



Children at Risk

The refugee and migrant crisis in Europe

Countries where children are on the move

Who they are and what to do for the most vulnerable child refugees and migrants in Europe - UNICEF

The refugee and migrant crisis in Europe is unlike any other in the scope and scale and speed at which it is unfolding. It engulfs multiple countries and is characterized by a mass movement of people, unwilling to stop in their quest to reach destination countries such as Germany and Sweden. Since early 2015, the number of children and women has steadily increased with a sharp spike since the summer as winter approaches. Not only is the total number of children seeking asylum in the European Union unprecedented in recent history – 190,000 in total from January to September this year, according to Eurostat – but so too is the number of children. In June, just one in 10 refugees and migrants was a child. By October, children accounted for one in three refugees and migrants registered crossing the border from Greece into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through Gevgelija.

UNICEF calls the attention of governments, citizens and humanitarian actors to the needs and rights of children on the move. All refugee and migrant children are at risk of violations and threats to their lives and well-being and all need protection, but five groups of children on the move are particularly vulnerable. The following actions are already being carried out by government authorities, UNICEF, UNHCR, and Red Cross humanitarian protection workers and national social workers. We ask that governments and partners join UNICEF in stepping up the following efforts to improve policies and protection practices for children on the move:

“These young people are determined to make a better life for themselves but their futures hang in the balance as they make their way through Europe. We cannot let them down. The big question for us in Europe is: are we ready for this, is Europe fit for purpose, will we be able to give these children the future that they risking their lives for?”

Marie-Pierre Poirier,
UNICEF Special Coordinator for the Refugee
and Migrant Crisis in Europe.



Quick facts



October 2015 saw almost the same number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe as all of 2014.



Sharp spike in numbers of children claiming asylum in Europe – now at unprecedented levels - in total **190,000** this year.



790,000

So far this year, more than 790,000* people have arrived by sea in Europe, with most fleeing conflict and violence in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. A growing percentage of those are children and women. For example, 44%** of all refugees and migrants registering at the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia border with Greece in October were children and women.



44%



3 million

No end in sight - the EU predicts that **3 million people** will seek asylum by the end of 2016.

* Data from UNHCR: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

** Data from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Ministry of Information

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.

- **ACTION:** Rapid winterization by equipping reception centres with hard floor, heating and winter supplies (clothing and blankets); provision of hygiene kits, nutritious food, medicines; and ensuring access to health services.
- **ASKS:** Avoid uncertainty and sudden border closures which expose these children to long waits at border crossings in the rain and cold in ‘no man’s land’; keep an orderly and coordinated approach where governments share advance information of refugee and migrant flows; step up search and rescue missions on sea and land.

2. Children with disabilities and special needs

– Whether the disability is physical or other, children with disabilities face especially difficult journeys through Europe, some being carried the entire way by their parents, with very little or no support services throughout their journey.

- **ACTION:** Making toilets and other facilities accessible for children with disabilities, setting up referral mechanisms and inclusive services.
- **ASKS:** Special assistance is also provided to children with chronic or severe medical condition and children with disabilities through the child-friendly spaces (provision of wheelchair, fast-track access to services and transport, etc.) and when necessary and agreed with the child and his/her family referral to specialized services.

3. Lost children – Children separated from their family or caregivers during the journey; mainly during uncontrolled movement of crowds during border crossing or when boarding buses, trains and taxis.

- **ACTION:** Working with humanitarian partners, simplified procedures for prompt reunification of children and their families or care givers have been put into place in reception and transit centres. This work is being conducted jointly by UNICEF, UNHCR, and Red Cross humanitarian protection workers and national social workers. In most cases children are reunified the same day or within less than three days.
- **ASKS:** Measures such as number tracking or tagging for families help prevent children being separated; monitoring by child protection officers and translators in key languages.

4. Children left behind – 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 on 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.

- **ACTION:** Monitoring, providing guidance, supporting governments to strengthen their national child protection systems promote access for all children to quality education, health and social protection.
- **ASKS:** Children left behind need to be provided urgent care and protection including accommodation in a safe and open social welfare accommodation centre; they need temporary documentation allowing them to stay in the country; they need to have a qualified guardian nominated to assist them develop a personalized plan for family reunification, access to justice and determination of their best interests and ensuring that they

are properly consulted in decisions affecting their lives.

5. Unaccompanied adolescents on the move

– Mostly boys aged between 14 and 17, many 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 would hold them back. They usually travel in groups of other teenagers, sometimes with an adult, sometimes not.

- **ACTION:** In reception and transit centres, humanitarian protection workers and local social workers closely monitor the situation to identify the most vulnerable adolescents and conduct child-friendly interviews when possible to assess their needs.
- **ASKS:** When there is no evidence of risks, it may be in their best interests to allow them to continue their journey and thus prevent further harm; where children do remain in accommodation centres while their asylum applications are being heard, advocate for measures to increase safety (separate toilets, adequate lighting, staffing 24/7).



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