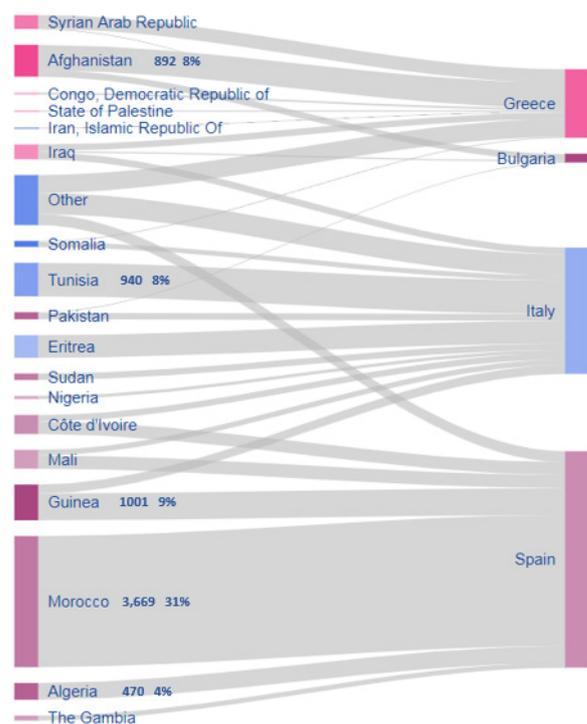
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Nationality of Accompanied and Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival

Accompanied Children by Country of Origin and Arrival



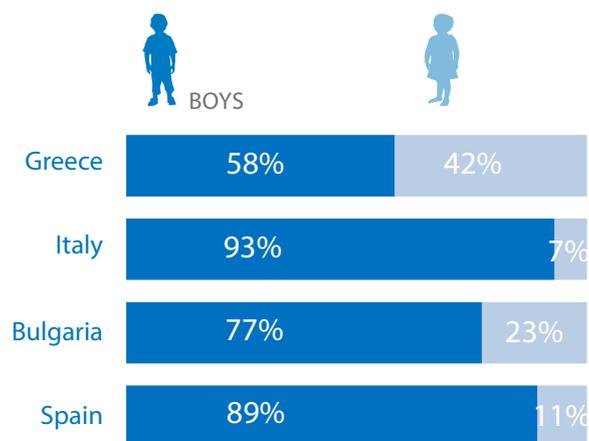
UASC by Country of Origin and Arrival



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

Gender Breakdown of All Children by Country of Arrival

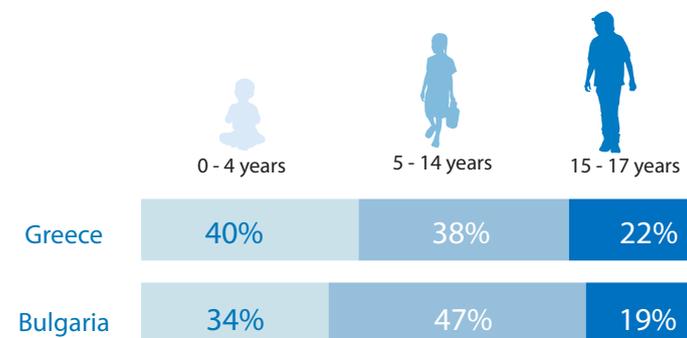
Overall, the proportion of boys among children arriving remains higher than girls. Nearly two-thirds of children who arrived in 2018 were boys, although the proportion of boys arriving in Italy⁸ and Spain remained significantly higher than in Greece and Bulgaria.



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

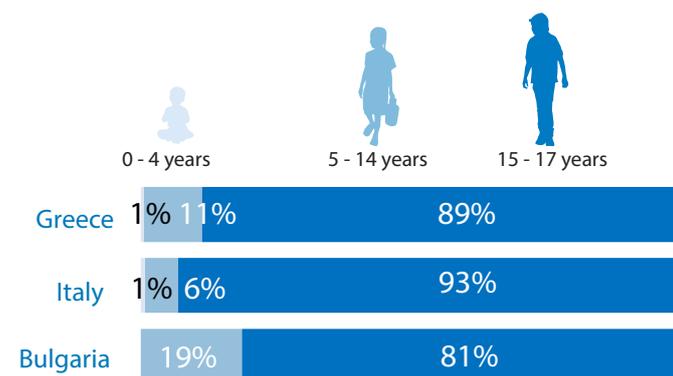
Among the 15,164 accompanied children who arrived in Greece and Bulgaria, 40% were 0 to 4 years old, 39% were 5 to 14 years old and 22% were 15 to 17 years old. An age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy and Spain is not available.

Accompanied Children - Age Breakdown



The majority of UASC who arrived in Italy, Greece and Bulgaria between January and December 2018 were boys between 15 and 17 years old (91% overall).

Unaccompanied and Separated children - Age breakdown



Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Italian Ministry of Interior

Reception on Arrival in 2018

Greece

- An estimated 27,000 children were present in Greece as of 31 December 2018, an increase from 21,000 in December 2017. Of these, 57% live in urban areas (apartments, hotels, shelters for UASC, self-settled, etc.); 29% live in accommodation sites or reception centres and 1% live in safe zones for unaccompanied children⁹. A further 13% are in Reception and Identification Centres on the islands, a situation comparable to that of December 2017.
- A total of 700 unaccompanied children remained in Reception and Identification Centres¹⁰ in December 2018, while 86 were held in detention as a form of protective custody (both almost double compared to December 2017).
- A total of 1,758 children were placed in dedicated accommodation for UASC (981 in long-term accommodation and another 777 in temporary accommodation). Due to an increase in the number of places in temporary accommodation, the capacity to host UASC has increased by 43% compared to December 2017, when only 1,300 UASC were in long-term or temporary accommodation. Despite the progress, however, as of December 2018 almost half of all UASC present in Greece (1,700) remained on the waiting list for accommodation.

Italy

- A total of 10,787 children (93% boys and 7% girls) were present in shelters for UASC run by State authorities and non-profit entities at the end of December 2018. This represents a 13% decrease compared to December 2017, primarily as a result of the overall decrease in sea arrivals. As of December 2018, close to 5,230 children were considered to have left the system (in June 2018, this number stood at 4,700).
- There is no information available on children accommodated in reception facilities with their families.

Bulgaria

- As of December 2018, 213 children, including UASC, were accommodated in reception centres in Sofia and southern Bulgaria, an almost four-fold increase compared to December 2017 (55).

Spain

- At the end of 2018, a total of 13,000 unaccompanied and separated children were present in Spain. This represents a 103% increase compared to December 2017. Most UASC are currently hosted in Andalusia, Melilla, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Madrid. While they are entitled to the same protection and care as Spanish children, their reception conditions may vary significantly from one location to another due to the decentralized nature of the national child protection system.

Serbia

- A total of 1,140 children (880 boys and 260 girls) were present in Serbia as of December 2018, which is a 63% increase compared to June 2018, but comparable to the caseload in early January 2018.
- 484 of these children were unaccompanied or separated (281 boys and 203 girls) - a six-fold increase compared to June 2018, when only 69 UASC were registered as present in the country.
- In 2018 children comprised 46% of the total number of refugees and migrants who have been accommodated in the country.

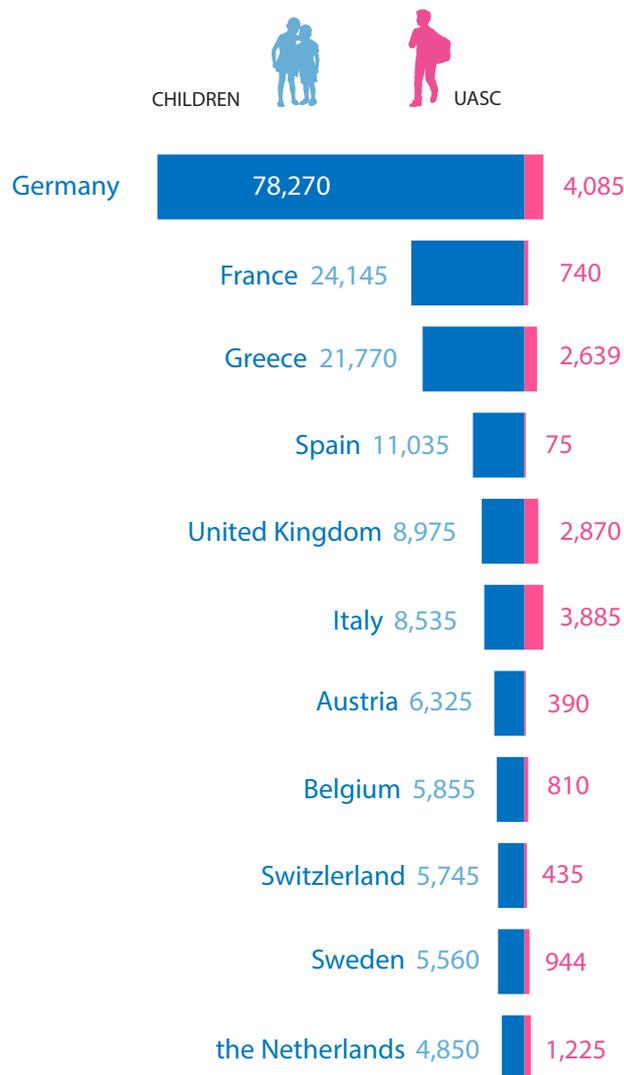
- 94% of refugee and migrant children were accommodated in state reception and accommodation centres. While three new centres and a professionalised guardianship system for UASC were established in 2018, the reception system for UASC is still significantly strained, with limited resources for social workers and quality care arrangements.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- As of December 2018, 590 children (339 boys and 251 girls), were present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, of whom 271 (46%) were unaccompanied or separated (all boys).
- Despite a significant increase in accommodation capacity and the provision of basic services recorded over the course of 2018, there are still no specific facilities for children registered as unaccompanied or separated. Further on, restrictions on freedom of movement in Una-Sana Canton, where around 90% of refugees and migrants (including children) are accommodated, remain a major concern as they significantly limit access to services and rights.

Reception systems still vary greatly in quality and capacity across and within countries. A large proportion of children who are not living in dedicated shelters have either moved onwards, live in informal accommodation, or are homeless, with limited access to basic services and greater exposure to risks of violence, smuggling, exploitation and trafficking.

Asylum Applications Lodged by Children, including Unaccompanied and Separated Children between January and December 2018 – by Country of Asylum



Asylum Applications and Decisions

In 2018, European countries¹¹ recorded some 602,920 new asylum seekers. Nearly a third of them (32%) were children (191,360). This represents an 8% decrease compared to child asylum seekers in 2017.

This included 20,325 UASC who claimed asylum in Europe- 40% less compared to 2017 (32,350).

In 2018, nearly half of all child asylum seekers were from the Syrian Arab Republic (28%), Iraq (10%) and Afghanistan (9%), with an increased number of child asylum seekers from Eritrea (4%), Turkey (4%), Venezuela (3%), Nigeria (3%) and Iran (3%). Another 3% of child asylum seekers were recorded either as stateless or having unknown nationality.

Among unaccompanied children seeking asylum, most common nationalities were Afghanistan (16%) and Eritrea (10%), followed by the Syrian Arab Republic and Pakistan (7% each), Iraq and Guinea (6% each), as well as Somalia (5%).

A total of 44% of all child asylum seekers, as well as 14% of those unaccompanied or separated, were female.

As in previous years, Germany remained the top destination for refugee and migrant children, registering 43% of all child asylum applications in 2018 (78,270 children). Other countries that recorded large numbers of child asylum seekers include France (24,145 children, 13%), Greece (21,770 children, 11%), Spain (11,035 children, 6%), the United Kingdom (8,975 children, 4%) and Italy (8,535 children 4%). Greece remains the country with the highest number of first-time applicants relative to the population.

In 2018, a total of 173,135 decisions on child asylum claims were issued by national authorities. Yet, due to an accumulated backlog in national asylum systems, a total of 225,615 child asylum applications were registered as pending at the end of December 2018.

Of all decisions taken in 2018, 56% were positive and 44% negative, reflecting a steady decrease in the proportion of positive decisions compared to 2017 and 2016, when 63% and 67% of children respectively received positive asylum decisions.

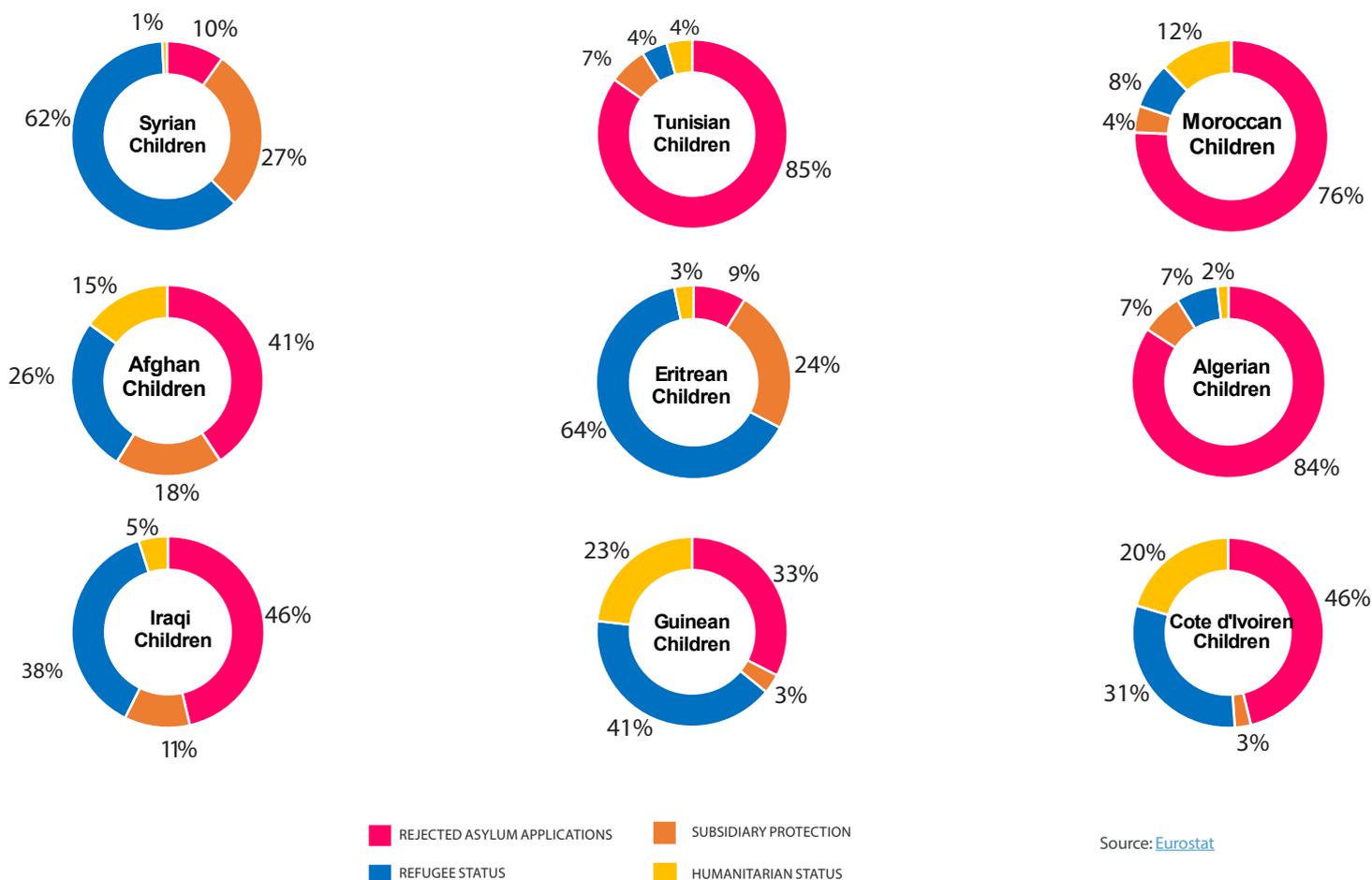
Of those who received positive decisions, a higher percentage of children were granted refugee status in 2018 (63%) than in 2017 (50%) and 2016 (53%).

This is particularly visible among Syrian children, for whom refugee status decisions increased from 49% in 2017 to 62% in 2018, while subsidiary protection decisions dropped from 46% to 27%.

Many child asylum applicants received negative decisions, notably among those from North African countries (over 80% on average), as well as children from Iraq, Côte d'Ivoire (46% each) and Afghanistan (41%).

Decisions on Child Asylum Applications between January and December 2018¹²

Decisions issued for common nationalities arriving to Europe



Refugee and Migrant Children’s Journey to Europe¹³

Between June and October 2018, IOM interviewed¹⁴ 114 children (age 14 – 17) in various locations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Italy, Montenegro and the Republic of North Macedonia, to understand their demographic and socio-economic characteristics, experiences during the journey, including those that might amount to human trafficking, exploitation and abuse. Children interviewed were mainly from Pakistan (17%), Guinea Conakry (11%), Côte d'Ivoire (9%), Tunisia (9%) and Egypt (6%). 92 per cent were male and 8 per cent female. Most interviewed children were travelling unaccompanied.

Profiles of interviewed children

Of those who reported being unaccompanied, 76% travelled alone, 23% with a non-family member and 1% only with a sibling. A third of children interviewed (34%) had completed lower-secondary education, 43% had completed primary school, while 18% of children had not received any formal education. 50% of children interviewed were out of school for at least 2 years and nearly 25% were working prior to departure from their country of origin.



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Journey Experience

77% of children interviewed left for Europe directly from their countries of origin; while 23% re-emigrated after spending more than a year in a country different than the one of origin or habitual residence (mainly Eritrean and Nigerian children who spent over a year in Libya¹⁵). The majority of children spent over 6 months on the move along the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes.

21 % of children were reportedly held in a location against their will, and many of them were forced to work or have worked during the journey without receiving expected payment.

While 44% of children could not estimate the cost of their journey to Europe, 14% had paid more than USD 5,000, 13% had paid between USD 2,500 and 5,000, and another 13% between USD 1,000 and 2,500.

Resettlement

In 2018, some 14,600 refugee children were resettled in Europe. The majority of children were resettled to the United Kingdom and France (20% each) followed by Sweden (18%), Germany (11%) and Norway (10%). The vast majority of children originated from the Syrian Arab Republic (78%), Democratic Republic of Congo (6%) and Sudan (6%).

Source: [Eurostat](#)

Relocation

Between October 2015 and June 2018, a total of 11,094 children (585 unaccompanied and separated) were relocated from Greece and Italy to EU Member states as part of the EU Emergency

Relocation scheme. Despite the end of the scheme in April 2018, some unaccompanied children continued to be relocated to the UK through Dubs project¹⁶. Between January and December 2018, a total of 89 unaccompanied and separated children were transferred to the UK from France (39), Greece (37) and Italy (13) .

Returns from Greece to Turkey

Of all returnees (1,806) from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement, since 2016, 88 (5%) were children. All of them were returned with their families.

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

Assisted with Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) to Children and UASC¹⁷

Between January and December 2018, IOM provided AVRR support to 63,485 migrants globally (12% less than the same period in 2017). 18% of migrants availing AVRR support were children, of which 13% were unaccompanied and separated.

54% of AVRR beneficiaries were assisted to return from the European Economic Area and Switzerland. Among these, 47% were assisted to return from Germany.

25% of beneficiaries assisted to return from the European Economic Area and Switzerland were children, among whom 1.8% were unaccompanied and separated. 23% of the beneficiaries assisted to return from the European Economic Area and Switzerland returned to South East and Eastern Europe, and 12% returned to the Middle East and North Africa.



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.

[\[Source\]](#)

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 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) [\[Source\]](#)

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. [\[Source\]](#)

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 2018 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.

Endnotes:

1. Data on arrivals is partial due to the large scale of irregular movements. It reflects both sea and land arrivals in Greece and Spain, and only sea arrivals in Italy. Data for Spain is based on the Ministry of Interior statistics and UNHCR estimates.
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 10,538 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 2017.
5. Data on arrivals and demographic 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 isn't typically compiled by government institutions are collected by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.
7. Estimates provided by UNHCR.
8. For Italy, the calculation is based on the estimated 10,787 UASC accommodated in the government shelters according to the Ministry of Labour and not the total number of UASC who arrived between January and December 2018.
9. Safe Zones are designated supervised spaces within accommodation sites which provide UAC with 24/7 emergency protection and care. They should be used for a maximum of 3 months as short term 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.
10. First-line reception and registration centres, where all administrative procedures concerning new arrivals take place, apart from so-called vulnerable individuals who are transferred to the mainland for these processes. Unaccompanied children are considered a vulnerable category and should in principle be transferred to the mainland.
11. European Union Member States + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
12. Due to backlogs in asylum procedures and the fact that not all refugee and migrant children lodge their asylum claim immediately upon arrival, data on decisions issued in 2018 might also include decisions on asylum applications lodged by children, who arrived in 2017.
13. These are preliminary findings.
14. More information on the methodology used for these surveys can be found [here](#)
15. The information on nationality recorded in the survey is based on the nationality declared by respondents.
16. The UK Government committed to transferring approximately 300 vulnerable unaccompanied and separated children from France, Greece and Italy to the UK between 1 October 2017 and 31 March 2019. IOM is responsible for providing health assessments, pre-departure orientation and movement management.
17. The data provided here is provisional and should therefore be considered as an estimation.





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, relocations programs between EU Member States, as well as returns from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement.

The present factsheet covers the period January to December 2018 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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