

Migration of children to Europe

In this data brief, IOM and UNICEF examine recent trends in the migration of children to Europe in 2015.



Of the **870,000** refugees and migrants arriving by sea in Europe in 2015



more than
1 in 5
is a child



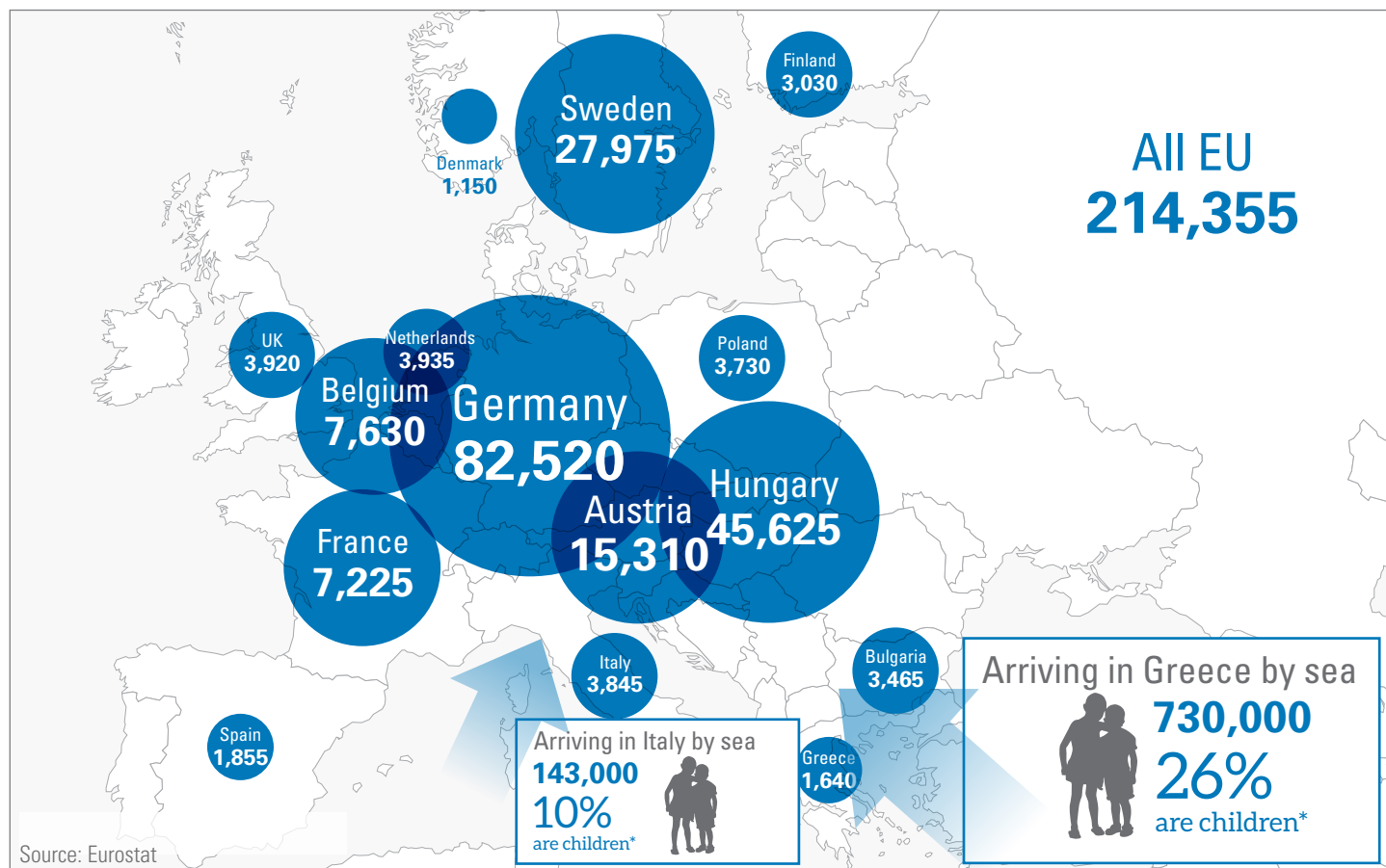
unicef

Since the beginning of this year, more than one in five of over 870,000¹ refugees and migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe is a child.² Children are among the most at risk of refugees and migrants. For some children, the difficulties begin with perilous border crossings and rough seas. All are at risk of being exposed to sickness, injury, violence, exploitation and trafficking – violations of their rights and threats to their lives and well-being – while some tragically never arrive at their destination. Children represent more than 30 per cent of all recorded deaths in the Aegean Sea this year.³ Another serious concern is the growing number of children who travel without a parent or guardian and claim asylum in Europe as unaccompanied children.

Refugee and migrant children who are particularly at risk while on the move to Europe, include babies and small children, children with disabilities and special needs, children who have become temporarily separated from their families during the journey, stranded children who have exhausted their resources, unaccompanied and separated adolescents, and trafficked children. Women who have recently given birth are less resilient to the stresses of the journey and risk being unable to continue breastfeeding, as families are swept along migration routes, through reception centers, and loaded onto buses and trains. Babies are born every day along the migration routes – in very unfavorable conditions – and carried along as newborns.

Child asylum seekers to the EU by country of destination

January – September 2015



¹ Figures are recorded for all arrivals by sea in Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta in 2015. UNHCR and national authorities, 26 November 2015.

² A child is defined as an individual under the age of 18.

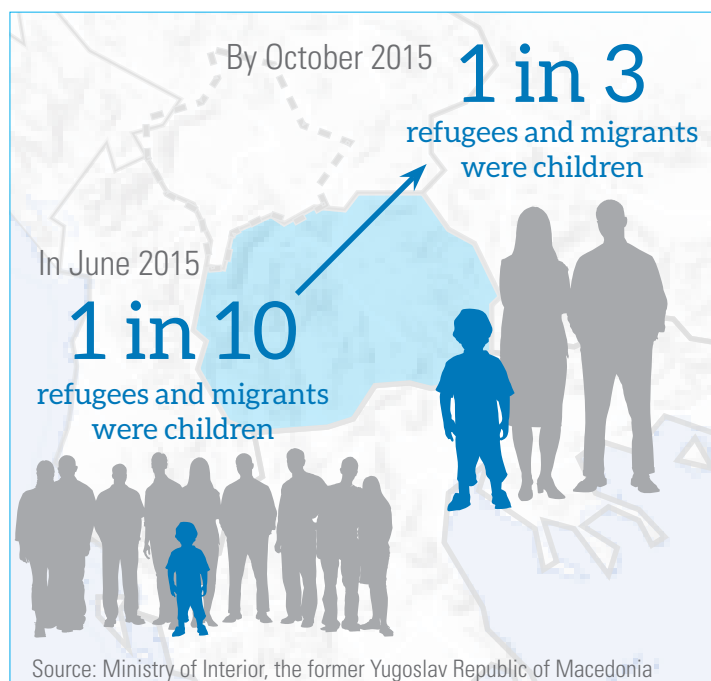
³ IOM Missing Migrants Project.

*Source: IOM, UNHCR and national authorities

Children are arriving in unprecedented numbers

- So far this year, children make up an estimated one-quarter of the 730,000 sea arrivals in Greece and of flows heading towards Western and Northern Europe through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia.⁴
- 61 per cent of refugees and migrants arriving in Greece are from Syria, while another 22 per cent are from Afghanistan, 7 per cent from Iraq, and 3 per cent from Pakistan – all countries affected by conflict, insecurity and political unrest.⁵ Unfortunately there is a lack of disaggregated data on the countries of origin of children arriving by sea in Greece.
- The number of children on the move is growing. In June 2015, one in 10 refugees and migrants registered at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was a child. By October, this had increased to one in three.⁶ Similarly, Greece has seen an increase from one in six in June to one in three during October.⁷
- About 10 per cent – or 15,000 – of the over 143,000 sea arrivals in Italy this year are children.⁸ Of these, 29 per cent are from Eritrea, 13 per cent from Syria, 11 per cent from Egypt, 9 per cent from Somalia, and 7 per cent from Nigeria.⁹

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:



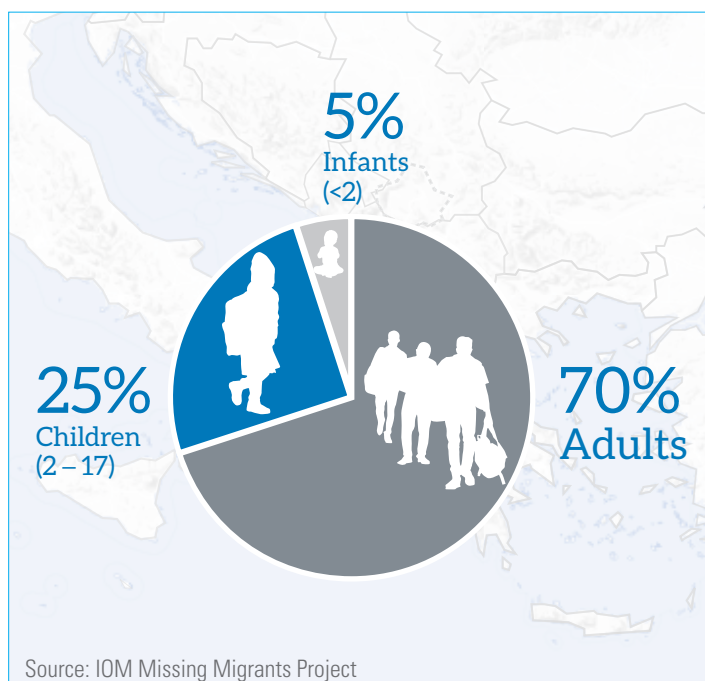
Children are dying on the journey

Many refugees and migrants have attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea by boat and find themselves at the mercy of smugglers who load too many people in dinghies without life jackets or experienced skippers. Over 3,500 refugees and migrants have died in the Mediterranean Sea so far this year, the majority in the Central Mediterranean between Libya and Italy. Children are particularly at risk during these sea crossings, and in the Eastern Mediterranean where more families are travelling, at least 30 per cent of deaths this year have been of children.¹⁰

- In October 2015 alone, at least 90 children died in the Eastern Mediterranean, with nearly one in 5 under the age of 2 years.
- On 28 October, more than 50 people drowned in the largest shipwreck this year in the Eastern Mediterranean – of them, 20 were children and infants.
- Most of the children who have drowned this year are from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and are under the age of 12.

Deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean by age group

1 September – 27 November 2015



4 IOM, UNHCR and national authorities, as of 27 November 2015.

5 IOM and national authorities, as of 31 October 2015.

6 Ministry of Interior, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as of 31 October 2015.

7 UNHCR and national authorities, as of 27 November 2015.

8 Italian Ministry of Interior, as of 31 October 2015.

9 Italian Ministry of Interior, as of 31 October 2015.

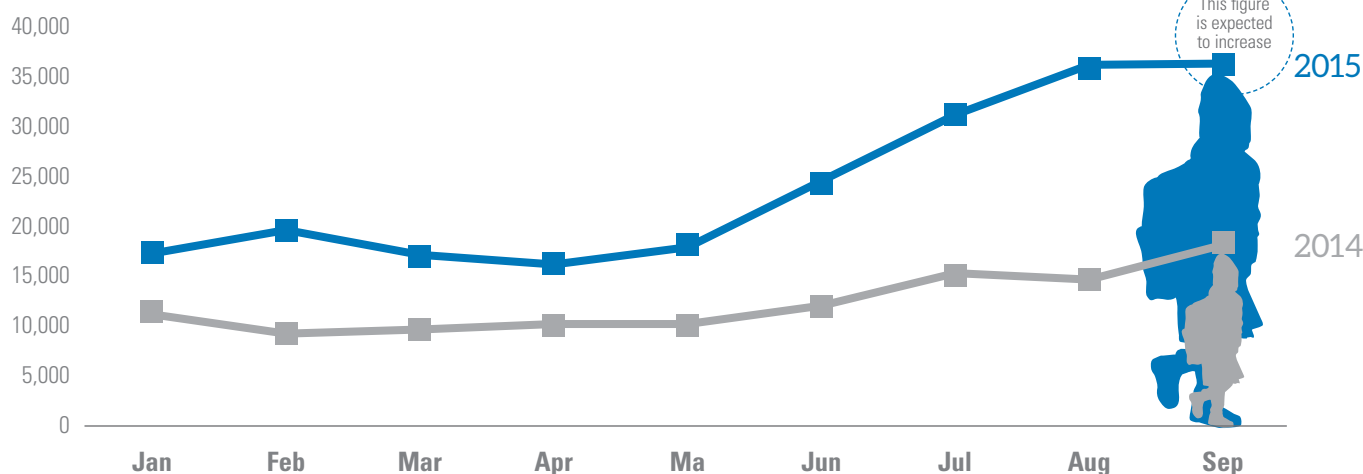
10 IOM Missing Migrants Project. All subsequent data on deaths is from this source.

Significant numbers of children are seeking asylum in the EU

- A large number of children are seeking asylum in their final destinations in Europe. According to the latest available data from Eurostat, over 802,205 asylum claims had been registered in the EU between January and September 2015, almost double the number from this time last year; asylum applications are expected to surpass one million by the end of the year.¹¹
- Last year, over one quarter of all asylum applications – more than 160,000 – in the EU were from children.¹² Between January and September 2015, numbers of child applicants had already reached 214,355, surpassing all of 2014, and represented 27 per cent of all asylum claims this year.¹³
- Of all children seeking asylum in the EU this year, the greatest numbers originate from Syria (25 per cent), Afghanistan (18 per cent), Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) (10 per cent), Albania (8 per cent), Iraq (6 per cent) and Serbia (5 per cent). Children from three conflict-affected countries alone (Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq) account for 49 per cent of all child asylum claims in the EU, while children originating from the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) represent 27 per cent of all asylum applications.¹⁴

Monthly child asylum applications in the EU

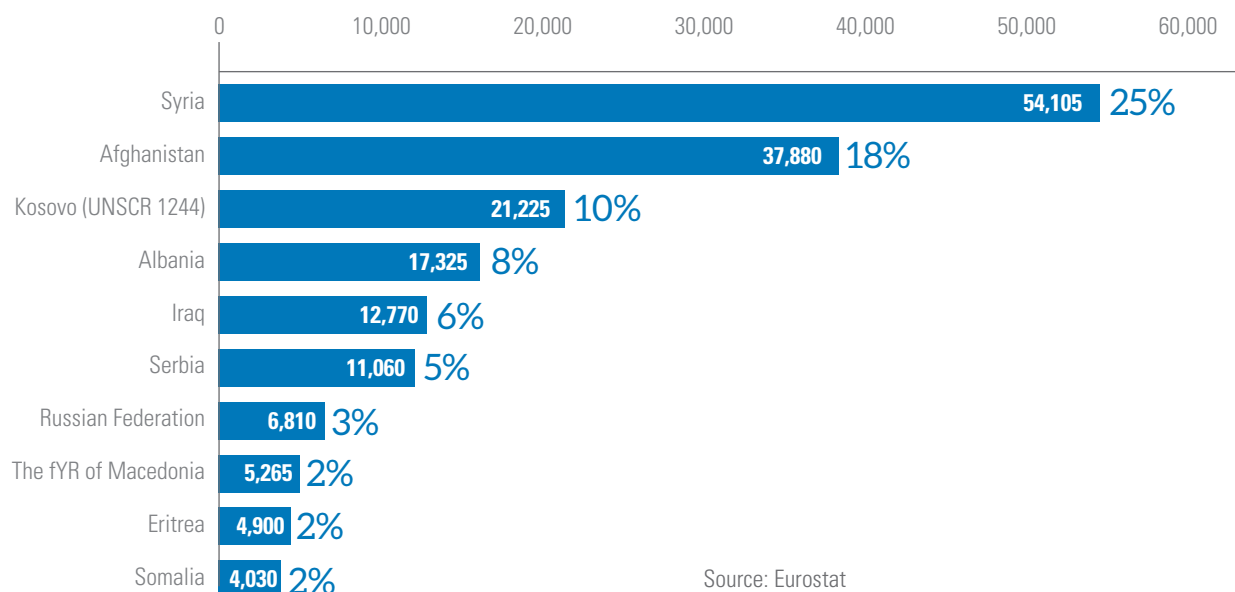
2014 and 2015



Source: Eurostat (note: the final figure for total asylum claims in September 2015 is not yet available, and is expected to increase)

Top 10 child asylum applications in the EU by country/territory of origin

January – September 2015



Source: Eurostat

¹¹ Eurostat, "Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex Monthly data (rounded)" (migr_asyappctzm). Accessed 14 November 2015.

¹² Eurostat, "Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex Annual data (rounded)" (migr_asyunaa). Accessed 11 November 2015.

¹³ Eurostat, "Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex Monthly data (rounded)" (migr_asyappctzm). Accessed 14 November 2015.

¹⁴ Eurostat, "Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex Monthly data (rounded)" (migr_asyappctzm). Accessed 14.11.2015.

Unaccompanied children arriving in Europe in record numbers

- In 2014, over 23,000 asylum applicants in the EU were considered unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs) – or 4 per cent of all asylum applicants, and 14 per cent of all child applicants.¹⁵ Roughly one third of them sought asylum in Sweden. Other countries receiving large numbers of child asylum seekers were Germany and Italy.¹⁶
- In 2015, one of the destination countries, Sweden, continues to receive applications for asylum from a significant number of unaccompanied and separated children. From January to October this year, more UASCs had sought asylum in Sweden alone than there were in the entire EU last year, with 23,300 claims (9,300 UASCs applied for asylum in Sweden in October alone).¹⁷ Over 60 per cent this year are from Afghanistan. In Norway, more than 3,800 UASCs applied for asylum between January and October.¹⁸
- For countries with children on the move, Italy has registered 10,820 UASCs arriving by sea,¹⁹ while the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia registered over 15,000 UASCs crossing the border with Greece from mid-June to late November.²⁰ Many people on the move in the Balkans are not registering as they cross borders, so the numbers of UASCs there are likely to be much higher than reported.
- Trafficking of children is also a challenge. Italy has seen a 300 per cent increase in the number of Nigerian victims of trafficking arriving by sea compared to last year, with about half of them unaccompanied children.²¹
- While record numbers of refugee and migrant children have arrived in Europe in 2015, it is very difficult to get accurate numbers for unaccompanied and separated children, as formal registration procedures in some countries in Europe do not allow for their identification.

Children at risk

Five groups of refugee and migrant children on the move in Europe are most vulnerable and require special attention and monitoring:

1.



Babies and small children – With winter fast approaching, there is a heightened risk of these children dying at sea or on land, or becoming seriously ill with hypothermia or pneumonia. Babies and small children are more at risk of drowning, as they can slip from parents' arms during shipwrecks.

2.



Children with disabilities and special needs (physical or psychological) – these children face especially difficult journeys through Europe, with very little or no specialised services throughout their journey.

3.



Lost children – children separated from their families or caregivers during the journey; mainly during uncontrolled movement of crowds during border crossing or when boarding buses, trains and taxis. Tracing mechanisms at the borders and prompt reunification procedures should be systematically put in place.

4.



Stranded children – children who do not have the financial means, contacts or support networks to find the money or resources they need to pursue their journey. They are mainly found in the Greek Islands and Italy. Increasing numbers are now found in Athens. They are especially vulnerable to all forms of abuse, trafficking, recruitment by criminal gangs, and violence including sexual abuse and exploitation. Strengthened monitoring of these children and effective guardianship mechanisms should help protect them from further harm.

5.



Unaccompanied adolescents on the move – many are males aged between 14 and 17 and many are from Afghanistan; they often do not want to be identified as unaccompanied or separated children and avoid being registered or pretend to be young adults to escape traditional protection measures which hold them back. They usually travel in groups of other teenagers, sometimes with an adult, sometimes not. These children are at high risk of trafficking and exploitative conditions along the route.

15 Eurostat, "Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex Annual data (rounded)" [migr_asyunaa], and "Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex Annual data (rounded)" [migr_asyunaa]. Accessed 11 November 2015.

16 Eurostat, 2015, "The number of asylum applicants in the EU jumped to more than 625 000 in 2014" <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-press-releases/-/3-20032015-BP>

17 Swedish Migration Agency. Monthly Statistics: Asylum applications. Available from <http://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Facts-and-statistics-/Statistics.html>. Accessed 8 November 2015.

18 Utländingsdirektoratet (UDI). "January - October 2015: Asylum applications of unaccompanied minors lodged in Norway by nationality and month."

19 Italian Ministry of Interior, as of 31 October 2015.

20 Ministry of Interior, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as of 17 November 2015.

21 IOM Rome.

Migration across the Mediterranean Sea and over land routes poses significant risks for children and their families as well as challenges for countries in Europe – both those where people are on the move and those that are final destinations – and for humanitarian actors involved in the response.

It is crucial that information is as accurate and timely as possible to ensure adequate care for children and their families. In particular, UNICEF and IOM stress the need for socio-demographic data to be collected for all children (age, sex, origin) during all registration processes.

Monitoring needs to be strengthened to ensure that vulnerable women and children are identified and protected, and measures and practices that prevent family separation are put into place

at all points on their journey. Continuous advocacy is being conducted with government partners for promoting practices that allow families to be processed and move together.

This situation calls for reinforcing in countries where children's journeys are interrupted and at final destinations the capacity to identify, refer and support children at risk, including accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children, and children victims of violence, trafficking and exploitation, with health, education, and protection services and care.



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