

Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated

Overview of Trends
January to June 2020



© IOM / 2020/ SEDRA TRC, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Cyprus and Malta between January and June 2020 (**14% girls and 86% boys**). Child arrivals in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain in the first half of 2020 decreased by **32%** compared to the first half of 2019 (**8,236**).

37%



Some
2,302

children who arrived in Europe between January and June 2020 were **unaccompanied and separated**.



Some
5,800
children

(**24% girls and 28% boys**) were under resettlement procedures in Europe in the first half of 2020.

Out of the total number of children



who sought international protection in Europe between January and June 2020, about 80% were registered in just five countries: **Germany (37%), France (14%), Greece and Spain (12% each) and the United Kingdom (5%)**.

Arrivals to Europe between January and June 2020¹

Between January and June 2020, **6,177** children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta. Of these, **2,302** (37%) were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC)². Child arrivals in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain in the first half of 2020 decreased by **32%** compared to the first half in 2019 (**8,236**).

Greece

Between January and June 2020, some 3,340³ children arrived in Greece by land and sea, including 391 UASC (12%)⁴. Like the number of people arriving overall in 2020 so far, the number of children also decreased, with 43% fewer children arriving than in the first half of 2019 (5,905). The number of children arriving unaccompanied or separated also decreased, with 61% less children compared to the same period in 2019 (994). Most children, including UASC, were from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq and State of Palestine.

Bulgaria

Between January and June 2020, some 101 children lodged their asylum applications in Bulgaria. Among them, 48% were UASC (48). Most asylum-seeking children originated from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq.⁷

Spain

Between January and June 2020, some 870⁵ children were estimated to have arrived by sea and land, including some 329 (38%) UASC. This is a 50% decrease compared to the same period in 2019 (1,750). Arrivals of UASC in the first half of 2020 also decreased by 39% compared to the same period in 2019 (538). Based on estimates, most children, including UASC, originated from Algeria, Morocco, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

Malta

Between January and June 2020, some 446⁸ children, including 415 (93%) UASC were among arrivals resulting from search and rescue activities. Most children, including UASC, originated from Sudan, Somalia and Bangladesh.

Italy

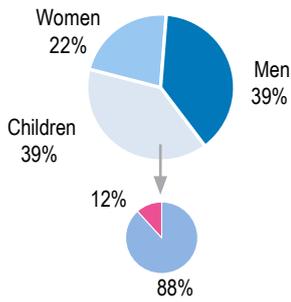
Among the 1,289 children who arrived in Italy between January and June 2020, 1,080 (84%) were UASC – a ratio amongst all children that has remained consistent in recent years. Arrivals of children in the first half of 2020 more than doubled compared to the same period in 2019 (486). Most children originated from Bangladesh, Tunisia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea.⁶

Cyprus

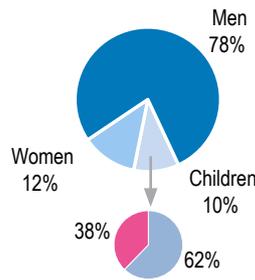
Among the 131 children who arrived in Cyprus between January and June 2020 by sea, 39 (30%) were UASC. Most children, including UASC, originated from the Syrian Arab Republic and Somalia.

Demographic of Arrivals, including Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children

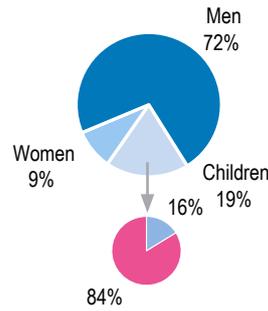
GREECE



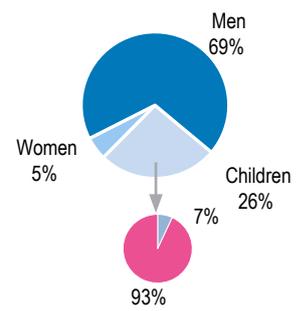
SPAIN



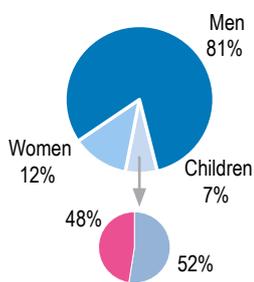
ITALY



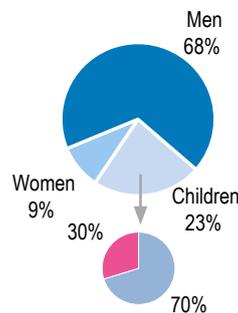
MALTA



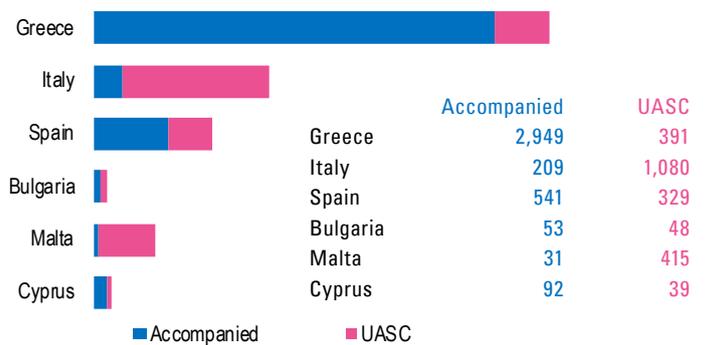
BULGARIA



CYPRUS

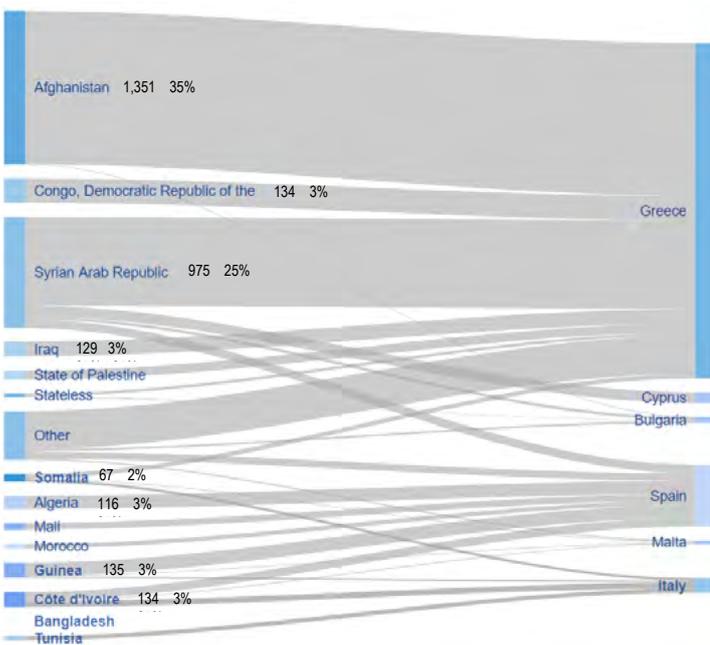


Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival

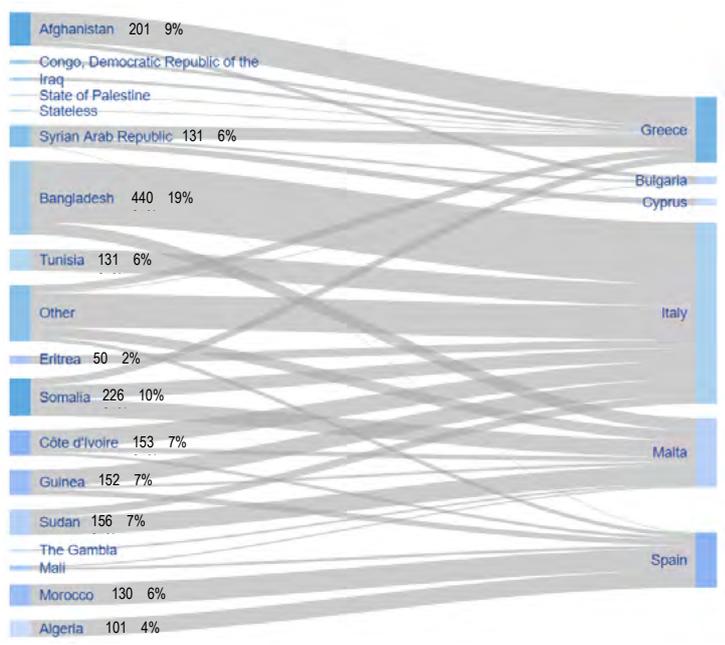


Nationality of Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated Children by Country of Arrival

Accompanied Children by Country of Origin and Arrival



UASC by Country of Origin and Arrival

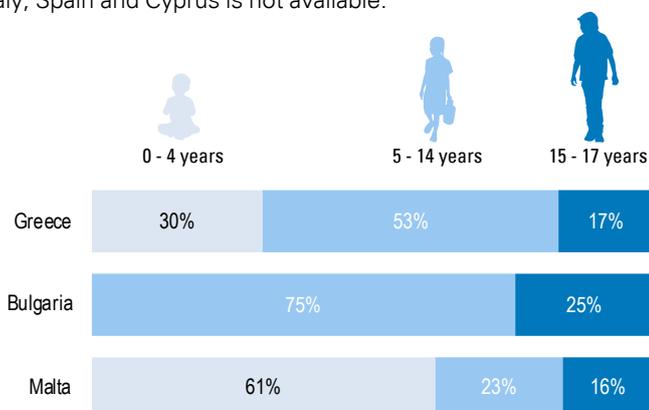


Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA; Italian Ministry of Interior; Bulgaria State Agency for Refugees; Spanish Ministry of Interior; Malta Immigration Police; and Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement, Malta (MHAS).

Age and sex breakdown of all Children by Country of Arrival

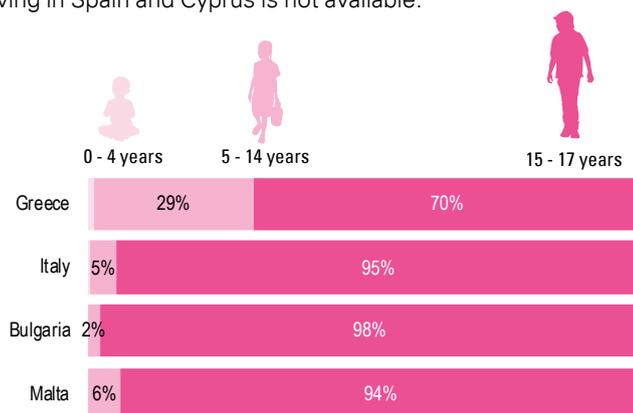
Accompanied Children - Age Breakdown

Among the 3,033 accompanied children who arrived in Greece, Bulgaria and Malta between January and June 2020, 30% were 0 to 4 years old, 53% were 5 to 14 years old and 17% were 15 to 17 years old. The age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy, Spain and Cyprus is not available.



Unaccompanied Children - Age Breakdown

The majority of UASC who arrived in Italy, Greece, Bulgaria and Malta between January and June 2020 were between 15 and 17 years old (90% overall). Age disaggregated data on children arriving in Spain and Cyprus is not available.

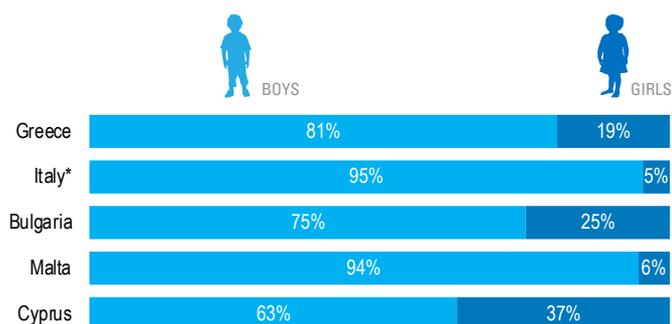


Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies on UASC in reception, Spanish Ministry of Interior and Social Policy, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Maltese Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE).

Note: Due to the limited disaggregation or inconsistency of data by age and sex across countries, these graphs refer to estimates.

Sex Breakdown of Children by Country of Arrival

Overall, the proportion of boys among arrivals remains high: 85% of children who arrived through various Mediterranean routes between January and June 2020 were boys. The proportion of girls arriving alone in Greece in the same period decreased by half (19%) compared to the first half in 2019 (42%), whereas the proportion of boys arriving unaccompanied in Italy remained consistent with previous trends. The proportion of boys among arrivals to Malta remained similar compared to the children arrived in the whole of 2019.



*For Italy, the calculation is based on the estimated 5,016 UASC registered in the reception system as of 30 June 2020 according to the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.

Reception on arrival as of June 2020

Greece

- Of all children present in Greece, 48% were living in urban areas (apartments, hotels, shelters for unaccompanied children, self-settled, etc.); 28% were in accommodation sites; 1% were in safe zones for unaccompanied children and 23% were in Reception and Identification Centres.
- An estimated 45,100 children were present in Greece as of 30 June 2020, an increase from 32,000 in June 2019.

Italy

- The majority of UASC registered at the end of June 2020 (94%) were in shelters for unaccompanied children run by state authorities and non-profit entities, while the rest were in family care arrangements (6%).
- As of June 2020, some 5,016 unaccompanied migrant and asylum-seeking children (95% boys and 5% girls) were present in the country.

Spain

- There are specialised government-run reception centers across the 17 Autonomous communities and the 2 autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla available to accommodate children.
- As of the end of February 2020, there were 11,978 UASC in reception (1,099 female and 10,879 male), according to the ADEXTTRA registry of unaccompanied migrant children.

Malta

- Upon arrival, unaccompanied children awaiting age assessment are placed in detention facilities. After the age assessment has been conducted, those found to be underage may be placed in open reception centers with dedicated sections for unaccompanied children over the age of 16. Unaccompanied children below the age of 16 are usually accommodated in Dar Il-Liedna open centre, designated for children.
- At the end of June 2020, an estimated 350 unaccompanied children were accommodated in open centers, while a further 338 remained in detention facilities. Another 90 unaccompanied children were hosted at the Initial Reception Center.

Bulgaria

- 101 children, including 48 unaccompanied children, were accommodated in reception facilities in Sofia and Southern Bulgaria.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Migrant and asylum-seeking/refugee children are hosted in Temporary Reception Centres and other formal accommodation throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Unaccompanied children were accommodated in Usivak, Bira, Miral, Borici, Sedra, and Blazuj Temporary Reception Centers.
- As of June 2020, a total of 817 migrant and asylum-seeking/refugee children were present in the country. Of these 468 children (268 boys and 200 girls) were accommodated with family members and 349 were unaccompanied (348 boys, one girl).

Croatia

- The Croatian government designated two facilities for children in Zagreb and in Split for the initial reception of UASC during which best interests' procedures are undertaken. These should be completed within 3 months to determine appropriate solutions, including on accommodation and care. The children, irrespective of their legal status, are largely entitled to the same protection and care as Croatian children.
- From January to June 2020 there were 104 UASC registered as seeking international protection in Croatia, of which 97 boys (10 boys of 0-13 years old, 13 boys of 14-15 years old, 74 boys of 16-17 years old) and 7 girls (2 girls of 0-13 years old, 1 girls 14-15 years old, 4 girls 16-17 years old).

Hungary

- Unaccompanied children cannot legally be detained in Hungary, while accompanied children may be detained for up to 30 days with their families. Unaccompanied children are accommodated in a dedicated children's home in Budapest.
- From 1 January to 21 May 2020, about 207 children, including 6 separated children, were detained in the transit zones.
- In June, there were about 50 accompanied children in the reception centres. 7 unaccompanied (6 boys, 1 girl) were additionally accommodated in the Children's Home as of June.

Montenegro

- A total of 78 children were accommodated in closed and open reception centers in facilities in Podgorica, Spuz and Konik. Of those, 38 were accompanied boys, 4 unaccompanied boys, and 36 accompanied girls. There were no unaccompanied girls.

Poland

- Accompanied children may be placed in detention, reception facilities or private accommodation together with their parents or legal guardians. Unaccompanied children are placed in childcare facilities together with Polish children.
- On 30 June, there was one unaccompanied child in the asylum procedure in Poland.

Romania

- Families with children, who do not have sufficient resources for private accommodation, are hosted in one of six existing reception facilities.
- UAC under the age of 16 are usually referred to national child protection services and placed in residential facilities run by the Child Protection Directorate, where they are accommodated together with Romanian children in similar situations. Older adolescents typically remain in government-run reception facilities for asylum seekers and refugees of all ages.
- As of June 2020, some 89 unaccompanied children submitted their asylum requests.

Slovenia

- Asylum-seeking UAC are placed in quarantine (related to COVID) at Logatec closed accommodation facility for 10 days. Some are then transferred to student dormitories in Postojna. One of these has been designated for the reception of UAC and can accommodate up to 22 children.
- Unaccompanied children who do not apply for asylum may be confined (related to COVID) in accordance with the Foreigners Act. Also asylum-seeking children accompanied by their parents may be confined.

Reception systems for children vary greatly across and within countries and can pose protection risks if not appropriate for the needs of children, particularly unaccompanied and separated children. A significant number of unaccompanied children are not hosted in formal shelters or family-based care arrangements. While official information is unavailable, reports suggest many of these children have moved onwards, residing in informal accommodation or on the streets.



Impact of COVID

The impact which COVID-19 has had on entire systems and population groups of course extends to refugee and migrant children. Suspension of procedures such as registration, age assessment and asylum impacted access to services for children, including guardianship, and in some contexts access to appropriate shelter. Family reunion/reunification has been delayed with the suspension of asylum procedures, consular services in third countries and limited flight options to facilitate transfers. Physical distancing and confinement measures have exacerbated previous challenges of individual oversight and case management, effective information provision to children as well as support for caregivers and parents. Access to education has been a challenge particularly in reception facilities, as refugee and migrant children may not have the same levels of connectivity for online learning, and with crowded reception conditions being far less conducive to learning than school environments. Integration may also be hindered as regular interaction in schools and with host community children and teachers has been disrupted. Overall, heightened risk factors such as increased poverty and food insecurity, limited access to education, disruption of peer and social support networks for children/caregivers, as well as community and social support services, have had a detrimental effect on mental health and psycho-social well-being, and exacerbated the risk of violence, abuse and neglect for children, both unaccompanied and within families.

Positive practices:

- In France, self-declared minority was accepted to facilitate access to child protection services while age assessment procedures remained suspended
- In a number of national contexts, remote case management for children continued while confinement measures prevented in-person support and visits
- In a number of national contexts, the validity of residence permits – including those for unaccompanied children and asylum seekers - due to expire in the first half of 2020 has been extended, as access to police and administration offices was delayed due to COVID-19 restrictive measures.
- The storybook “My Hero is You” is a child-friendly publication developed by the IASC MHPSS reference group and already translated into several languages to explain covid to children.
- In Bulgaria, the child protection agency has set up a hotline accessible for covid-related advice and information for parents and children.



Asylum Applications and Decisions

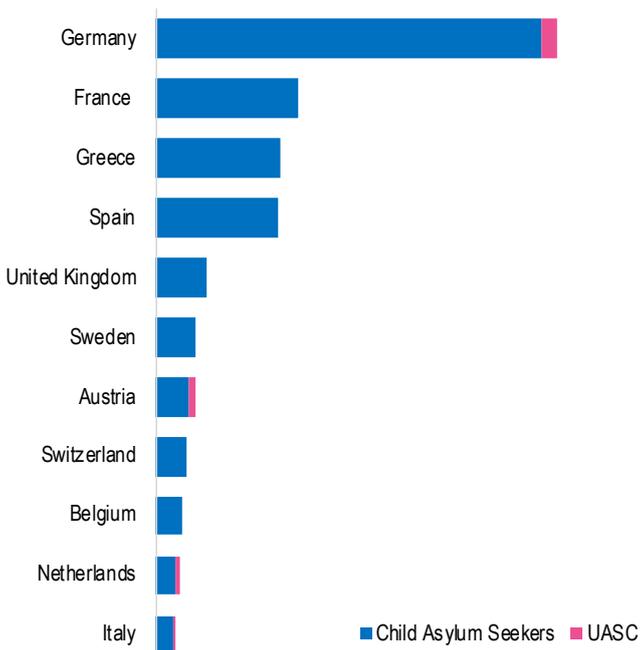
During the first half of 2020, countries in Europe⁹ recorded some **218,755** new asylum seekers. Nearly a third of them (**69,010**) were children – a decrease of **29%** compared to the number of child asylum applicants in the first half in 2019 (97,235).

During the first half of 2020, the **Syrian Arab Republic** continued to be most common country of origin among child asylum seekers (22%), followed by Afghanistan (13%), **Iraq** (6%), **Venezuela, Colombia** and **Eritrea** (4% each).

45% of all child asylum seekers were female. Among the top countries of origin for child asylum seekers, females represented a high proportion of those from **Côte d'Ivoire** (64%), followed by **Guinea (54%), Nigeria (52%), Venezuela (50%), Turkey** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo (49%), Colombia (48%), Russian Federation (47%), Eritrea** and **Syrian Arab Republic (46% each)**.

Like previous years, **Germany** remained the top destination for refugee and migrant children, registering 37% of all child asylum applications between January and June 2020 (25,755 children). Other countries that recorded large numbers of child asylum seekers included **France** (9,590 children, 14%), **Greece** (8,385 children, 12%), **Spain** (8,115 children, 12%), and the **United Kingdom** (3,445 children, 5%).

First-time Asylum Applications Lodged by Children, and Asylum Applicants considered to be Unaccompanied and Separated Children, between January and June 2020, by Country of Asylum*



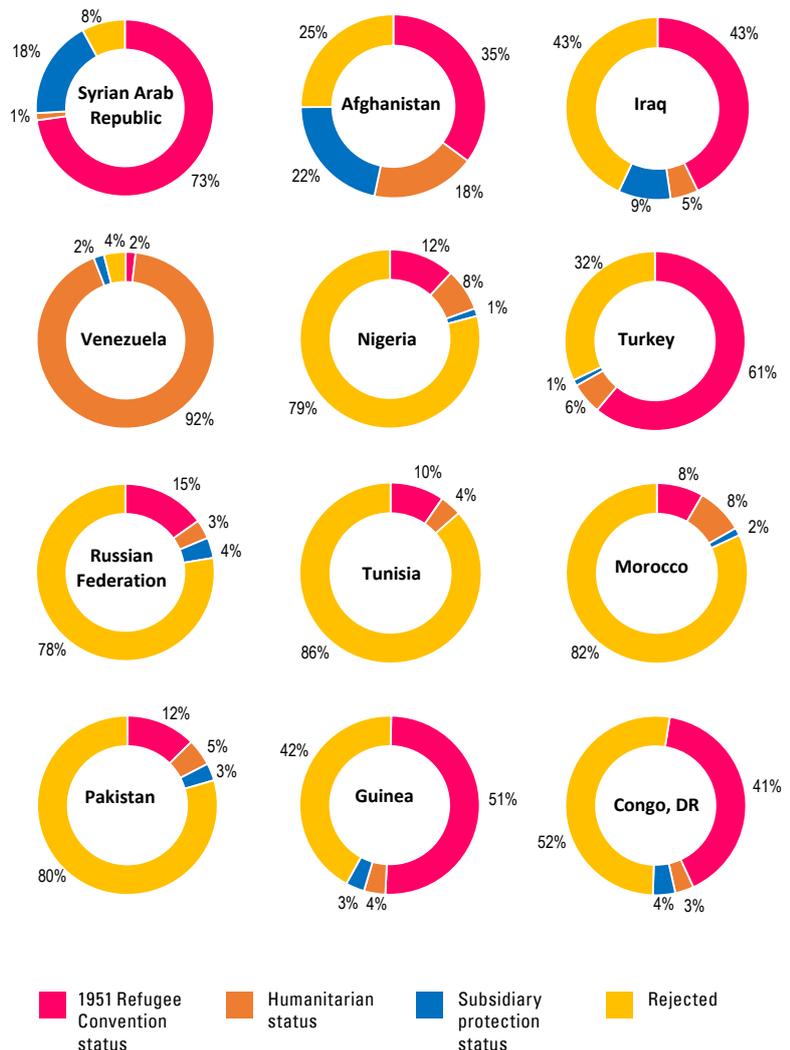
*The difference in numbers of arrivals and asylum applications can be explained by the long waiting times before people can claim asylum, backlogs in national asylum systems, as well as the fact that applications can be submitted by persons who have arrived previously or did not necessarily come through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

Between January and June 2020, a total of **74,635** decisions were issued for child asylum claims by national authorities across Europe. Among those, **60%** were positive – a similar percentage as compared to the first half of 2019 (59%). Most decisions granting refugee status and subsidiary protection were issued by Germany to Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan children, while the majority of decisions granting humanitarian status were issued by Spain to Venezuelan and Ukrainian children.

Of all children who received a positive decision, **68%** were granted **refugee status** (slightly down from 72% same period in 2019), 18% were granted subsidiary protection (19% same period in 2019) and 15% humanitarian status (up from 9% same period in 2019).

Among top countries of origin, the share of negative decisions was notably higher among those coming from North and West African countries, as well as children from Pakistan (80%), Russian Federation (78%) and Iraq (43%).

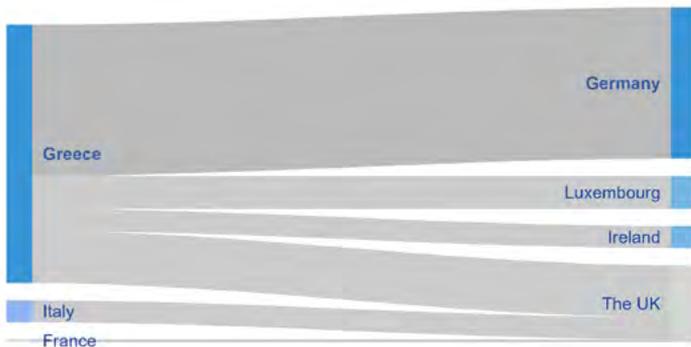
Decisions on Child Asylum Applications between January and June 2020



Source: Eurostat 2019

Relocation

After the official closure of the EU emergency relocation scheme in 2018, IOM has continued to support national authorities to relocate migrants and refugees arriving by sea to other EU Member States through bilateral agreements between countries involved, as well as increasingly through EC funded projects implemented by IOM in Greece and Malta in coordination with UNHCR and UNICEF. Despite the challenges faced due to COVID-19, IOM relocation efforts continued throughout all months of the reporting period. Between January and June 2020, a total of 108 children (95 boys, 13 girls) were relocated from Greece, Italy, France and Malta. Of them, 103 were unaccompanied children and were relocated to Germany (55), Ireland (8) and Luxembourg (12) under relocation projects, while others were relocated to the UK (28) under the Dubs scheme.



[source]

Returns from Greece to Turkey

Of all returnees from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement between 2016 and March 2020 (2,140), 107 (5%) were children. All of them were returned with their families.

[source]

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

Between January and June 2020, IOM provided AVRR support to 17,793 migrants globally (37% less than the same period in 2019). About 9% of them were children, including 14 unaccompanied and separated children. Overall, 5,834 beneficiaries were assisted to return from countries of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland. Of these, 29% (1,68) were assisted to return from Germany only and 19% (1,142) were children, including 14 who were unaccompanied or separated. Out of all beneficiaries assisted to return from the EEA and Switzerland, around 15% (881) returned to countries of South-Eastern, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; 8% (487) returned to the Middle East and Northern Africa, 8% (433) to countries of South America and the remaining 69% (4,033) to other regions.

Children Resettled to Europe

Of the total 11,200 people in resettlement procedures in Europe between January and June 2020, 52% were children (28% boys and 24% girls). Children's resettlement cases in Europe were most commonly being considered by Sweden, France, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom and Netherlands. The most common nationalities of children whose cases were being considered by European states for resettlement included Syrians, Congolese (DRC), South Sudanese, Sudanese and Eritreans.

Source: 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 resettlement portal and UNICEF.



Definitions:

A **“separated child”** is a child separated from both parents or from his/her previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. This may, therefore, mean that the child is accompanied by other adult family members.

An **“unaccompanied child”** is a child separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by any other adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. [\[source\]](#)

A **“refugee”** is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Article 1 A 1951 Refugee Convention).

An **“asylum seeker”** is a person who has applied for asylum and is waiting for a decision as to whether or not they are a refugee. Determination of refugee status can only be of a declaratory nature. Indeed, any person is a refugee within the framework of a given instrument if he meets the criteria of the refugee definition in that instrument, whether he is formally recognized as a refugee or not (UNHCR Note on Determination of Refugee Status under International Instruments). [\[source\]](#)

A **“migrant”** refers to any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. [\[source\]](#)

About the factsheet

This factsheet is jointly produced by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM with the aim to support evidence-based decision-making and advocacy on issues related to refugee and migrant children.

The document provides an overview of the situation in Europe with regards to refugee and migrant children (accompanied and UASC). It compiles key child-related data based on available official sources: arrival, asylum applications, asylum decisions, profiling of arrivals, 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 June 2020 and is produced every six months to provide up-to-date information on refugee and migrant children, including unaccompanied and separated children.

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 includes both sea and land arrivals and is based on UNHCR estimates, pending provision of final figures by Spanish Ministry of Interior (MOI); figures for UASC are only available for arrivals by sea (not for Ceuta or Melilla).
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 Police.
4. During the same period of time, a total of 739 referrals were made to the Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) based on children identified on islands and mainland Greece, including near the land border with Turkey in January-June 2020.
5. UNHCR estimated figures pending provision of final figures by Spanish Ministry of Interior (MOI); figures on UASC arrivals to Ceuta and Melilla are not included. Children arriving in the Canary Islands from Western Africa through the Atlantic are included.
6. Data on arrivals and demographic of refugees and migrants registered in Italy is based on information received from the Italian Ministry of Interior.
7. Statistics for Bulgaria are collected by the State Agency for Refugees. Observations on data and trends that isn't typically compiled by government institutions are collected by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.
8. Estimate on data provided by the Immigration Police and the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHAS), Malta. UASC figures are based on age declared by the refugees and migrants upon arrival. Not all the persons who make such a declaration are recognised to be UASC by the authorities after the age assessment is conducted.
9. European Union Member States + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

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 children 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 for UASC asylum claims for the period January to June 2020, since Eurostat publish UASC data on annual basis, data was available only for few countries at the time when this factsheet was released.

Jointly compiled and produced by:



For further information or any questions concerning this factsheet, please contact:

UNHCR:
Javed Khan
khanjav@unhcr.org

UNICEF:
Siraj Mahmudlu
smahmudlu@unicef.org

IOM:
Ivona Zakoska Todorovska
dtmmediterranean@iom.int