

# ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN IN EUROPE



IOM/2017

## HIGHLIGHTS



On both the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes many children have left their countries of origin due to violence, deprivation and conflict, and most did not initially aim to travel to Europe. However, among those who eventually did undertake the journey to Europe, education was a key factor shaping their decision. Education is also a key element for refugee and migrant children's social inclusion into host communities.



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. See more on page 4.



All European States<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> were **integrated into the formal education system** as of December 2018. See more on page 5.



**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<sup>3</sup> and 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 catch-up 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. See more on page 7.



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. See more on page 11.

## Limitations

This document aims at analysing the situation of refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children, who have recently arrived in Europe (since 2015). However, due to challenges with data availability, some of the information below may refer to **highly aggregate (proxy) data** such as native-born vs. foreign-born children or children with migrant background.

There is **no systematic or harmonized approach to data collection** on refugee and migrant children in national education systems across Europe. **Data is often not comparable** due to

the variety of indicators and definitions used in various databases/sources (including EUROSTAT and PISA), as well as different age groups, timeframe/points in time for data collection and insufficient disaggregation. This makes it **complex to analyse** issues particularly around **school attendance and learning outcomes** among this specific group.

This document refers to data available **as of December 2018**, and therefore may not reflect more recent statistics that have become available in early 2019.

# I. SCHOOL-AGE REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN IN EUROPE

## THE BIG PICTURE

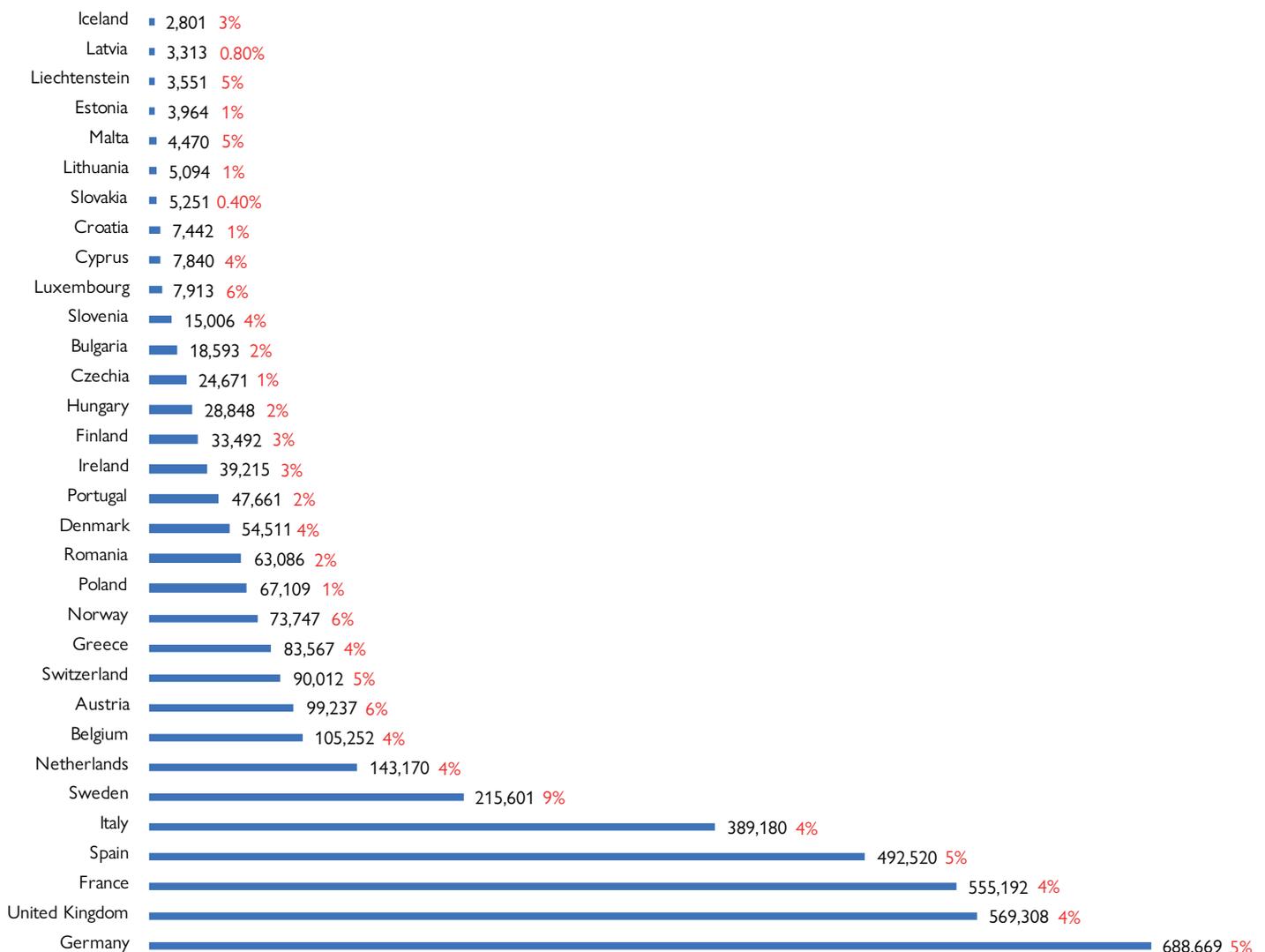
As of 31 December 2018, out of the 109,279,876 children and adolescents living in EU+ countries<sup>4</sup>, **5%** were **foreign-born**: 2,614,436 (2.4%) were born in another EU+ country, and 3,949,286 (**3.6%**) were **born outside the EU+**. Refugee and migrant children that arrived in Europe over the past few years can therefore be considered a subset of the latter group.

As of 31 December 2018, a total of **83,272,636 children and adolescents were of school age** (5 to 19 years old<sup>5</sup>). Among them, 2,160,145 (2.6%) were children born in another EU+ State, while 3,487,701 (**4%**) were born outside the EU+.

Among the latter group, **25%** were 5 to 9 years old, **30%** were 10 to 14 years old and **46%** were 15 to 19 years old.

Most of the foreign-born school-age children and adolescents, born outside the EU+, were hosted by **Germany** (688,669), **the United Kingdom** (569,308), **France** (555,192), **Spain** (492,520), **Italy** (389,180) and **Sweden** (215,601). Yet, in terms of overall proportion, foreign-born children made up barely **4-5%** across these countries, except Sweden where they represented **9%** of all school-age children.

Number and proportion of foreign-born school-age children (5-19) by country of residence in Europe



Source: Eurostat, 2018 annual data

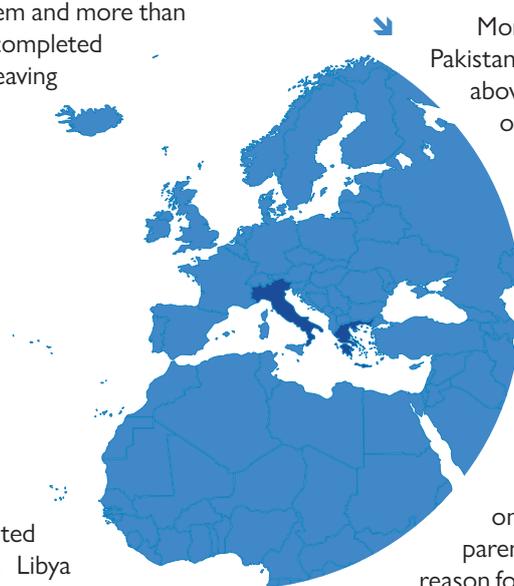
## EDUCATION PROFILES OF REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN COMING TO EUROPE

### Central Mediterranean Route

- More than a quarter of the children interviewed in Italy in 2017<sup>6</sup> said they never went to school, while one third managed to complete only primary school before starting their journey to Europe.
- Children from Nigeria, The Gambia and Guinea had the lowest education levels - more than a third reported not having completed any formal level of education in their countries of origin.
- Children from Bangladesh and Pakistan spent on average 6 to 9 years in the education system and more than half of them had successfully completed secondary education before leaving their countries.
- At the time of the interviews, two-thirds of children from Nigeria, Bangladesh, The Gambia, Guinea and Pakistan<sup>7</sup> reported having been more than one year outside the education system (34% for more than 2 years). Almost half of them spent between 6 months and one year travelling to Europe.
- 22 per cent of children reported spending more than a year in Libya before undertaking the journey across the Mediterranean. During this period, many of them experienced physical violence, abuse or exploitation.<sup>8</sup>
- For many unaccompanied children leaving with the objective of coming to Europe, education was the most important factor in their decision (38% of children interviewed in a UNICEF-REACH survey conducted in Italy in 2017).

### Eastern Mediterranean Route

- A quarter of children interviewed in Serbia, Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia, Hungary and Bulgaria<sup>9</sup> had not completed any formal level of education, while another third completed only primary education prior to their arrival in Europe.
- Children from Afghanistan and Iraq who arrived to Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean Route had the lowest level of education, and more than one third had reportedly never gone to school.
- More than half of Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, Pakistani and Iranian children interviewed in the above-mentioned countries of arrival had been out of school between 1 and 2 years prior to the survey, which includes the duration of travel. Among Syrian children this gap could reach 2.5 years.
- Almost half of children interviewed spent between 1 to 6 months travelling to Europe and 34% had spent more than a year in Turkey prior to their departure to Europe.
- In a recent assessment in Greece, 77% of children listed going to school as one of their top priorities<sup>10</sup>. One in three parents reported that education was the key reason for leaving for Europe. Youth and adolescents also voiced a strong desire to continue learning as their top priority, often in the context of contributing to cultural understanding, engagement and integration, employment and overall well-being.



Source: IOM DTM Flow Monitoring Surveys Analysis – [Profile of top 5 nationalities interviewed on the Central \(Pakistan, Nigeria, the Gambia, Guinea and Bangladesh\) and Eastern Mediterranean Route \(Iraq, Iran, Syrian Arab Republic, Pakistan, Afghanistan\)](#); UNICEF-REACH, [Children on the Move in Italy and Greece, 2017](#)



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## II. ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

### Access to Education Based on Legal Status

Although all children's fundamental right to basic education is recognized under international and regional human rights law, including EU law<sup>11</sup>, 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.

**Children of EU-born migrants** generally have the right to be admitted to their host State's educational, apprenticeship and vocational training courses under the same conditions as nationals<sup>12</sup>, including access to education-related social benefits<sup>13</sup>.

**International protection beneficiaries** (refugees under the 1951 Convention and subsidiary protection holders)<sup>14</sup>, those enjoying temporary protection<sup>15</sup>, as well as those with long term residence status<sup>16</sup> and those who are reunited with family members lawfully residing in the EU<sup>17</sup>, are also entitled to access education under the same conditions as nationals, but they are not automatically entitled to associated benefits<sup>18</sup>, which possibly restricts their ability to access quality education.

**Asylum-seeking children** are also legally entitled to access the host State's education system on the same terms as those that apply to nationals, although formal education may be provided in accommodation centres<sup>19</sup>. Education authorities in the EU Member States (MS) shall not postpone access to education for more than three months from the date on which children (or their parents) have lodged their asylum claim,<sup>20</sup> although in practice, it could take longer, and alternative classes in the accommodation centres do not usually teach the full curriculum, or meet the same teaching standards as local schools. EU FRA has reported additional restrictions in some specific parts and regions in Germany, Greece (for the Reception and Identification Centres) and Hungary. Children whose asylum application has been rejected continue to have access to basic education during the period granted for voluntary departure and during periods for which removal has been postponed<sup>21</sup>.

**Migrant children in an irregular situation** (e.g. those who have not applied for asylum or lack legal documents) are the most at risk of staying out of school. Only seven EU MS have explicitly recognized undocumented migrant

children's entitlement to basic formal education (Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden) while three MS explicitly exclude or limit their right to schooling (Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania). In most MS, the right to education is provided to all children in the country, hence implicitly also to children staying irregularly<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, as this right is not systematically guaranteed or facilitated, local procedural requirements can restrict or deter access. For example, schools may be obliged to report families without valid documentation to immigration authorities, which may deter such families from enrolling their children into school<sup>23</sup>.

Furthermore, schools may demand birth certificates, prior education credentials, national identification papers or proof of residency to enroll.

Access to upper-secondary education, early childhood education (ECE), vocational training, further learning and higher education may also be highly constrained as they are often not part of compulsory education recognized by national law.

Source: [EU FRA 2011](#)



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## ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

Data and definitions used across Europe do not allow for a full comparative analysis. This section therefore provides a snapshot of the situation in selected European countries, illustrating **the diversity of situations and disparities with regards to the availability, relevance and timeliness of data** on refugee and migrant children's access to education. This is largely due to diverging national legislation, varying responsible authorities (national vs. federal/regional), and tools and methodologies to collect and analyse education data and statistics. Moreover, while in some countries data is recorded based on the migration status of children, in others this is done with a focus on citizenship or language skills.

### Bulgaria

- Refugee and migrant children are recorded in national education statistics only if they are asylum-seekers or beneficiaries of international protection.
- As of the end of December 2018, school enrolment for refugee and migrant children was five times higher compared to the 2016-2017 school year due to increased outreach and support provided by the government and humanitarian agencies.

- **50%** or **81** out of **161** school-age refugee and migrant children accommodated in government reception centres in December 2018 were enrolled in primary and secondary public schools, while a total of **121** asylum-seeking and refugee children were registered overall in the formal education system in the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year.

### France

- Refugee and migrant children appear in national education statistics only when they do not speak the language of instruction (French) and require additional language support.
- Latest publicly available data from the 2016-2017 school year indicates that, among the **12.9 million** children enrolled in both public and private education, some **60,673** were non-French speaking<sup>24</sup>. Of them, 29,701 were registered in primary schools, 24,540 in lower secondary and 6,432 in upper secondary education.
- The majority of non-French speaking children were registered in the Paris region (4 in every 10 children), followed by Lyon-Grenoble, Marseille-Nice and Nancy-Strasbourg regions.
- On average around **90%** of non-French speaking children were

placed in preparatory classes (specific classes for non-French speaking children) or have benefitted from additional language support.

### Germany

- Data on refugee and migrant children accessing education is only partially available at the regional level as data collection is not compulsory. It is therefore impossible to establish the situation for the entire country.
- Access to formal education for refugee and migrant children living with their parents in reception centres in Germany depends on the specific regulations of the responsible federal state and children's migration status. In many states, access to schools remains limited, particularly for children from families originating from so-called "safe countries and territories of origin" (e.g. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo UNSCR 1244, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Senegal and Serbia)<sup>25</sup>, as speedy returns are envisaged for this group.
- Based on the 2016 [IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees](#), covering 4,500 parents of refugee and migrant children, more than **98%** of primary school-aged children attended school in 2016. Yet, **less**



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than half of these children received language support. In terms of early childhood education, findings for children aged 3 to 6 years were similar among refugee and migrant children and other children, but among the 0 to 3 age group, refugee and migrant children were significantly under-represented.

### Greece

- National inter-agency education assessments capture data on all recently arrived refugee and migrant children regardless of their legal status.
- By December 2018, **11,500** refugee and migrant children were enrolled in Greek schools throughout the country, an increase of 44% compared to the number of enrolled children by June 2018.
- Based on [the latest assessment](#) conducted by the national inter-agency Education Working Group with support of the Ministry of Education, out of the 5,935 assessed school-age children (4-17 years old) – regardless of their migratory status - living in apartments, shelters and hotels for unaccompanied children, **62%** were enrolled in Greek schools.
- Of the children in school undergoing the assessment, **91%** were enrolled in schools on the mainland while **9%** were enrolled in schools on the Greek islands.
- In terms of gender breakdown, **66%** of all assessed girls and **67%** of all assessed boys present in Greece were enrolled in schools.
- Enrolment rate was higher among children who were 6-12 years old (**75%**), followed by 13-15 years old (**62%**), as well as 4-5 and 16-17 years old (**57%** each).
- Enrolment rates were highest among Pakistani, Afghan, Iraqi and Syrian refugee and migrant children (**73%**, **68%**, **67%** and **66%** respectively). These were also the most common nationalities of refugee and migrant children enrolled in schools overall.

### Italy

- National education statistics distinguish only between Italian and non-Italian citizens.
- In the 2016-2017 school year, **634,070** non-Italian children were registered in Italian schools (9.5% of all children enrolled).
- **46%** of non-Italian children were enrolled in primary education, **26%** were in lower secondary education, and **29%** in upper-secondary education. There is no data on pre-primary school enrolment.
- Among all non-Italian children in the education system, **77%** (487,748) were non-EU citizens.
- Among the refugee and migrant adolescents who responded to UNICEF's [U-Report](#) on the Move poll on education, **49%** attended only Italian language classes, while just **30%** attended regular classes, with great variability among districts.
- **86%** of young migrants and refugees answering to the U-Report on the Move poll declared they would like to access vocational training. Yet, very few of them were actually able to access such opportunities.

### Serbia

- National education statistics capture all recently arrived refugee and migrant children regardless of their legal status.
- **51%** (413) of the 844 refugee and migrant school-age children, who were accommodated in 16 government accommodation centres in Serbia as of December 2018, were enrolled in primary and secondary schools.
- **83%** of primary school-age children (129 out of 155) were enrolled in 40 primary schools.
- **100%** of lower secondary school-age children (251 out of 251) were enrolled in 3 secondary schools.
- **12%** of upper-secondary school-age children (51 out of 438) were enrolled in 3 secondary schools.

### Spain

- National education statistics do not capture refugee and migrant children, and only partial data related to refugee and migrant children hosted in reception facilities is available.
- **95%** of **6,200**<sup>26</sup> refugee and migrant children in reception facilities were enrolled in secondary education for the school year 2017-2018. Among them, **58%** were boys and **42%** were girls. Among the most common nationalities that arrived by sea and land, **21%** of Syrian children and **4%** of Palestinian children were enrolled in primary and secondary education.

### Sweden

- National education statistics capture all students of foreign background (including second generation migrants), hence information on recently arrived refugee and migrant children is not available.
- During the school year 2017-2018 there were 1,049,490 children enrolled in primary and lower secondary education. **25%** of them were of foreign background, and just **1%** were asylum-seeking children.
- Among the 347,863 children enrolled in upper secondary education, **32%** were of foreign background. All children who were registered with the national population registry and required Swedish language support were enrolled in language introduction programmes.

Sources: Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs; Greece Education Sector Working Group Assessment on Access to Education for Refugee and Migrant Children- May 2018; Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Italian Ministry of Education, UNICEF U-report on the Move, National Education Report-Germany 2018, French Ministry of Education, Swedish Ministry of Education

## III. CHALLENGES AND GAPS

### CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING EDUCATION

- **Legal barriers** including lack of clear provisions on compulsory education for children in reception centres, children without residence permits or international protection status, or legal provisions for compulsory education, which may limit access to education for children outside a certain age group - e.g. children below 5 or above 15 years old. In federal countries, like Germany, legal provisions on access to education for newly arrived refugee and migrant children may also greatly vary from one region to another. In addition, there are often no legal provisions on how children's education level should be assessed and assigned to school grades.
- **Administrative challenges** including inflexible registration deadlines, residence and other personal documentation requirements, extended stay in first reception centres where school enrolment is not compulsory (e.g. in Italy and Greece). Such challenges are even more pronounced when it comes to early childhood education (Germany, Nordic countries, etc.), upper secondary education and vocational training (Italy). Frequent movements of refugees and migrants from one type of accommodation to another (particularly in Greece and Italy), distance and transportation to schools, cost of school materials, insufficient information provision to children and their families about procedures and services available, etc., can also seriously impact school enrolment and attendance.
- **Insufficient human and financial resources** of education authorities including limited places in schools and pre-schools, lack of catch-up classes, budgetary shortfalls, insufficient guidance and training for teachers and education practitioners who work with refugee and migrant students, including those in need of psychosocial support and language learning (see below).
- **Psychosocial support** in primary and secondary schools is often lacking to assist teachers and refugee and migrant children, who may have difficulties to concentrate and learn in class due to stress and trauma accumulated in countries of origin, in transit or at destination. This may also relate to pending family reunification and asylum procedures, as well as significant differences between education systems.
- **Additional language and cultural mediation support** is scarce, yet essential to address language barriers and communication challenges, as refugee and migrant children often do not have sufficient knowledge of the language of instruction or there is a low interest in learning the language of the host country - e.g. Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, from where refugee and migrant families often wish to move onwards, or children are waiting for family reunification and transfer, to another EU country.
- **Stereotypes and judgement** based on perceptions at school may lead to discrimination, prejudice and bullying as refugee and migrant children are seen as different, and teachers are not always sufficiently equipped to promote multiculturalism and openness to diversity.
- **Limited opportunities for adolescents**, particularly those aged 15-17 years, face greater challenges in integrating the national education systems in formal high schools or institutions for vocational training. Some of them have gone beyond the age of compulsory education in certain countries (e.g. Italy, Greece, Germany, etc.). All of the three challenges listed above are compounded for adolescents.
- **Unaccompanied children who turn 18** are at particularly high risk of early school leaving as they tend to lose the support received from the national child protection system when aging out.



## Challenges and Gaps in European Education Statistics

While in some countries, education assessments have been conducted in coordination with national education authorities to establish a baseline situation with regards to refugee and migrant children’s school enrolment, this is often an *ad-hoc* effort yet to be linked to national education management information systems.

Based on an [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#) report, only 10 out of 28 EU Member States capture migration status in education statistics. Yet, data is not comparable

due to the variety of indicators used: asylum-seekers, refugees, non-nationals, not speaking the language of instruction, etc. (see table below), as well as the different timeframes for the latest data collection.

Data on refugee and migrant children in pre-primary and upper-secondary education (3-5 years and 15+ years) is largely missing, especially in countries where these age groups are not covered by national legislation on compulsory education.

EU Member State	(Proxy) Indicator used by national authorities to report school enrolment
Austria	Only asylum-seekers
Bulgaria	Asylum-seekers and refugees
Germany	All persons with migration background <sup>27</sup>
Denmark	Only refugees
Greece	All non-Greek citizens <sup>28</sup>
Italy	All non-Italian students (by nationality) regardless of residence status
The Netherlands	Only asylum-seekers
Poland	Asylum-seekers and refugees (percentages only)
Slovakia	Only accompanied asylum-seekers
France	Non-French speaking children

Source: EU FRA



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# IV. REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN LEARNING

## School Attendance

Improving school attendance and reducing **early school leaving** are major issues for national education systems, affecting both native-born and foreign-born children (coming both from other EU+ Member States and from outside the EU+). Refugee and migrant children are included in statistics related to foreign-born children and born outside the EU+.

Due to a variety of reasons including the lack of adequate support, across all EU+ Member States, with the exception of the United Kingdom, children and youth born outside the EU+ are over-represented among those who leave early. Overall, early school leaving among children born outside the EU+ (including refugee and migrant children) is almost **twice as high** compared to native-born children (25.4% vs. 11.5%) for reasons explained below. This gap is most pronounced in **Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain**.

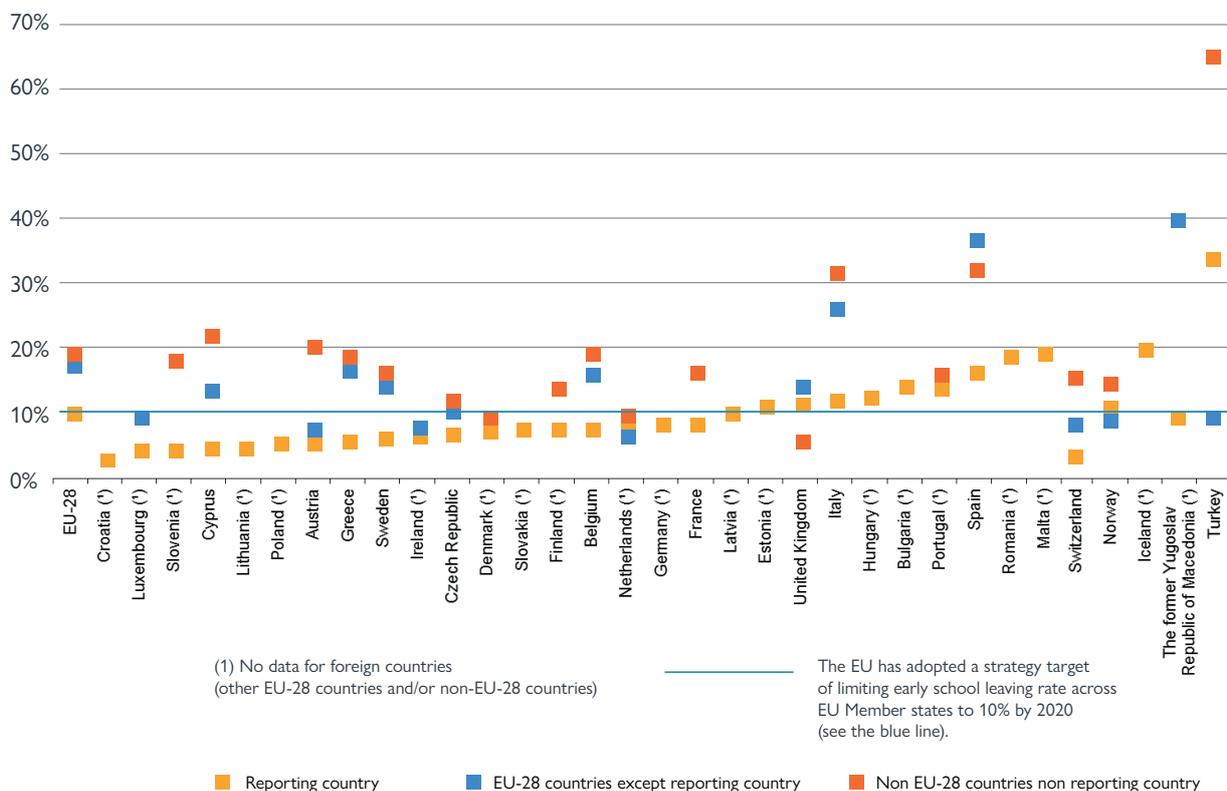
Early school leaving or disengagement from education often relates to the **socio-economic inequalities**, which affect many refugee and migrant children, but also children's and their parents' education expectations, the school environment and relations with teachers and peers. **Language barriers and**

**difficulties with concentration and learning resulting from painful personal experiences**, as outlined on page 7, can also be significant contributing factors.

**Poverty** is a particularly important factor that may affect children and young people's engagement in education. Based on the latest [Eurostat statistics](#) from 2013, young people born outside the EU were nearly twice more likely to be at risk of poverty compared to native-born young people (49% vs. 28%).<sup>29</sup> Greatest disparities in poverty rates among native-born and foreign-born young people were found in Belgium, Greece, Finland, Spain and Sweden. Moreover, children with migrant/refugee background tend to concentrate in suburban areas and schools with lower academic standards and performance levels, which may impact negatively on their participation in education and ultimately on their educational outcomes.

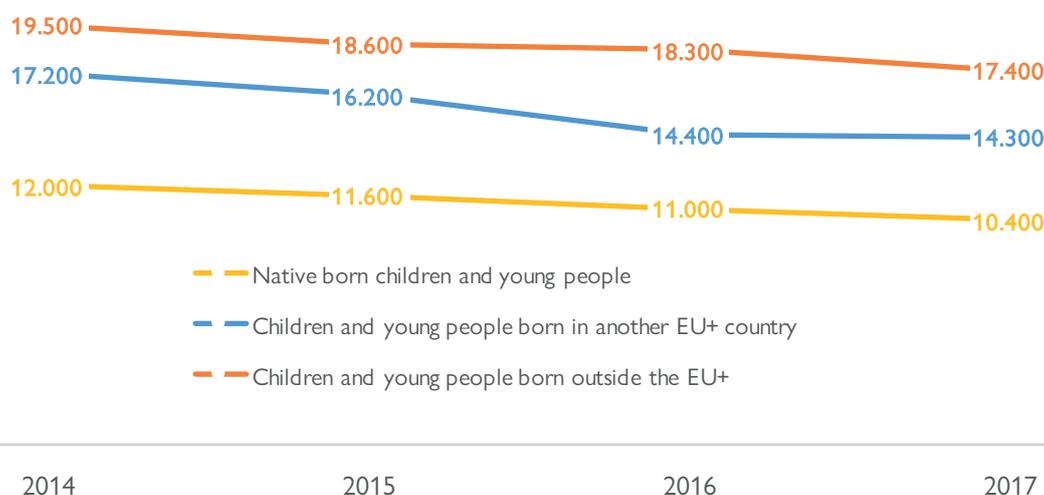
Countries like **Czechia, Denmark, Portugal and the Netherlands and the UK**, have, nevertheless, managed to limit the gap between native-born and foreign-born children born outside the EU+. They also have some of the lowest levels of early school leaving in Europe overall, already below the [EU](#)

Level of early school leaving among native, children born in another EU+ country and children born outside the EU+, by country of residence.



Source: Eurostat, 2016

Children and young people (aged 15-24) not in employment, education or training (NEET) by groups of country of birth in the European Union



strategy target of 10% to be reached by 2020. This could be explained by effective strategies to prevent early school leaving as part of broader social inclusion policies in countries with long a tradition of immigration and/or strong equity focus in social welfare systems.

Early school leaving may have a significant impact on adolescents' and young people's transition from education to work. The EU has therefore also been monitoring young people's disengagement from both the education and labour market, with latest statistics suggesting that in the absence of appropriate interventions, foreign-born young people (aged 15-24) are overall much more likely to be **neither in employment, nor in education or training (NEET)** than their native-born peers. This rate is even more pronounced among young people born outside the EU+.

The highest shares of young people born outside the EU+, who were NEET in 2017, were found in **Greece** (34.1%), **Italy** (33.5%), **Croatia** (28.2%), **Spain** (26%) and **France** (24.3%). In contrast, **Norway** (9.1%), **Luxembourg** (9.6%), **the Netherlands** (10.2%), **Hungary** (10.9%) and **Switzerland** (12%) observed the lowest shares of young migrants NEET, in many cases due to targeted national policies to lower NEET levels overall.

Source: Eurostat Early School Leaving from Education and Training, 2016; Eurostat NEET, 2007–2017; <http://www.sirius-migrationeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SIRIUS-EarlySchoolLeaving-FINAL.pdf>



IOM/2017

## Learning Outcomes

There is no systematic data available on the learning outcomes of refugee and migrant children. The best available comparable data is found in the 'Programme for International Student Assessment' (PISA) database, which allows for comparison between three categories – native-born children, first-generation migrants and second-generation migrants. For the purpose of this assessment, refugee and migrant children are counted among the first-generation migrants.

Due to a variety of reasons, including the lack of adequate support, first-generation migrant students can face learning challenges resulting in lower academic performance.<sup>30</sup> Yet their resilience and learning outcomes improve significantly over time, when targeted education as well as wider social inclusion measures (e.g. language classes, homework support and psychosocial measures) are available to reduce various disadvantages, as many children demonstrate a determination to improve their prospects in life. On average across EU+ countries in 2015, around **3 in 4 native-born students** – but only **3 in 5 students with a migrant background**<sup>31</sup> – attained the **baseline level of proficiency** in the three core PISA subjects: science, reading and mathematics.

The performance gap between native-born students and students with a migrant/refugee background is wider when it comes to first-generation migrant/refugee students, and especially **late arrivals** (students who arrived at or after the age of 12). This couples with overall challenges faced by **adolescents** (particularly aged 15+ years) in integrating into the formal education system, as they go beyond compulsory school age and are often not targeted by national educational integration strategies.

Migrant/refugee students are also more likely than native-born students to be victims of **bullying** and **perceived unfair treatment** by teachers, which may contribute to differences between native-born and migrant/refugee students in academic performance and well-being.

Nevertheless, migrant/refugee students, especially from the first generation, tend to express **higher levels of motivation** than native-born students. For example, the proportion of first-generation migrant/refugee students in the Netherlands and Belgium expressing a high motivation is 36 and 23 per cent respectively higher than that of native-born students in these countries.

Moreover, **free pre-school programmes** can alleviate disadvantages and increase equity, as they allow children with a migrant/refugee background to interact with the local community, learn the host country language and acquire important social competencies in structured settings. Based on PISA statistics, migrant/refugee students who had participated in early childhood education **attained higher scores** compared to their peers who had not attended such programmes **by an amount that corresponded to more than one year of school**.

**Supportive school environment** and quality of teaching are other important factors in improving learning outcomes for children, including refugees and migrants. Literature shows that measures can be multifaceted – developing mentoring and cultural mediation schemes, making adequate resources available to address socio-economic disadvantages, providing information about the school environment, engaging with parents, ensuring additional language support, strengthening anti-discrimination legislation, etc. Examples of such measures already in practice in European countries can be found below, in Section V.

Sources:

[OECD, 'Assessment of Migrant Education', 2018](#)

[Reception Education for Refugee and Migrant Children](#)

[EU JRC, Immigrant background and expected early school leaving in Europe: evidence from PISA, 2018](#)

[UNESCO, 'Migration, Displacement and Education: Building Bridges, not Walls', 2019](#)

[RAND Europe, 'Education of migrant children: Education policy responses for the inclusion of migrant children in Europe'](#)



IOM/2018

# V. HELPING REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN ACCESS EDUCATION AND LEARN

## Promising Practices at National and Local Level

### ➤ Securing the right to education for every asylum-seeking child in Sweden

According to the Swedish School Act, once a child has been registered and assigned to a municipality to stay, (s)he has a right to access education. This includes pre-school, and primary up to upper secondary school (if the child has not already turned 18). The right to education applies even if a decision to reject an application for asylum is announced, until the child has physically left Sweden. In 2017, additional temporary measures were adopted to allow children and young people enrolled in upper secondary education, whose asylum claims were rejected, to stay in Sweden until they complete their studies.

### ➤ Encouraging irregular migrants in Portugal to send their children to school

Portugal's Aliens and Borders Service has launched a go-to-school programme designed to regularize young children who were born in Portugal to migrant parents and attend state schools, but who are not lawfully staying in the country. Residence permits for both the children and their parents are granted or renewed directly at school, on the same day, avoiding bureaucracy. This project also includes local awareness-raising activities aimed at all actors of each school community. The programme considers education a social inclusion factor and encourages migrants in an irregular situation to place their children in school.

### ➤ Mitigating financial disadvantages for migrant and refugee children in Estonia and Belgium

The Estonian Multicultural School project (2017- 2020) aims to reform the structure of financial support available to schools with a diverse student population and to change school level approaches to multiculturalism. Under a similar initiative in the Flemish Community of Belgium, schools receive additional lessons or extra teaching hours to target socio- economic disadvantages. These overtime hours are granted for a period of three years and serve to develop a vision of the school in terms of equal opportunities in education.

### ➤ Parental engagement in Germany and France

Parental engagement can play an important role in refugee and migrant children's

education. Through 'Neighborhood Mothers' started in Berlin and then replicated across the country, women with their own history of migration and integration are trained to act as contact and resource persons for families and particularly other women in the neighborhood (for instance by working in schools or by visiting families in their homes). Similar programmes have also been developed in Denmark and the Netherlands. Since 2009, the French government is implementing a national programme 'Opening school to parents for successful integration' which aims to engage parents of migrant and refugee children. In 2017, over 300 schools were involved, offering free of charge French language and training courses for parents, increasing their understanding of the French education system and providing them with practical advice on how to better support their children in the learning process.

### ➤ Supporting school enrolment through coordination of all actors in Greece

In 2016, the Hellenic Ministry of Education established 'afternoon reception classes' to welcome refugee children aged 6-15 living in camps into classes in a second shift in public schools. In 2017, the Ministry tripled 'morning reception classes' for children residing in urban areas, so they can attend school with Greek children within the regular school hours and receive additional Greek language support. Within the national inter-agency Education Working Group, all accommodation and education actors combined efforts to enroll children in schools by sensitizing and accompanying parents and children through the registration process and beyond.

### ➤ Strengthening teachers' capacity to integrate refugee and migrant children in public schools in Bulgaria

Over the past years, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education supported the development of official programmes on teaching Bulgarian as a foreign language to refugees, provided additional funding for Bulgarian language classes and rolled out capacity building for teachers in public schools. These activities were conducted with support by UNHCR and UNICEF.

### ➤ Individualised learning plans for newly arrived children in Finland, the Netherlands and the UK

In Finland, newly arrived refugee and migrant children benefit from an individual curriculum during their first year in the formal education system. Activities are tailored to

children's specific needs and profile (being an unaccompanied child, coming from a war situation, etc.). Similar approaches have also been developed in the Netherlands and the UK.

### ➤ Fostering migrant and refugee 'role models' in Denmark

The 'We Need All Youngsters' campaign, launched in 2002 by the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, fosters exchanges between migrant and refugee children and 'role models' on the education system in Denmark. Information is shared, particularly on vocational education & training, and activities are organised with voluntary organisations such as online homework cafés. An evaluation showed that 50% of participating students felt inspired by role models and intended to complete their education.

### ➤ Preventing early school leaving in the Netherlands

To address early school leaving among adolescents with motivational problems and learning difficulties, the Dutch government adopted a national policy and developed targeted decentralized programmes, coordinated by an Early School Leaving Taskforce in the Ministry of Education. Crucial elements for the success of the policy were the set-up of mandatory regional monitoring and reporting tools, as well as the adoption of an integrated approach, linking schools with social services, municipalities and business sector. This has led to enhanced early signaling and effective prevention of early school leaving.

### ➤ Supporting children beyond compulsory school-age in Finland

The Helsinki 'skills centre' created in 2016, combines vocational education, employment and language training services for refugee and migrant adolescents who are 17+ years old, and whose language skills are not yet at the level needed for employment or vocational training. A similar system has been set up in Luxemburg.

Sources:

[UNICEF, 'Improving Education Participation', 2017;](#)  
[UNICEF, 'Protection on Paper? An analysis of Nordic Country Responses to Asylum Seeking Children, 2018;](#)  
[EU FRA, Fundamental rights of migrants in an irregular situation in the European Union, 2011;](#) [OECD Assessment of Migrant Education, 2018;](#) [Sirius, Multi-country partnership to enhance the education of refugee and migrant asylum-seeking youth in Europe, 2018;](#)  
[Reducing early school leaving, EU, Policies on Early School Leaving in nine European countries: a comparative analysis](#)



## United Nations Role and Support

### ➤ Technical assistance to governments:

UNICEF and UNHCR have provided guidance and technical assistance to national authorities in Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia to address legal and other practical barriers and develop national action plans to integrate refugee and migrant children in public schools. As a result of national authorities and inter-agency efforts in 2018, over 12,000 children were enrolled in public schools in Southeastern Europe (121 in Bulgaria, 11,500 in Greece and 413 in Serbia).

### ➤ Non-formal education and after-school support:

In 2018, UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM supported the provision of non-formal education, including homework support and psychosocial support for over 16,200 children<sup>32</sup> enrolled in public schools in Greece, Italy, Serbia, Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina, facilitating their integration. In Italy and Greece, UNICEF also developed e-learning platforms to help children improve their language skills and prepare for public school exams. IOM in Greece and North Macedonia has supported extracurricular activities for national and migrant/refugee students, in view of strengthening the formal learning process, fostering personal development and inclusion into the local community.

### ➤ Capacity-building for education professionals:

In Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, UNICEF and UNHCR supported capacity-building activities for some 4,400 formal and non-formal education professionals in 2017 and 2018. In Germany, early childhood education and development has been an integral part of UNICEF trainings on the minimum protection standards in 100 centres for nearly 2,800 managers, protection specialists and general staff.

UNHCR has developed teacher training materials on the topic of refugees, asylum and migration, currently available in French, English and Dutch (soon to be available in more languages). The toolkit includes a module with professional guidance on teaching refugee children in the classroom, dealing with symptoms of stress and trauma.

### ➤ Awareness raising and sensitization of the local communities:

In Cyprus, Germany, Greece and Serbia, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and NGOs have worked on sensitizing local communities on the importance of education for refugee and migrant children.

### ➤ Education supplies:

In Greece and Serbia, UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM have provided refugee and migrant children with education materials and supplies. In Serbia, UNHCR also provided furniture and equipment to four schools benefitting both local and refugee/migrant children.

### ➤ Transportation:

In 2017 and 2018, IOM and UNHCR provided school transportation for children from accommodation facilities to public schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece and Serbia. The Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees also provided school transportation for children from three reception centres in Sofia, Bulgaria.

### ➤ Child rights monitoring:

In Greece, the Network for the Rights of Children on the Move led by the Greek Ombudsperson for Child Rights is regularly monitoring access to education for refugee and migrant children, with UNICEF support. In Germany, UNICEF also supported refugee reception centres in strengthening their monitoring systems (including access to education and educational outcomes) through practical guidance and tools.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Ensure national legislation guarantees full and equal access for all children to inclusive and quality education in the formal education system, including access to catch-up programmes and accelerated learning opportunities, regardless of their asylum or migration status.*
2. *Provide targeted support through additional funds, programmes, guidance and capacity-building to schools, administrators and teachers to ensure accessible, quality and inclusive education for refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children<sup>33</sup>.*
3. *Foster an inclusive school climate, which promotes student well-being and belonging and protects against instances of discrimination, bullying and exclusion of refugee and migrant children, through dedicated resources.*
4. *Because the risk factors for early school leaving are multifaceted, strengthen the linkages between schools and other critical public services (health, child protection, social protection, parental labour market support, etc.) to ensure that barriers to school enrolment and factors contributing to early leaving are addressed.*
5. *Ensure increased access to early childhood education services for young refugee and migrant children within the host community, and promote integration of refugee and migrant young people into upper secondary education including vocational education and training schemes in line with Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the EC Action Plan (2016).*
6. *Develop standard harmonized internationally accepted definitions or classifications to allow for informed policy development and resource allocation through the compilation and analysis of data on refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children in existing education management information systems and international education databases.*
7. *Allocate adequate resources at sub-national, national and regional/ international level to ensure higher frequency and quality of relevant internationally-comparable data and statistics on refugee and migrant children's access to services, including education, through existing databases, e.g. Eurostat. This will allow for effective monitoring and timely decision-making.*

*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. Data on access to essential services such as education is also essential.*

*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](#).*

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## Number of children lodging asylum applications between January and December 2018

Country <sup>35</sup>	Number of child asylum-seekers registered in 2018	Main nationalities of asylum seeking children
Germany	78,130	Syrian (38%), Iraqi (11%), Afghan (7%) and Nigerian (5%)
France	23,980	Albanian (11%), Georgian (9%), Ivorian (6%) and Syrian(5%)
Greece	21,400	Syrian (29 %), Afghan (23%) and Iraqi (20%)
Spain	10,815	Venezuelan (38%), Colombian (16%), Syrian (12%) and Ukrainian (6%)
United Kingdom	8,805	Iraqi (12%). Afghan (8%) and Eritrean (7%)
Italy	8,380	Nigerian (9%), Gambian (8%), El Salvador (7%) and Pakistani (5%)
Austria	6,160	Syrian (38%), Afghan (21%) and Russian (7%).
Belgium	5,640	Syrian (19%), Afghan (10%) and Palestinian (9%)
Switzerland	5,595	Eritrean (35%), Syria (13%), and Afghan (11%)
Sweden	5,340	Syrian (18%), Afghan (7%) and Eritrean (4%)
Serbia	3,400	Nationality breakdown is not provided by the government
Netherlands	4,660	Syrian and Eritrean (14% each) and Iranian (8%)
Cyprus	1,040	Syrian (62%), Iraqi (15%) and Somalian (5%)
Bulgaria	805	Afghan (46%), Syrian (26%), Iraqi (25%) and Pakistani (2%)

Source: Eurostat, extracted on 2 April 2019

## Endnotes

- 1 European States used for this report include EU Member States, as well as Serbia.
- 2 Age groups used as reference for school-age children depend on national legislation and education systems: 5-18 years old in Bulgaria, 3-17 years old in France, 6-18 years old in Germany, 5-17 years old in Greece, 6-18 years old in Italy, 7-18 years old in Serbia, etc.
- 3 Compulsory school varies across countries, e.g. 5-16 years old in Bulgaria, 6-16 years old in France, 6-15 years old in Germany, 5-17 years old in Greece, 6-16 years old in Italy, 7-15 years old in Serbia.
- 4 EU+ refers to EU Member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Data source: [Eurostat](#)
- 5 European database ([Eurostat](#)) does not allow for disaggregation by age up to 17 years. For the purposes of this analysis therefore the age bracket 5 to 19 has been used.
- 6 Based on a sample of 364 children between 14 and 17 years old.
- 7 Apart from Pakistan, the remaining four listed countries were among the top 10 origin countries of arrival between January and November 2017, when surveys were conducted
- 8 Based on the UNICEF REACH report 'Children on the Move in Italy and Greece', 2017, 88% of children interviewed in Italy in 2017 reported to have suffered from physical violence. 81% of these incidents happened in Libya. In addition, 38% of children reported having been forced to work or perform activities against their will, mainly in Libya (97%).
- 9 Based on a sample of 240 children between 14 and 17 years old.
- 10 Save the Children, [Education Needs Assessment Greece, 2016](#).
- 11 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13), Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 28 and 29), revised European Social Charter (Article 17) and – for EU MS – to Article 14(1) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- 12 Regulation (EU) No 492/2011 on freedom of movement for workers within the Union, OJ 2011 L 141/1, pp. 1–12, Article 10; and Directive 2004/38 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States amending Regulation (EEC) No. 1612/68 and repealing Directives 64/221/EEC, 68/360/EEC, 72/194/EEC, 73/148/EEC, 75/34/EEC, 75/35/EEC, 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 93/96/EEC (Free Movement Directive), OJ 2004 L 158, pp.77–123, Article 24 (1).
- 13 See, for instance, ruling of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU), C-9/74, *Donato Casagrande v. Landeshauptstadt München*, 3 July 1974. Subsequently confirmed in cases such as CJEU, C-3/90, *M.J.E. Berniniv. Minister van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen*, 26 February 1992.
- 14 Article 27 of the Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (Recast) (Qualification Directive), OJ 2011 L337/9 pp9–268.
- 15 Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC), Article 14.
- 16 (Directive 2003/109/EC) – concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents, Article 11
- 17 Directive 2003/86/EC on the right to family reunification, Article 14.
- 18 Qualification Directive (recast), Article 27(2) in conjunction with Article 11(2) Long-term Residents Directive; (Directive 2003/109/EC) – concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents; Article 11(2) and (4); Directive 2003/86/EC on the right to family reunification, Article 14(1).
- 19 Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU), Article 14(1).
- 20 Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU), Article 14(2).
- 21 Return Directive (2008/115/EC), Article 14(1) and 17(3).
- 22 Explicit right refers to national legislations, which explicitly stipulate all refugee and migrant children as well as children in an irregular situation have access to education. Implicit right refers to national legislations, according to which all children on the territory of the country have the right to education, hence implicitly also referring to those in an irregular situation. Yet, in practice this is subject to interpretation and national, regional or local procedures. Limited right refers to national legislations, according to which migrant children in an irregular situation are not automatically entitled to the right of education. This may be subject to conditionality (e.g. residing in certain type of facility or timeframe of status determination procedures, etc) or interpretation by responsible authorities.
- 23 Such practices have been reported, for example in Cyprus and Slovakia.
- 24 This number does not include French-speaking refugee and migrant children from West Africa or other countries, where French is a commonly spoken language. This may explain the relatively small number of non-French speaking children registered as the majority of refugee and migrant children in the education system may actually already speak French upon arrival.
- 25 According to current law, they may remain in initial reception and arrival centres or 'special accommodation centres' until their return/repatriation.
- 26 Figures are provided by six government partners who provide services to children accommodated in reception centres and urban areas with the largest numbers of refugee and migrant children (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, and Malaga).
- 27 See footnote 22.
- 28 EU FRA report refers only to asylum-seekers, however this seems to be no longer the case in the current Greek education database.
- 29 Eurostat measures the at-risk-of-poverty rate in relative terms. It takes a relative poverty threshold of 60 % of the net median equivalised income, and defines as being at-risk-of-poverty the population segment below this threshold.
- 30 Based on available PISA statistics (2016), on average across OECD countries, as much as 51% of first-generation migrant students failed to reach baseline academic proficiency in reading, mathematics and science, compared to 28% percent of students without an immigration background.
- 31 In the PISA database, a child with 'migrant background' refers to a child born outside the country of assessment/survey (first generation) or whose parents were born in another country while he/she was born in the country of assessment/survey (second generation). This includes asylum-seeking and refugee children.
- 32 This includes some 8,000 children (incl. over 1,000 young children 3-5 years old) supported by UNICEF in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece and Italy; 6,400 children supported by UNHCR in Greece and Serbia and another 1,800 children supported by IOM in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia.
- 33 This may include guidance on the recognition of previous learning and educational attainment, programmes on second language learning, literacy and homework assistance for such students, more opportunities and incentives for teachers' professional development, as well as the establishment of psychosocial support services at schools and parental outreach.
- 34 Australian Committee for UNICEF, Belgian Committee for UNICEF, Canadian Committee for UNICEF, Dutch Committee for UNICEF, Finnish Committee for UNICEF, French Committee for UNICEF, Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF, Italian Committee for UNICEF, German Committee for UNICEF, Government of Denmark, Government of the The Netherlands, Government of the Republic of Korea, Norwegian Committee for UNICEF, New Zealand Committee for UNICEF, Swedish Committee for UNICEF, Swiss Committee for UNICEF Portuguese Committee for UNICEF, United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF, United States Fund for UNICEF, Spanish Committee for UNICEF, UNICEF Hungarian Foundation, UNICEF United Arab Emirates.
- 35 Data presented in this table is based on Eurostat asylum data and represents only most common EU Member States. To access full dataset on children asylum applications for 2018, see this link.

This factsheet is jointly produced by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM with the aim to support evidence-based decision-making and advocacy on access to education and related issues for refugee and migrant children in Europe. Based on publicly available datasets, this document provides an overview of the situation of refugee and migrant children in terms of education needs and profiles, ongoing activities, as well as remaining challenges and barriers related to school enrolment and attendance. It also analyses overall trends of learning outcomes and early school leaving as they correlate with the legal status/background of the child. Finally, it provides examples of existing good or promising practices, as well

as recommendations, which could help address challenges and barriers linked to children's access to education on one hand, and key data gaps on the other.

The current factsheet covers data as of December 2018. However, due to the challenges described in the 'Data gaps' section, other relevant sources (i.e. data for previous years, or OECD data) have also been used as appropriate. This is stock data, representing the situation at a given point in time and does not reflect population movement impacting school attendance.

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