Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe

Overview of Trends 2017

Arrivals to Europe in 2017

In 2017, 32,963 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, of whom 19,858 (60%) were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC). Arrivals of children overall in 2017 decreased by 67% compared to 2016 (100,264). Nevertheless, the proportion of children arriving unaccompanied or separated has increased from 34% in 2016 to 60% in 2017.

**Greece**

In 2017, 11,032 children arrived to Greece by sea, including 1,458 (13%) UASC. While this is an 83% decrease compared to 2016 (63,920), 72% (8,014) of children arriving in 2017 were registered during the second half of 2017. Between July and December 2017, the number of UASC identified (1,049) was more than double the first half of the year (409).

The majority of children arriving to Greece by sea were from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Afghanistan or Stateless. Most common nationalities of UASC were the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**Italy**

Among the 17,337 children who arrived to Italy in 2017, 15,779 (91%) were unaccompanied or separated. This is a 33% decrease compared to 2016 (25,846). This decrease is mainly due to the overall drop in the number of people crossing the Central Mediterranean since July 2017. Most children originated from Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Bangladesh and Nigeria.

**Bulgaria**

In 2017, 714 children were intercepted at border crossing points and within the territory of the country, an 89% decrease compared to 2016 (6,447). Among those, 27% were unaccompanied or separated children (195) which presents a 93% decrease compared to 2016 (2,768). Most children were from Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan.

**Spain**

Between January and December 2017, 3,880 children arrived to Spain by sea and land. Based on a response to a parliamentary question, at least 63% of all child arrivals (2,426) were UASC. Most children came from Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic, Algeria, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea. Child arrivals in the second half of 2017 were 44% higher than in the first six months.
Demographic of Arrivals, Including Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Greece

- Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival
  - Greece: 9,574 Accompanied, 1,458 UASC
  - Italy: 1,558 Accompanied, 15,779 UASC
  - Spain: 1,454 Accompanied, 2,426 UASC
  - Bulgaria: 519 Accompanied, 195 UASC

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Accompanied</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>6,346 43%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>1,189</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1,904</td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>1,417</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>1,312</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>1,228</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UASC by Country of Origin and Arrival

- Greece (Crude): 1,904 11%
- China: 1,646 9%
- The Gambia: 1,417 8%
- Bangladesh: 1,312 8%
- Nigeria: 1,228 7%
- India: 1,037 6%
- Other: 946 5%
Gender Breakdown of All Children by Country of Arrival

Overall, the proportion of boys compared to girls among arrivals remains higher (on average 4 boys for every 1 girl).

![Gender Breakdown Chart](chart_url)

Age Breakdown of Accompanied and UASC by Country of Arrival

Among the 10,093 accompanied children who arrived to Greece and Bulgaria, 31% were 0 to 4 years old, 34% were 5 to 14 years old and 35% were 15 to 17 years old. An age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy and Spain is not available.

Accompanied Children - Age Breakdown

![Accompanied Children Age Breakdown Chart](chart_url)

Unaccompanied and Separated Children – Age breakdown

![Unaccompanied Children Age Breakdown Chart](chart_url)

Reception on Arrival in 2017*

**Greece**

- An estimated 21,000 children were present in Greece as of 31 December 2017. Of them, 53% are in urban areas (apartments, hotels, shelters for UASC, etc.); 29% are in accommodation sites and 1% are in safe zones for UASC. A further 12% are in Reception and Identification Centres.

- In total, 438 unaccompanied children were in Reception and Identification Centres (a two-fold increase since September 2017) and 54 were in protective custody/detention (down from 106 in September 2017).

- 1,101 UASC were in shelters for UASC, with an additional 2,290 on the waiting list for shelter. Due to increased arrivals and limited places, the number of children on the waiting list for shelters increased by 88% during the second half of 2017.

**Italy**

- 18,303 UASC (93% boys and 7% girls) were present in shelters for UASC, run by State authorities and nonprofit entities at the end of 2017. This is only 500 more than in June, although during the same period of time 6,217 UASC arrived in Italy. 93% of all UASC in the shelters in December were between 15 and 17 years old.

**Bulgaria**

- 348 children, including UASC, were accommodated in reception centres in Sofia and Southern Bulgaria in December 2017. This represents a two-fold decrease compared to June 2017 and a five-fold decrease compared to March 2017.

- All persons intercepted, including children and UASC, continued to be routinely detained until they claim asylum. Overall, in 2017, children spent an average 10 days in detention before being transferred to a reception centre. In January, May, July and November children spent over 20 days in detention on average.

**Serbia**

- A total of 1,444 children were present in the country in December 2017, a 44% decrease compared to June 2017 and 51% decrease compared to March 2017.

- Children comprise 34% of the total number of refugees and migrants in the country, 94% of whom are accommodated in state reception and accommodation centres, including 279 UASC.

The reception systems still vary greatly in quality across and within countries, sometimes even posing protection risks. The large number of children who are not in shelters have either moved onwards or found themselves destitute on the streets or in informal accommodation.

* Figures reflect the situation as of end of December 2017

Sources: EKKA-Greece, UNHCR, UNICEF, Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.
Asylum Applications and Decisions

In 2017, European countries recorded 209,756 asylum claims by children, including 50,325 newly registered asylum claims during the last quarter of 2017. This represents a 47% drop from 2016, when 396,740 children claimed asylum in Europe.

Children make up more than 30% of all asylum seekers across Europe. Half of all child asylum seekers came from just three countries: Syrian Arab Republic (27%), Iraq (10%) and Afghanistan (10%). A total of 42% of all child asylum seekers are girls.

Germany is still the top destination for refugee and migrant children, registering close to half of all child asylum applications in 2017 (89,205 children of whom 9,084 UASC). France, Greece and Italy also recorded large numbers of child asylum seekers (20,970, 19,790 and 16,309 respectively). Greece also had the highest number of first-time applicants relative to the population.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>UASC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>89,205</td>
<td>9,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>20,970</td>
<td>no data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>19,790</td>
<td>2,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>16,309</td>
<td>9,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>11,620</td>
<td>1,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>8,507</td>
<td>1,336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>7,455</td>
<td>3,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>7,305</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>6,595</td>
<td>no data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The difference in numbers of arrivals and asylum applications can be explained by the long waiting times before people can claim asylum, backlogs in national asylum systems, as well as the fact that applications can be submitted by persons who have arrived previously or did not necessarily come through the Mediterranean Routes.

In 2017, a total of 303,360 decisions on asylum claims by children were issued. Of them, 63% were positive and 37% rejected. This represents a slight decrease of the proportion of positive decisions compared to 2016, when 69% of children saw their asylum claims accepted. Among children with positive decisions, 52% received refugee status (down from 53% in 2016), 37% were granted subsidiary protection and 11% received humanitarian status (up from 9% in 2016).

Throughout the year there was a clear trend of countries granting subsidiary protection, and especially humanitarian protection, rather than refugee status. This was visible across nationalities, including Iraqi, Syrian, Afghan and Stateless children, for whom refugee status decisions dropped by 30%, 17%, 9% and 6% respectively just between the third and last quarter of 2017.

Many children saw their asylum claims rejected, particularly Pakistanis (75%) but also Bangladeshis (48%), Cote d’Ivoirian (42%), Iraqis (34%), Afghans (33%) and Guineans (28%).
Relocation

Between October 2015 and December 2017, a total of 33,154 refugees and migrants benefited from the EU relocation scheme. This number includes 11,237 children, out of whom 465 were UASC (368 from Greece and 97 from Italy).

More than half of children relocated from Greece were transferred to Germany (24%), France (20%) and the Netherlands (8%). Another quarter was relocated to Sweden (7%), Finland (7%), Spain (6%) and Portugal (5%).

One third of all relocated children from Italy departed to Germany (33%). Eighteen percent of children were transferred to the Netherlands, 11% to Sweden and 10% to Switzerland.

In 2017, a total of 300 UASC children benefited from the relocation scheme, 203 from Greece and 96 from Italy. This is a 80% increase compared to 165 relocated by the end of 2016. During the full duration of the scheme since October 2015, almost 70% of all relocated children were transferred in 2017.

Greece

By the end of December 2017, a total of 21,710 people were relocated from Greece to other EU Member States (14,430 between January and December 2017). 45% of all beneficiaries were children - 9,583 in total, including 368 UASC. The majority, 6,476 children were relocated in 2017 only, a two-fold increase compared to the 3,104 children who benefited between October 2015 and December 2016. In terms of relocations of UASC, 204 were transferred in 2017. This is a 25% increase compared to 164 who benefited from the relocation scheme in previous years.

Italy

Since the beginning of the relocation scheme in October 2015, a total of 11,444 refugees and migrants were relocated from Italy to different EU Member States. 11% of all beneficiaries were children (1,286), out of whom 97 are UASC. Almost all UASC were relocated in 2017 - 96, while only one was transferred in 2016. Moreover, 85% of all child beneficiaries were transferred in 2017 (1,079 vs. 192 in 2016 and 13 in 2015).

Returns from Greece to Turkey

Of the total returnees (1,484) from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement since the start of 2016 until the end of December 2017, 79 (5%) were children. All of them were returned with their families.

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

Between January and December 2017, IOM provided AVRR support to more than 72,000 migrants (36% less than the same period in 2016). 25% of migrants availing AVRR support were children, including 4% UASC. 71% of the AVRR beneficiaries returned from the European Economic Area and Switzerland. Among these, 58% returned from Germany. 27% of beneficiaries returning from the European Economic Area and Switzerland were children, among whom 2.5% were UASC.

Children Resettled to Europe

Of the total number of refugees submitted for resettlement (38,881) to Europe in 2017, 53% were children (29% boys and 24% girls). During the year, 26,468 resettled refugees departed to European countries.

Source: Europe Resettlement 2016, UNHCR

Sources: Hellenic Police, Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), Italian Ministry of Interior, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Spanish Ministry of Interior, Eurostat, BAMF-Germany, IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF
Children’s vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation

Travelling alone, long duration of travel, no or low level of education, high cost of the journey (above USD 5,000) and no close family in country of destination are some of the predictors of the higher positive responses of refugee and migrant children’s vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation indicators on the migration routes to Europe, a recent IOM study has shown.

**Travelling alone** - 86% of children who travelled alone reported experiencing events described in at least one of the listed human trafficking and exploitative practices indicators, compared to 63% of adults; 75% of those interviewed in Italy and 27% of those who arrived via Eastern Mediterranean Route. More boys (66%) than girls (50%) travelling without their families on both routes reported experiencing some form of exploitation.

**Long duration of travel** - children who reported travelling for more than 6 months were more likely to report experiencing some form of exploitation. Children on the Central Mediterranean Route recorded longer journeys from the departure country (more than 5 months) than those who travelled on the Eastern Mediterranean Route (in average 3 months in more than 70% of cases).

**No or low level of education** - children with the secondary level of education are less likely (61% of positive responses) to be vulnerable than those with primary (68%) or no formal education (78%).

**Cost of the journey** - children on the Eastern Mediterranean Route reported paying more than USD 5,000 in 44% of cases compared to 16% on the Central Mediterranean Route. However, children who arrived in Italy are more frequently unable to calculate the total amount paid.

**Family at the intended destination country** - having a family member in the intended country of destination appears to be a protective factor for refugee and migrant children as they are less likely to report exploitation than those without relatives in the intended country of destination.


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**Endnotes:**

1. Data on arrivals is partial due to the large scale of irregular movements and reflects only sea arrivals for Greece and Italy. Data for Spain include both sea and land arrivals and official disaggregated data is only available up until October 2017; data on the number of children and UASC arriving in November and December are estimates by UNHCR based on unofficial sources. Figures for UASC are only available for arrivals by sea (not for Ceuta or Melilla). Nationality breakdown of UASC arriving in Spain is not available.

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 (EKKAI) based on children identified on islands and mainland Greece, including near the land border with Turkey in 2017.

5. This number reflects all relocations since the launch of the EU relocation scheme in late 2015.

6. The data provided here is provisional and should therefore be considered as an estimation.

7. Figures for submissions and departures only include those that UNHCR assisted.

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**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, relocation from Greece and Italy under the EU relocation scheme, as well as returns from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement.

The present factsheet covers the period January to December 2017 and is produced on quarterly basis to provide up-to-date information on refugee and migrant children, including unaccompanied and separated children.

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**Sources:**

- Hellenic Police
- Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA)
- Italian Ministry of Interior
- Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees
- Spanish Ministry of Interior
- Eurostat
- BAMF-Germany
- IOM
- UNHCR
- UNICEF

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**Limitation of available data on Children and UASC:**

There is no comprehensive data on arrivals (both adults and children) in Europe, especially by land and air, as such movements are largely irregular and involve smuggling networks, which are difficult to track. If collected, data is rarely disaggregated by nationalities, risk category, gender or age.

Reliable data on the number of UASC either arriving to, or currently residing in, different European countries is often unavailable. The number of asylum applications filed by UASC is used to provide an indication of trends but does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the caseload due to backlogs in national asylum systems, onward irregular movements or not applying for asylum at all. In addition, due to different definitions and national procedures and practices, collecting accurate data on separated children specifically is very challenging (e.g. separated children being registered as either accompanied or unaccompanied). It should also be noted that complete data for the period January to December 2017 on children and UASC asylum applications for all EU member states was not available on the Eurostat website at the time this factsheet was released.

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**Jointly compiled and produced by:**

UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM