



Am I Not a Child?

The Neglect of Child Refugees in Europe

TRTWORLD
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Preface

İbrahim Eren

Director General and Chairman, TRT

The world is currently facing the greatest humanitarian crisis it has ever seen. Dubbed a 'lost generation', millions of young children and unaccompanied minors have fled their home countries as refugees. Persecuted, stigmatized, and exposed to the horrors of war and conflict, these young people have endured significant barriers to their development, leaving them with little prospect for a stable future.

As signatories of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the European Union has a direct responsibility to provide these children with a safe rite of passage and basic necessities such as food, shelter, registration, and education. However, there has been a gross neglect of the fundamental rights of a child across the continent, and this has only resulted in further instability.

The ramifications of these crises are enormous – there are over 170,000 unaccompanied minors of refugee backgrounds living under duress in the European Union, alone. Often, they are forced to endure environments rife with violence, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation.

The rights of a child are sacrosanct – they each deserve the opportunity to be part of our future. And we, each, have a responsibility to these young, brave, and resilient members of the 'lost generation'.

#achildisachild, no matter what.

Now is the time to act.

The 'Am I not a Child?' campaign, organized by TRT World Citizen, aims to take TRT World beyond the realm of reporting and directly into tangible, humanitarian efforts. This is a first for a global news network, and sets a new benchmark for the world of news, media, and reporting.

All components of this campaign look to work with young children of refugee backgrounds while

developing their sense of agency, ensuring that they can exercise their right to a sustainable future of their own making.

The following booklet contains vital information and statistics about unaccompanied minors who have fled to the European Union as refugees. Based on the research conducted by the TRT World Research Centre, information booklets regarding the transition process, rights and entitlements, representatives, and relevant NGOs are currently being deployed to refugee camps and shelters throughout the European Union.

As part of the campaign, TRT World Research Centre prepared this policy brief to inform and urge policymakers to deal with aforementioned problems. In collaboration with TRT Çocuk (TRT Kids Channel), we are presently involved in the production of an animated series that intends to raise awareness about the barriers many children of refugee backgrounds face. Scheduled for a winter release, the show will seek to engage young minds through vivid storytelling, factual evidence and relatable themes. The aim is not to invoke sympathy, but rather, encourage empathy and understanding.

TRT World Research Centre has also prepared a Refugee Children's Rights Guidebook in five languages. It seeks to support and inform refugee children about their rights and legal opportunities. Furthermore, we are developing a campaign of public service announcements to raise global awareness about the humanitarian crises at hand. In correspondence with this, TRT World is committed to providing exclusive coverage on the ongoing humanitarian crises affecting refugees around the globe on all its digital and media platforms. Finally, TRT World is preparing a documentary on the phenomenon of missing children.

TRT World has always been the voice of the oppressed. We hope, these works help ease the suffering of all refugee children.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM (CEAS)⁴:

The EU reformed its legislation on asylum and established a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Its mandate "is the right to asylum and the prohibition of refoulement", as guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Both instruments bind EU Members, who must also comply with the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

COURT OF JUSTICE OF EUROPEAN UNION (CJEU)⁵:

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) interprets EU law to make sure it is applied in the same way in all EU countries, and settles legal disputes between national governments and EU institutions. It can also, in certain circumstances, be used by individuals, companies or organizations to take action against an EU institution if they feel it has somehow infringed their rights.

DUBLIN REGULATION: (Regulation No. 604/2013): sometimes the Dublin III Regulation; previously the Dublin II Regulation and Dublin Convention) is an EU law that determines the EU Member State responsible to examine an application for asylum seekers seeking international protection under the Geneva Convention.

EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS (ECHR)⁶:

The European Convention on Human Rights is an international treaty under which the member States of the Council of Europe promise to secure fundamental civil and political rights, not only to their own citizens but also to everyone within their jurisdiction. The Convention, which was signed on 4 November 1950 in Rome, came into effect in 1953.

EURODAC⁷: The oldest EU biometric database; it was established in 2000 and became operational in 2003. Its original purpose was to establish which Member State is responsible, in accordance with the Dublin Convention, for the reception of asylum applications.

EUROPOL⁸: The EU's law enforcement agency. Its main goal is to achieve a safer Europe for the benefit of all EU citizens. Headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands, it assists

the 28 EU Member States in their fight against serious international crime and terrorism.

FRONTEX⁹: The European Border and Coast Guard Agency - is to promote, coordinate and develop European border management in line with the EU fundamental rights charter and the concept of Integrated Border Management specialising on border security and immigration.

GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT (GDP)¹⁰:

The Global Detention Project (GDP) is a non-profit research center based in Geneva, Switzerland, that investigates the use of immigration-related detention as a response to global migration. Its objectives are to improve transparency in the treatment of detainees; encourage adherence to fundamental norms; reinforce advocacy aimed at reforming detention practices; and promote scholarship and comparative analysis of immigration control regimes.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION: THE UNITED NATIONS MIGRATION AGENCY (IOM)¹¹:

As the leading international organisation for migration, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: 1) Assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management; 2) Advance understanding of migration issues; 3) Encourage social and economic development through migration; 4) Uphold human dignity and the well-being of migrants.

THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER OF REFUGEES (UNHCR)¹²:

The principal United Nations (UN) office mandated to promote and protect human rights for all. The UNHCR leads global human rights efforts and speaks out, objectively, in the face of human rights violations worldwide. It provides a forum for identifying, highlighting and developing responses to today's human rights challenges. It acts as the principal focal point of human rights research, education, public information, and advocacy activities in the UN system.

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)¹³:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted

⁴ European Commission. (2017, August). Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/reception-conditions_en

⁵ European Commission. (2017, August). Retrieved from https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/court-justice_en

⁶ European Commission on Human Rights. (2017, July). Retrieved from <http://www.echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=home>

⁷ European Commission. (2017, August). Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/identification-of-applicants_en

⁸ European Commission. (2017, August). Retrieved from <https://www.europol.europa.eu>

⁹ Frontex Online. (2017, August). Retrieved from <http://frontex.europa.eu>

¹⁰ Global Detention Project. (2017, June). Retrieved from <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/about-us>

¹¹ International Organization of Migration. UN Migration Agency. Retrieved from <http://www.iom.int/about-iom>

¹² Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2017, August). Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/WhatWeDo.aspx>

by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out the fundamental human rights to be universally protected and it has been translated into over 500 languages.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (UNCRC)¹⁴:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally-binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or ability. The UNCRC consists of 54 articles that set out children's rights and how governments should work together to make them available to all children.¹⁵



*A refugee child is seen at the temporary refugee camp on Piraeus Port, Athens, Greece.
(Omar Marques - Anadolu Agency)*

Asylum Seeker: A person who flees his/her own country and seeks sanctuary in another country by applying for asylum or the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance.

Child: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18. It should, however, be noted that social and biological understandings of what constitute a child, at the age of puberty for instance, differ.

Child Refugee: An unaccompanied child or a person who is under the age of eighteen, unless maturity is determined at an earlier age under the law applicable to the child, who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, has responsibility to do so.

Child Trafficking: The action or practice of illegally procuring and relocating children, typically for the purposes of forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Migrant: A person who moves without threat of force or violence of any kind from one place to another in order to find work or better living conditions.

Refugee: A person who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War, ethnic, tribal or religious violence are leading causes for refugees fleeing their countries.

DEFINITIONS

¹³ United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. (2017, June). Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

¹⁴ United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. (2017, May). Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

¹⁵ Save the Children. (2017, June). Retrieved from <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/child-rights/un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>

Introduction

The 'Am I Not a Child?' campaign, under the directive of TRT's World Citizen platform, seeks to highlight the tragedy of child refugees and their exploitation in Europe. Critically, the European Union has a manifest responsibility to child refugees, as outlined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Both instruments bind EU Members, who must also comply with the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Moreover, as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the European Union must act in the **'best interests of the child.'**¹⁶ Unfortunately, a monumental failure in fulfilling those obligations has led to tens of thousands of children to exist in appalling, exploitative and criminal conditions. At present, there are 170,000 unaccompanied and separated child refugees (UASCR) throughout the European Union living under duress, the threat of violence or sexual exploitation.¹⁷ In fact, the "ECHR has held against several Member States for violating the EU's legal regime on refugees on issues of detention, status of reception facilities, and lack of legal remedies."¹⁸ According to Claude Moraes, the chair of the European Parliament's Justice and Home Affairs committee, "the amount of child abuse, rape and smuggling that is going on is horrific... If the EU is to have any sort of value it has to care for unaccompanied minors when they arrive in Europe."¹⁹

A 'child', according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, "is a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger."²⁰ More specifically, a 'child refugee' is an unaccompanied person under the age of eighteen who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, has responsibility to do so. As such, these 'child refugees' need to be governed under the guiding principles of special care and attention as distinct from other asylum seekers, refugee claimants or migrants. Actually, considering the horrific conditions which have compelled these child refugees to endure torturous and unwelcoming journeys - alone - it is

Europe's moral and legal responsibility to act.

Evidently, according to the clear dictates of several international and European Union obligations, effective protection and assistance should be delivered to unaccompanied children in a systematic, comprehensive and integrated manner.²¹ These are the irrefutable rights of the child, particularly for child refugees who, at the moment, are being inexplicably ignored.

This policy report has been organised into **6 sections**.

Section 1 outlines the reality of war that has compelled child refugees to seek safety and security in Europe. **Section 2** outlines the migratory routes that child refugees take to their respective destinations. **Section 3** explains what happens when these child refugees arrive in Europe, including how they are often relegated to detention centres which, in and of itself, is against international law and in direct opposition to UN and EU guidelines on treatment of child refugees. Also, this section includes a brief overview of the situation in Italy, Greece, France and Spain. **Section 4** provides details on life in the camps and the prevalence of trafficking and sexual exploitation therein. Finally, **Section 5** discusses the classification of refugees and the ongoing sophistry by which child refugees are becoming legally entangled. Are they migrants, refugees, or even children? By deflecting resources towards this obfuscation, the lives of thousands of children are at risk. **Section 6** outlines policy recommendations for EU governments and requests that they fulfill their moral and legal obligations to child refugees.

In conclusion, TRT World Research Centre, commissioned this policy report on the phenomenon of 'unaccompanied and separated child refugees' in Europe with the sole intent to raise awareness about their frightful predicament. These young children are caught, helplessly, between war, violence and exploitation.²² The international community's inability to positively impact the war zones they are fleeing, has directly compelled these children to be uprooted from their lands of origin and endure the dangerous journey to the EU. However, upon arriving in the EU they are often shunned, grossly abused and exploited.²³ Hence, the question echoing in our mind was posed by a child refugee who lamented, **"Am I not a Child?"**

¹⁶ "10th European Forum on the Rights of a Child." (2016, November). General Background Paper. Retrieved from ec.europa.eu/newsroom/document.cfm

¹⁷ "UNICEF: Number of Unaccompanied Refugee Children Soars," in *Aljazeera News*. (2017, May). Retrieved from www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/unicef-number-unaccompanied-refugee-children-soars-

¹⁸ Library of Congress. (2017, August). Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/europeanunion.php>

¹⁹ Nelson, Arthur. "Horrible Levels of Child Abuse in Unsafe Refugee Camps," in *The Guardian*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/apr/24/eu-urgent-protection-23000-unaccompanied-child-refugees-squalid-camps-greece-italy>

²⁰ United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. (2017, May). Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

²¹ Fontes, Lisa Aronson. "Keeping Refugee Children and Teens Safe," in *Psychology Today*. (2017, August). Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/invisible-chains/201708/keeping-refugeechildren-and-teens-safe>

²² <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/more-children-move-more-children-vulnerable-trafficking/32320>

²³ Deardon, Lizzie. "EU Accused of Deliberately Letting Refugees Drown," in *The Independent*. (2017, July). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-ngo-rescue-ships-mediterranean-sea-italy-libya-eu-code-of-conduct-deaths-2300-latest-a7866226.html>



Refugee children sleep on the pavement after the refugees disembark from the passenger ship following their trip from the island of Lesbos to the port of Piraeus, near Athens, Greece. (Thomas Campean - Anadolu Agency)

WAR

WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?



A European volunteer holds a refugee child on her arms after a boat carrying refugees arrived in Lesbos Island, Greece. (Özge Elif Kızıl - Anadolu Agency)

War, violence and trauma compels parents to risk the lives of their children and send them on a treacherous journey to Europe. This tragic socio-cultural phenomenon has not been adequately explored during the refugee crisis. 'War,' strictly defined, is 'a state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country,' yet this does not encompass the totality of its violence which affects people on a generational level.²⁴ Trauma, abuse and a wide-range of psychological sufferings are all a direct consequence of war. Unfortunately, the current global world predicament is one of considerable conflict, fear and uncertainty. Especially in war-torn countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan, where basic necessities of life including safety, security and a child's education is a luxury millions do not have. In such catastrophic conditions desperation prevails compelling both young and old, women and children - with or without guardians - to seek refuge in Europe.

As seen in table 1 (2015, 2016) and table 2 (2017), the top-ten countries from which refugees have fled all qualify as active war zones. Evidently, the international community must take partial responsibility for ineffectively

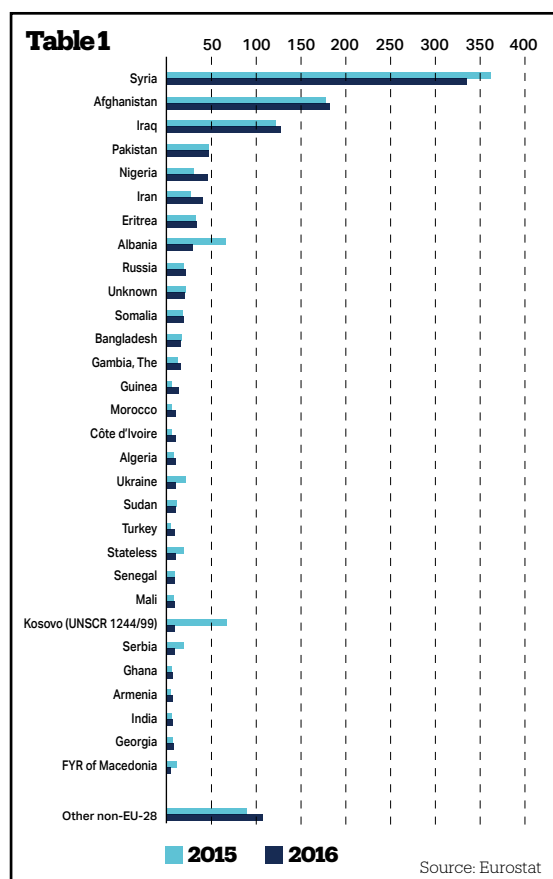


Table 2

Top Ten Refugee Producing Countries

- 1 Syria
- 2 Afghanistan
- 3 Somalia
- 4 Sudan
- 5 South Sudan
- 6 Congo, Dem. Rep.
- 7 Central African Rep.
- 8 Iraq
- 9 Eritrea
- 10 Pakistan

Source: Amnesty International

addressing these issues, or for their failure to fulfill their collective responsibility to protect innocent civilians. That inadequacy has directly contributed to the refugee crisis.²⁵ For example, Syria has been in conflict for nearly seven years, with more than 2 million civilian casualties of which 24,000 were children.²⁶ Statistically, Syria had a pre-war population of 22 million. Now, "more than half of those people have been forced from their homes. About 5 million have fled the country and live around the world as refugees."²⁷ Undoubtedly, the ongoing Syrian conflict, not to mention conflicts in other global hotspots such as Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq, have all directly contributed to the global refugee crisis.

As a result of the protracted nature of these conflicts, not only are people's lives in grave danger, but their families and social structures are torn apart. Imagine how desperate a mother or father must be to risk the lives of their beloved children. Their existence is in enough peril to warrant sending their loved ones on a terrifying voyage to a faraway land with an uncertain future. All in the hopes that their children escape the repulsion surrounding them. However, the level of desperation is such that parents are often willing to utilise unsavory, unscrupulous and illegal networks to transport their children out of the war zone. At this point, the element of criminality is introduced into the lives of these children, who fall into the hands of opportunistic traffickers. From then onwards, their situation grows increasingly grim, as these children are treated in dehumanising ways, especially since they have no one to protect them.²⁸

²⁴ Freh, Fuaad. "Psychological Effects of War and Violence on Children," in *Journal of Psychological Abnormalities*. (2015). S1: e001. doi:10.4172/jpab.S1-e00

²⁵ Mills, Kurt. "Syria and the Mediterranean Crisis," in *Huffington Post*. (2016, October). Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/kurt-mills/syriarefugee-crisis_b_8231874.html

²⁶ Dupere, Katie. "UN Launches Website to Answer Questions on Syrian Refugee Crisis," in *Mashable Online*. (2017, May). Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2017/05/22/syrian-refugee-crisis-google-united-nations/#cqNhoQD_gaq7

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hodal, Kate. "Traffickers and Smugglers Exploit Record Rise in Unaccompanied Child Refugees," in *The Guardian*. (2017, May). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/may/17/traffickers-smugglers-exploit-record-rise-unaccompanied-child-refugees-migrantsunicef-report>



Refugees arrived in Serbia pass the Serbian - Hungarian border.
(Thomas Campean - Anadolu Agency)

Stairway to Heaven

In 2016, global forced displacement hit record-high numbers - the highest in recorded human history of 63.5 million people.²⁹ According to the *Global Trends* report released by the UN Refugee Agency, on average, 24 people were forced to flee from their homes every minute in 2015 - four times more than was reported a decade earlier.³⁰ The numbers are staggering; and among the millions uprooted are hundreds of thousands of unaccompanied children travelling to Europe hoping to find the promise of safety, security and sanctuary. At present, according to official UN accounts, nearly half of all refugees in the world are children.³¹ Yet, while embarking on this dangerous, life-threatening passage, they are often pushed into the hands of smugglers on the nine major migration routes for child refugees.³² Worse, little is being done to assist them since, as UN

High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi states, "politics is preventing genuine assistance to child refugees in Europe."³³

Currently, the vast majority of child refugees coming to Europe are from war-torn countries. Overall, the number of asylum applications from these countries began to rise, especially after 2012 when, in lieu of the Syrian war, and the ongoing conflicts in Somalia and Iraq, the Taliban resurfaced in Afghanistan.³⁴ As the Syrian persisted through 2013, the number of refugee applications rose to 431,000, and continued to swell to 627, 000 in 2014. In 2015 and 2016, the number of asylum seekers rose again, reaching nearly 1.3 million per annum.³⁵ Now, given the obstacles that EU countries have in reporting issues related to child refugees, these statistics may underestimate the real magnitude of the problem.

²⁹ Edwards, Adrian. "Global Forced Displacement Hits Record High," in *UNHCR Online*. (2016, June). Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>

³⁰ Global Trends. (2015). UNHCR - UN Refugee Agency. (2016). Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unhcrsharedmedia/2016/2016-06-20-globaltrends/2016-06-14-Global-Trends-2015.pdf>

³¹ Hodal, Kate. "Nearly Half of All refugees are Children," in *The Guardian*. (2016, September). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/2016/sep/07/nearly-half-of-all-refugees-are-children-unicef-report-migrants-united-nations>

³² Hodal, Kate. "Traffickers and Smugglers Exploit Record Rise in Unaccompanied Child Refugees," in *The Guardian*. (2017, May). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/may/17/traffickers-smugglers-exploit-record-rise-unaccompanied-child-refugees-migrantsunicef-report>

³³ Edwards, Adrian. "Global Forced Displacement Hits Record High," in *UNHCR Online*. (2016, June). Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>

³⁴ Mortimer, Caroline. "Refugee Crisis: War and Disaster Displaces a record 40.8 million," in *The Independent*. (2016, May). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/refugee-crisis-war-and-disaster-internally-displaces-a-record-408m-people-around-the-world-says-new->

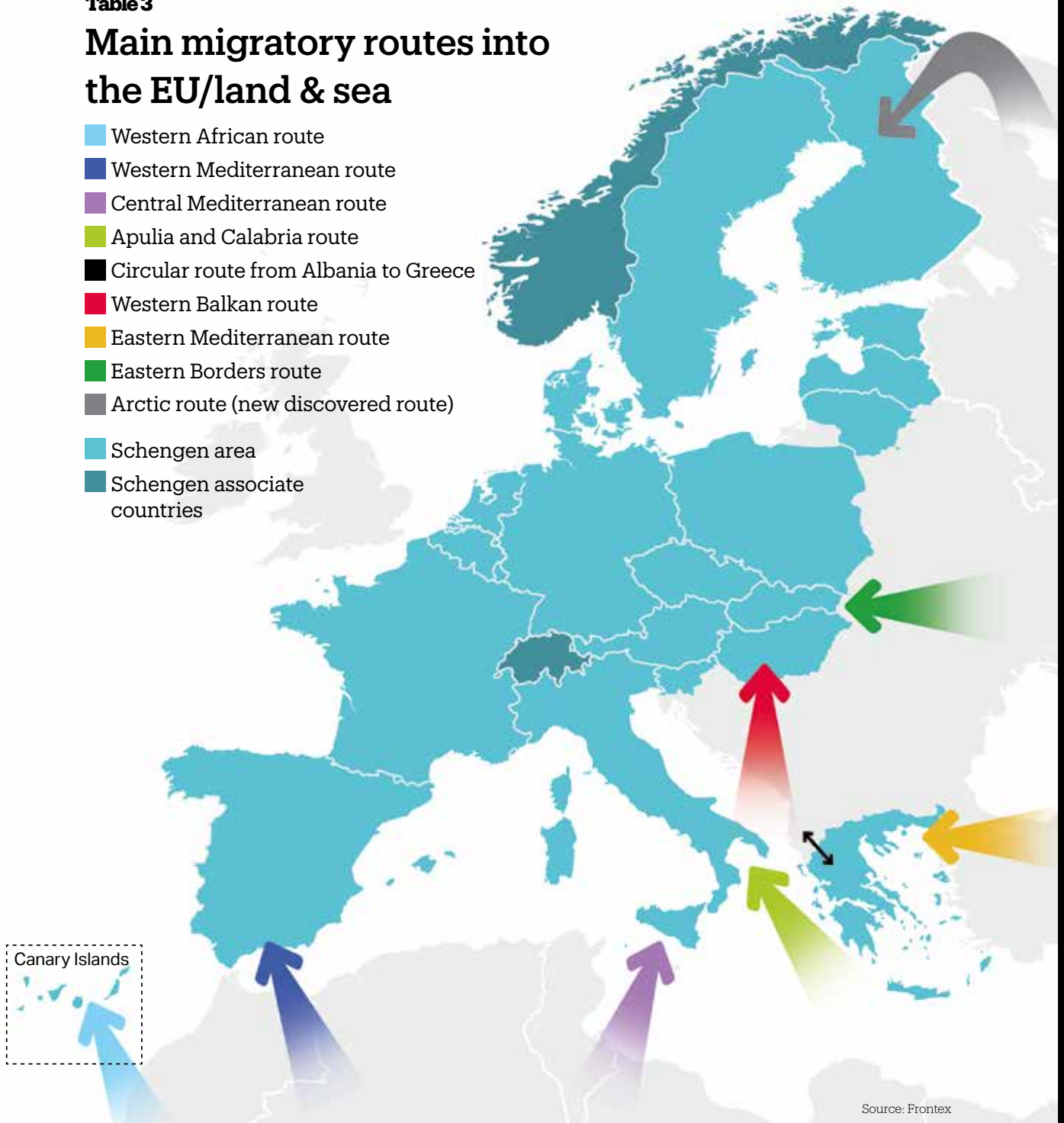
³⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics

There are 9 migratory routes³⁶ to Europe that have been identified by Frontex so far:

Table 3

Main migratory routes into the EU/land & sea

- Western African route
- Western Mediterranean route
- Central Mediterranean route
- Apulia and Calabria route
- Circular route from Albania to Greece
- Western Balkan route
- Eastern Mediterranean route
- Eastern Borders route
- Arctic route (new discovered route)
- Schengen area
- Schengen associate countries



³⁶ Frontex Online. (2017, August). Retrieved from <http://frontex.europa.eu>

³⁷ Kingsley, Patrick. "Syrian Refugees Find New Route," in *The Guardian*. (2015, August). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/29/syrian-refugees-europe-arctic-circle-russia-norway>

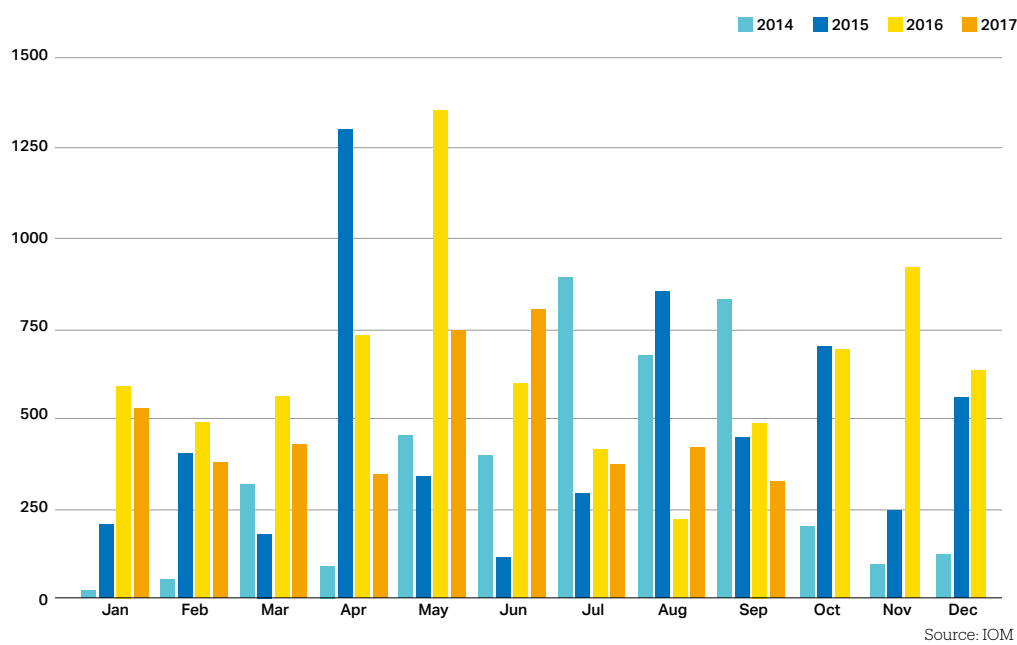
■ As the border policies of the EU change to confront illegal transgressions, so do the migratory routes.³⁸

However, life finds a way, and refugees continuously alter their paths to reach the EU. While the East Mediterranean Route was the main route for migrants to reach Europe in 2014, Frontex refrained from rescuing and transferring refugees to the Italian coast, neglecting agreements between Turkey and the EU. This resulted in a shift of the main migratory route.³⁹ In 2015 and 2016, illegal crossing of the borders increased drastically through the Central Mediterranean Route.⁴⁰ The Apulia and Calabria Route is another route frequently used to travel from Egypt to the Italian coasts; although cheaper and highly prone to smuggling activities.⁴¹ The Western Balkan route, Circular Route and the Eastern Mediterranean route are increasingly avoided due to the poor conditions of the camps there and

widespread fears of horrific abuse.

Moreover, the "policies that have demotivated migrants from using the Western Mediterranean Route are, to a large degree responsible for thousands of drowned African refugees or migrants."⁴² Initially, the Italian State's Mare Nostrum search and rescue operation, which saved the lives of hundreds of refugees, proved too costly and was replaced with a much smaller sea-force by Frontex. However, they refused to launch search and rescue operations. Instead, it began to focus primarily on border control. As a consequence, the reluctance of this EU agency to protect vulnerable refugees at sea led to higher-fatalities and shipwrecks.⁴³ Unsurprisingly, with that callous attitude, 2016 was the deadliest year for refugees seeking to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. Additionally, while ample evidence illustrates the high mortality rate in the Mediterranean Sea, there is no official information regarding the number of boats or refugees who depart from non-European coasts. In fact, the total number of refugee deaths in the Mediterranean, including those of children, are most likely considerably higher than those in official reports.

Table 5 Recorded Deaths in the Mediterranean Sea by Month



³⁸ Sytas, Andrias and Mardiste, David. "Baltic States Erect Border Fences," in *Reuters Online*. (2016, March). Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-baltics/worried-over-refugees-baltics-begin-to-erect-border-fences>

³⁹ Alexandridis, Antonios and Dalkiran, Muge. "Routes Change, Migration Persists: The Effects of EU Policy on Migratory Routes," in *Al Sharq Forum*. (2017, March). Retrieved from <http://sharqforum.org/2017/03/28/routes-change-migration-persists-the-effects-of-eu-policy-on-migratory-routes/>

⁴⁰ Frontex Online. (2017, August). Retrieved from <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/central-mediterranean-route/>

⁴¹ Dimitropolous, Stav. "The Sophisticated Smuggling Routes Bringing Refugees to Europe," in *Vice News*. (2017, March). Retrieved from https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/aea5n4/the-sophisticated-smuggling-routes-bringing-refugees-into-greece

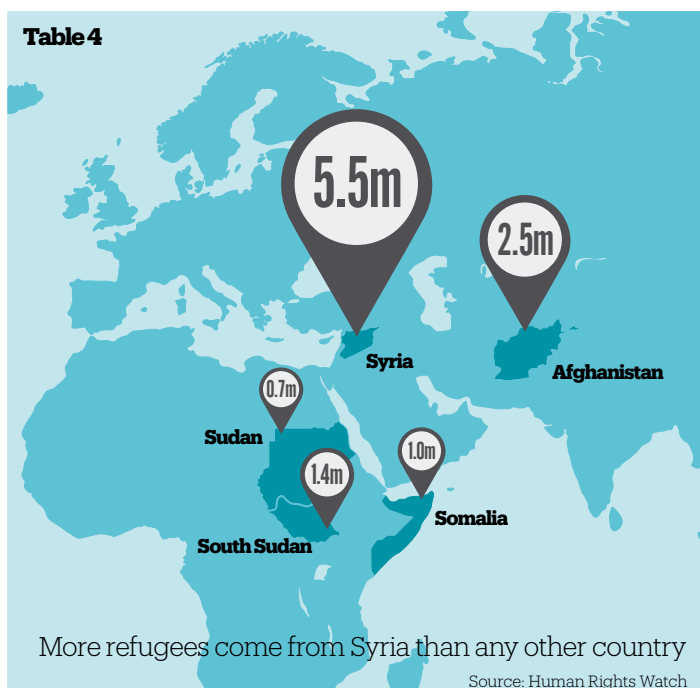
⁴² Alexandridis, Antonios and Dalkiran, Muge. "Routes Change, Migration Persists: The Effects of EU Policy on Migratory Routes," in *Al Sharq Forum*. (2017, March). Retrieved from <http://sharqforum.org/2017/03/28/routes-change-migration-persists-the-effects-of-eu-policy-on-migratory-routes/>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Smith, Helena. "Shocking Images of young Syrian boy Show Tragic Plight of Refugees," in *The Guardian*. (2015, September). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees>



A graffiti showing drowned three year old refugee Aylan Kurdi was created at the river Main in Frankfurt, Germany. The boy was found dead in Sept. 2015 after a number of migrants died while boats carrying them to the Greek island of Kos capsized. (AP Photo - Michael Probst)



‘Children are intrinsically more vulnerable; they are at a higher risk of succumbing to violence, physical and sexual abuse, labor and sexual exploitation, and to the extortionate services of smugglers, and the predatory exploitation of a flourishing human trafficking industry.’

Vasileia Digidiki & Jacqueline Bhabha, (2015) - Emergency within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece

At Europe's Doorstep: Camp Conditions



Refugee children walk on a muddy field at a makeshift camp on the Greece-Macedonia border in Idomeni village.
(Besar Ademi - Anadolu Ajansı)

While the Dublin Regulation requires refugees to apply for asylum in the first country they enter, unaccompanied child refugees may seek asylum in EU member countries where they have relatives.⁴⁵ However, the closure of

borders by EU member countries means that there is a lack of safe and legal routes available for children seeking asylum. Consequently, these children rely on smugglers or illegal routes between countries.⁴⁶ In fact, they may travel

hundreds of miles through hazardous routes by foot, often without proper means of sustenance or transport. This puts them at grave risk of abduction by traffickers or those seeking to take advantage of their situation. Furthermore, in order to cover their travelling expenses, these children often become entrapped in child labour, including sexual exploitation.⁴⁷ The mistreatment of the children within refugee centers and other so-called refugee camps, however, plays a key role in exposing them to the aforementioned dangers.⁴⁸



A refugee child brushes his teeth on the Hungarian- Serbian border in Horgos, Serbia. (Nikola Gligić - Anadolu Agency)

Mapping of Refugee Camps compiled by Global Detention Project



⁴⁵ Peers, Steve. "The Dublin Regulation: Is the End Nigh? Where should unaccompanied children apply for asylum?" in *EU Law Analysis*. (2016, January). Retrieved from <http://eulawanalysis.blogspot.com.tr/2016/01/the-dublin-regulation-is-end-nigh-where.html>

⁴⁶ Bulman, May. "Surge in Child Refugees trying to reach UK..." in *The Independent*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/child-refugees-france-uk-new-market-smugglers-traffickers-a7622656.html>

⁴⁷ Gerretsen, Isabelle. "Child Refugees Forced to Sell their Bodies to Enter Europe," in *Newsweek*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/child-refugees-europe-refugee-crisis-sexual-exploitation-greece-harvard-585976>

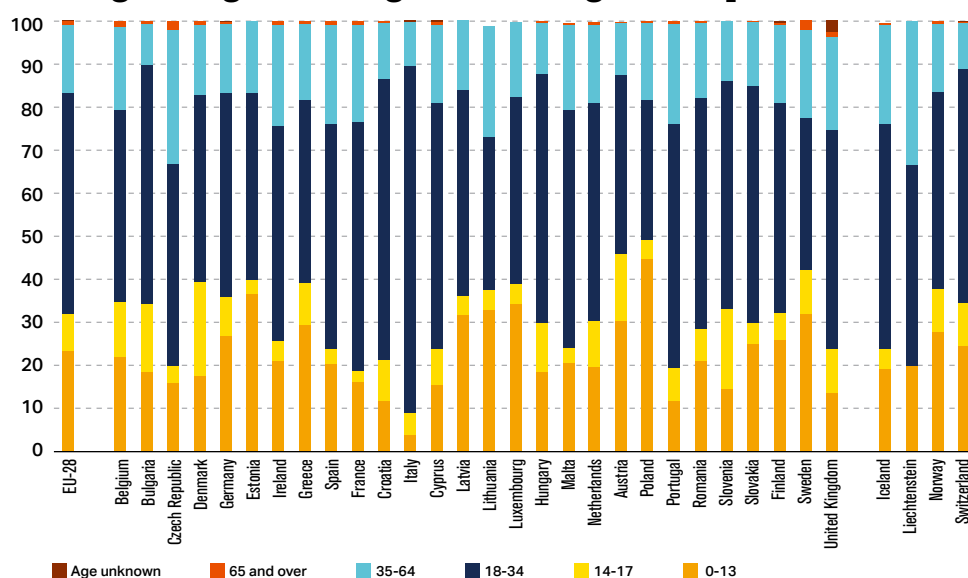
⁴⁸ Harrell-Bond, Barbara. "Are Refugee Camps Safe?" in *Working Paper for UNHCR*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/research/working/3ae6a0c64/refugee-camps-good-children-barbara-harrell-bond.html>

A 2016 study by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), entitled *Neither Safe nor Sound*, highlights the plight of child refugees living in France, across the English Channel, awaiting asylum in the United Kingdom. Based on direct, one-on-one interviews with the unaccompanied child refugees, as well as volunteers working in the camps, it was found that most children suffered from cold and fatigue, difficulty in accessing meals and showers, nervousness, symptoms of depression, and no access to regular schooling.⁴⁹ There are even cases of "entry fees" being extracted by traffickers.⁵⁰ Other accounts call attention to the fact that most children lack access to proper communication services such as cell phones.⁵¹ The situation in Greece is more disturbing - according to a chilling report published in April 2017 by the FXB Centre for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University. The report highlights the physical, psychological, and sexual violence faced by minors in refugee camps in Greece, with a particular focus on sexual exploitation.⁵² Although cases of boys and girls being targeted by sexual predators - whether individual actors or parts of criminal networks - are many, most children are

afraid to come forward for fear of reprisal.⁵³ This means that the actual scale of the crimes against child refugees are almost impossible to report on.

Overall, conditions in refugee camps remain highly inhospitable, with unaccompanied children being the most vulnerable demographic. A considerable number of child refugees, owing to poor living conditions and lack of understanding the asylum process, leave the camps. Upon abandoning the camps, they often become targets of organised gangs and criminal networks. In fact, attesting that, the Chief of Staff of Europol, Brian Donald, believes that a sophisticated "criminal infrastructure" is targeting refugees throughout Europe, and he reports that "nearly ten thousand refugee children registered as having arrived in Europe went missing in early 2016."⁵⁴ In fact, instances of disappearances have occurred regularly throughout the EU and Europol has confirmed it has received evidence of child refugees being victims of sexual exploitation.⁵⁵ Furthermore, it pointed to a close link between networks of smugglers transporting refugees and criminal gangs exploiting them for labour and sex.⁵⁶

Table 7 The Age Range of Refugees Arriving in European Countries



Note: due to the use of rounded figures in these calculations the sum of all age groups does not always equal 100 %.

Source: Eurostat

⁴⁹ Based on 61 individual and group interviews with unaccompanied children, conducted in their mother tongue across seven sites in France (Calais, Grande-Synthe, Angres, Norrent Fontes, Steenvoorde, Tatinghem, and Cherbourg). See: [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef_NeitherSafeNorSound_\(003\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef_NeitherSafeNorSound_(003).pdf)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Collins, Lauren. "Europe's Child Refugee Crisis" in *New Yorker*. (2017, February). Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/europes-child-refugee-crisis>

⁵² Digidiki, Vasileia and Bhabha, Jacqueline. "Emergency within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece," by FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University. (2015). Retrieved from <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wpcontent/uploads/sites/5/2017/04/Emergency-Within-an-Emergency-FXB.pdf>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Vidal, Mario. "No One is Counting the Missing Refugee Children in Europe," in *Newsdeeply Online*. (2017, June). Retrieved from <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2017/07/20/no-one-is-counting-europes-missing-refugee-children>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Even if child refugees become officially registered, they wait, in shoddy encampments, while their application for asylum is processed. That process can, and often does, take years. Here, in this horrible predicament, children are most vulnerable and oft subject to all kinds of threats, abuse and violence.⁵⁷ The main problems in the camps aside, the failure of local government authorities to deal with child refugees is atrocious, which then provokes them to contact underground illegitimate social actors and smugglers, leading to their eventual trafficking. The troubling question remains, 'why does the EU seem to turn a blind eye to such inhumanity?'

**'Why does the EU
seem to turn a
blind eye to such
inhumanity being
done to children?'**



Refugee children play outside the tents on the Hungarian- Serbian border in Horgos. (Nikola Gligić - Anadolu Agency)

⁵⁷ Nelson, Arthur. "Horrific levels of Child Abuse in Unsafe Refugee camps," in *The Guardian*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/apr/24/eu-urgent-protection-23000-unaccompanied-child-refugees-squalid-camps-greece-italy>

TRT WORLD AM I NOT A CHILD?



A refugee woman sits on the pavement with her children after they disembarked from a passenger ship following their trip from the island of Lesbos to the port of Piraeus, near Athens, Greece.
(Thomas Campean - Anadolu Agency)

Refugees in Italy, France, Greece and Spain

ITALY

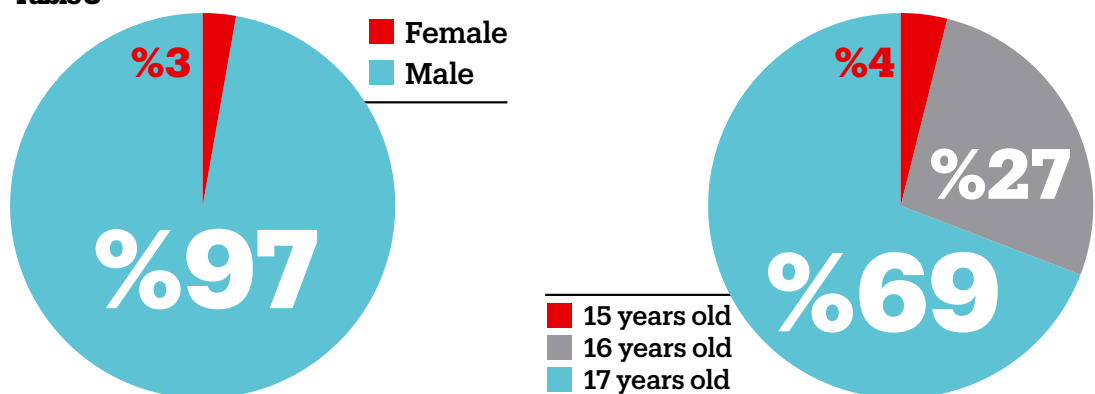
■ From January to April 2017, around 24,000 refugees were stranded on the Italian coast, of which 2,293 refugees were unaccompanied minors. "On their way to Italy, 663 immigrants lost their lives- a mean of seven individuals a day from January 1st, 2017 up to April 4th, 2017. Yet, aside from many refugees dying on the way to Europe, over 180,000 refugees had reached Italian shores in 2016, exceeding 2015 and 2014 records."⁵⁸ Meanwhile by August 6th, 2017, the total number of refugees arriving in Italy has risen to around 96,350 refugees, with 2,398 refugees missing as of 6th August, 2017.⁵⁹

In 2016, 91% of all child refugees arriving in Italy were unaccompanied, without parents or guardians, corresponding to a total, officially, of 25,846 unaccompanied minor refugees registered. Yet

the number of unaccompanied minor refugees registering in reception centers remains low, with 17,245 registrations of minors in reception centers or with private foster parents in 2016. Additionally, nearly half of the unaccompanied minor refugees get lost once arriving on Italian ground. The reasoning behind this discrepancy is unclear. In the first 6 months of 2017, till June 30th, around 11,406 unaccompanied and separated children have arrived on Italy's coast, equaling to 14% of all sea arrivals. Again, it is reasonable to assume, that thousands of child refugees arrive in Europe and do not register anywhere. With that, the numbers become frightening. What will Europe do with hundreds of thousands of scarred, emotionally traumatized and exploited child refugees who are living on the streets or as an underclass in European cities?

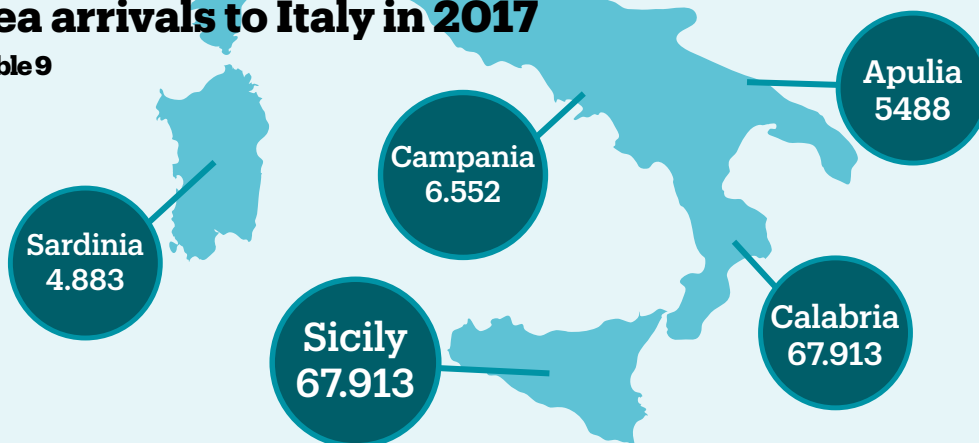
Profile of UASC in UASC-dedicated facilities in Sicily by gender and by age breakdown

Table 8



Sea arrivals to Italy in 2017

Table 9



⁵⁸ "Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals," in *Relief Online*. (2017, August). Retrieved from <http://reliefweb.int/report/italy/mediterranean-migrant-arrivalsreach-115109-2017-2397-deaths>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

GREECE

■ Greece is one of the top refugee conduit countries worldwide, infamous for the notorious Elliniko refugee camp located on the outskirts of Athens. Camp conditions are atrocious - often overcrowded and with harrowing levels of child abuse. Unaccompanied children are first put into safe shelters specifically reserved for them. However, due to overcrowding and lack of physical space in camps, authorities detain these children in police stations, immigration detention facilities, and asylum processing centers. Currently, 1,149 unaccompanied minor refugees are waiting to be placed in safe shelters. During the timespan between January 2017 and July 2017, Greece has welcomed 11,535 new refugees, of which around 9% are unaccompanied minor refugees, which means around 1039 children. There is no credible, clear plan on dealing with them. In fact, the situation of child refugees in Greece is among the worst in the European Union, especially in regards to the sexual exploitation of children.⁶⁰ In fact, there are serious allegations that not just Greece, but the European Union is reluctant to provide refugee children with a safe and permanent home.⁶¹

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW)'s interview with some of the refugee children in Greece, children as young as 15 were denied special protection, even though that is required under international law.⁶² This is particularly problematic as Greece does not verify the ages of minors arriving as refugees. Furthermore, there is evidence that unaccompanied child refugees are actually recorded at an older age in order to avoid care for them.⁶³

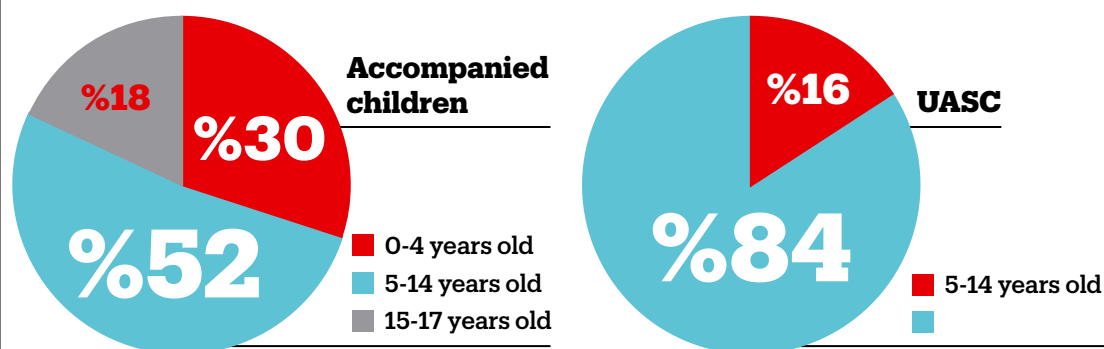


At Greece's Macedonian Border in the town of Idomeni, refugees are waiting to go to Western European countries with the hope for a better life. (Besar Ademi - Anadolu Agency)

Greece has received
11,535 new refugees,
of which around **9%**
are unaccompanied minor
refugees, which means
around **1039** children.

Source: Reliefweb

Table 10 **Ages of children who arrived in Greece in 2016**



Source: UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM

⁶⁰ Digidiki, Vasileia and Bhabha, Jacqueline. "Emergency within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece," by FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University. (2015). Retrieved from <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wpcontent/uploads/sites/5/2017/04/Emergency-Within-an-Emergency-FXB.pdf>

⁶¹ "UNICEF, Refugee and migrant crisis in Europe" in *Humanitarian situation report #17*. (2016, November). Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

⁶² "Greece Failing to Protect Child Refugees," in *Aljazeera Online*. (2017, July). Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/hrw-greecefailing-protect-lone-refugee-children-170719072148087.html>

⁶³ Ibid.



Refugees hoping to cross into Europe, arrive on the shore of Lesbos Island, Greece after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey.
(Özge Elif Kızıl - Anadolu Agency)

FRANCE

■ The situation for child refugees in France, as in Greece, is atrocious and among the worst in Europe. Whether in the infamous camp Calais, notoriously referred to as 'The Jungle', that was recently dismantled with approximately 8000 inhabitants forcefully relocated⁶⁴ or the lesser known, but equally frightening camp Dunkirk. Both camps house thousands of children who exist on the brink of life and death.⁶⁵ In 2016, UNICEF's report entitled *Neither Safe nor Sound* highlights the dire situation of child refugees living in France. Based on first-hand information, and direct interviews with child refugees as well as volunteer workers, sickening details of abuse including rape, slavery and enforced prostitution were revealed.⁶⁶ More recently, in March 2017, UNICEF conducted another series of interviews with child refugees who claimed that brutal treatment by French authorities coerced them to turn to smugglers and traffickers who, in turn, abused and exploited them.⁶⁷ Sexual exploitation by aid workers, volunteers as well as other criminal elements in the camps is at epidemic proportions and no one is helping the abused - not even the police.

The French government forcefully dismantled the Calais refugee camp, hailing its destruction as a "humanitarian intervention," and that its actions were meant for the migrants' own good. In reality, the situation for child refugees, due to official French government actions, has worsened. There needs to be a clear denunciation of the hasty and chaotic method in which the camp was shut down and the reprehensible treatment of child refugees. Without a

well-considered and careful exit strategy, all the people in the camp were left more vulnerable and desperate than before. Many children were left with nowhere to go.⁶⁸ UNICEF, when it responded to news of the destruction of the refugee camp, responded in a statement, saying: "The UK and French governments promised to keep children safe throughout the demolition. Yet right now, the situation for child refugees in France is more dangerous than ever. In an attempt to rectify the horrible conditions of the unofficial camp, the French government has made the situation much harder for already vulnerable refugees."⁶⁹

Mirroring that concern, Liana Bird, co-founder of the charity Help Refugees, stated that "unaccompanied minors are the most vulnerable people in Europe right now, and it's up to the government (of France) to put proper registration systems in place to give children safeguards against this (sexual or other forms) kind of exploitation."⁷⁰



French police mock a distraught refugee woman who is claiming her rights after camp shutdown. Open Source

⁶⁴ Van Hagen, Isobel. "Manipulation in a Time of Crisis: The Sexual Exploitation of Child Refugees Across France," in *The McGill International Review*. (2016, November). Retrieved from <https://mironline.ca/manipulation-in-the-time-of-crisis-the-sexual-exploitation-of-refugees-in-campscross-france/>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Based on 61 individual and group interviews with unaccompanied children, conducted in their mother tongue across seven sites in France (Calais, Grande-Synthe, Angres, Norrent Fontes, Steenvoorde, Tatinghem, and Cherbourg). See: [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef_NeitherSafeNorSound_\(003\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef_NeitherSafeNorSound_(003).pdf)

⁶⁷ Bulman, May. "Child Refugees in France Face Exploitation on Daily Basis," in *The Independent*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/child-refugees-migrants-dunkirk-calais-france-unicef-people-trafficking-smugglers-a7689051.html>

⁶⁸ Van Hagen, Isobel. "Manipulation in a Time of Crisis: The Sexual Exploitation of Child Refugees Across France," in *The McGill International Review*. (2016, November). Retrieved from <https://mironline.ca/manipulation-in-the-time-of-crisis-the-sexual-exploitation-of-refugees-in-campscross-france/>

⁶⁹ Smith-Spark, Laura, Vandoorne, Saskya and Jones, Byrony. "Calais Jungle: Migrant Children Have Nowhere to Go," in *CNN Online*. (2016, October). Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/media/media_92973.html

⁷⁰ Samuels, Gabriel. "Refugee Children Sexually Exploited in France," in *The Independent*. (2016, June). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-children-being-sexually-exploited-and-forced-into-crime-by-traffickers-in-northern-france-a7079446.htm>

SPAIN

■ In 2015, the Spanish government promised to welcome more than 17,000 refugees as part of the European Union's relocation plan to alleviate Greece and Italy's refugee intake. Yet, that plan was largely unsuccessful. The precise reasoning remains a matter of debate, yet there are strong accusations of willful neglect and malicious disregard by the Spanish authorities.⁷¹ Between January and May 2017, Spain welcomed 6,819 refugees, of whom 4,161 arrived by sea and 2,658 entered over land. A further 2,688 refugees were registered entering Spanish territory in June 2017. According to the UNHCR, Spain possesses very poor reception centers which are unsuitable for asylum seekers and utterly unacceptable for child refugees.⁷² Moreover, due to poor conditions and treatment, some refugees are sent back to their home country, and more than 25% of those 'pushbacks' are unaccompanied minor refugees seeking security.⁷³

Table 11

Unaccompanied Minors by Citizenship

Country	Number	%
Morocco	2197	65.8%
Algerians	207	6.2%
Overall Total	3341	72.0%

Unaccompanied Minors by Spanish Region

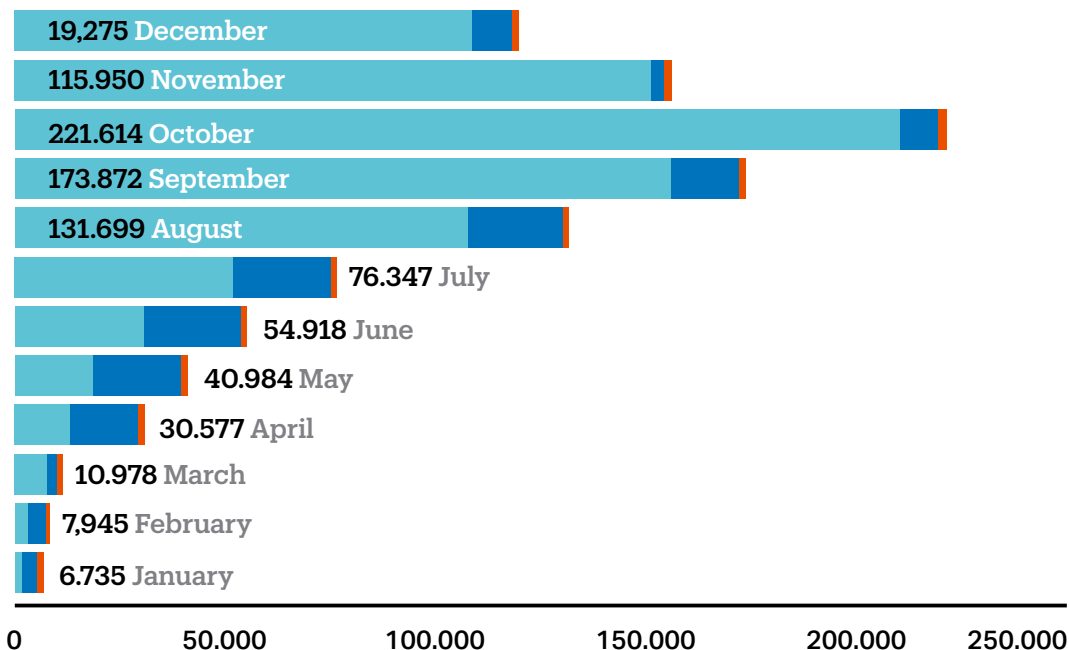
Spanish Region	Number	%
Andalucia	973	29.1%
Melilla	759	22.7%
Cataluña	321	9.6%
Pais Vasco	305	9.1%
Madrid	305	9.1%
Ceuta	198	5.9%
Comunidad Valenciana	105	3.1%
Canarias	93	2.8%
Murcia	56	1.7%
Asturias	39	1.2%
Overall Total	3341	94.4%

Source: Spanish Gov. Memorias de la Fiscalía General del Estado.

Arrivals in Italy, Greece and Spain in 2015

Table 12

■ Greece ■ Italy ■ Spain



Source: UNHCR

⁷¹ "Spain Migrants Held in Poor Conditions," in *Human Rights Watch*. (2017, July). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/31/spain-migrants-held-poor-conditions>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

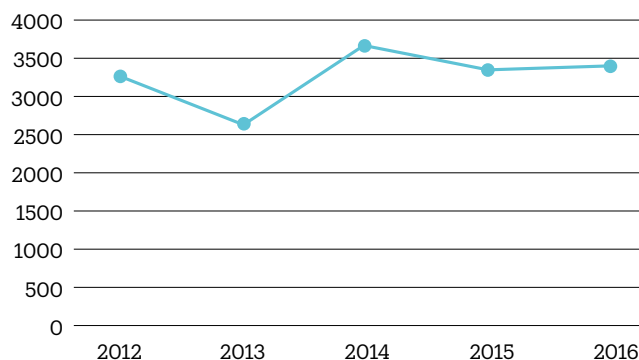


In 2016, 1,674 children were recorded to enter Spain, yet data on unaccompanied children is unavailable from the Spanish Ministry of Interior - often intentionally left unrecorded. Once unaccompanied child refugees enter Spain they are placed in detention centers and detained until they turn 18, at which point their asylum cases begin. The process is complex, arduous and haphazardly undertaken. In fact, Spanish authorities have readily admitted that they are incapable of handling the intake of refugees, pleading for increased assistance from the EU.⁷⁴

In addition, María Jesús Vega, a spokeswoman for UNHCR Spain, stated that "Spain isn't prepared and there aren't even the resources and the means to deal with the usual flow of people arriving by sea. More tragically, without a proper response, women and children will fall into the clutches of people-traffickers, becoming, merchandise."⁷⁵

Unaccompanied Minors in Spain 2012-2016

Table 13

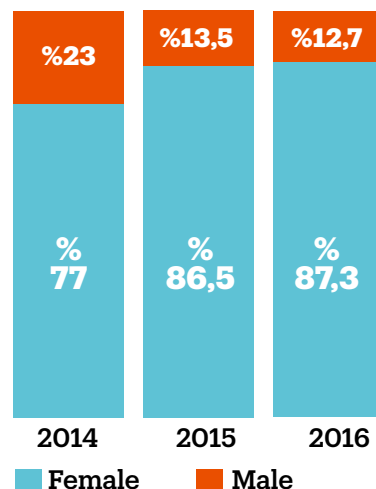


Source: Spanish Gov. Memorias de la Fiscalía General del Estado.

Members of the NGO "Pro Activa Open Arms" participate in a simulation in front of the beach of Barcelona while thousands demonstrate in support of refugees and the opening of borders, under the slogan "Volem Acollir" (We want to welcome) in Barcelona, Spain. (Albert Llop - Anadolu Agency)

Unaccompanied Minors in Spain by Sex

Table 14



Source: Spanish Gov. Memorias de la Fiscalía General del Estado.

⁷⁴ Jones, Sam and Rankin, Jennifer. "Spain Lacks Capacity to Handle Migration Surge," in *The Guardian*. (2017, August). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/17/spain-refugees-migrants-unhcrwarning>

⁷⁵ Ibid.



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Members of the non-governmental organisations stage a human chain protest in support of the refugees on the Europe Day at the Mayor Square in Madrid, Spain. (Burak Akbulut - Anadolu Agency)

Child Refugee Trafficking in Europe



A refugee boy is seen on the coast after arriving in Lesbos Island, Greece. (Özge Elif Kızıl - Anadolu Agency)

Human trafficking is a serious crime with increasing prevalence throughout the EU. Even more egregious is the tragic phenomenon of widespread trafficking of child refugees. Article 3 of the UN Protocol clearly stipulates the prevention, suppression and punishment of trafficking persons. Moreover, it defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the

giving or receiving of payments and benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”⁷⁶ Moreover, according to the UN protocol, the objectives of human trafficking are numerous and ‘shall include, at a minimum, the coerced prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs.’⁷⁷ Likewise, the Council of Europe defines it as “a serious violation of fundamental human rights and human dignity and involves

⁷⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Online. Retrieved from <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

ruthless practices such as the abuse and deception of vulnerable persons, as well as the use of violence, threats, debt bondage and coercion".⁷⁸ The council's definition specifies particular forms of exploitation for the aim of forced criminality, such as, 'pickpocketing, shoplifting, drug trafficking and other similar activities which are subject to penalties and imply financial gain.'⁷⁹ Though, irrespective of the subtle variations in its defining, it is undisputed that the massive surge in child refugee trafficking is entering epidemic proportions in Europe, is a clear abuse of a child's basic rights and dignity and that there seems to be either willful disregard or complicity for their predicament.⁸⁰

Whether in Italy,⁸¹ Greece,⁸² France⁸³ or elsewhere throughout the EU,⁸⁴ child refugee trafficking involves a wide-range of crimes, first and foremost sexual exploitation and enforced prostitution. Yet, the trials and tribulations of child refugees in Europe do not stop there, and organ mafia, benefit fraud, forced labour, slavery

and various levels of criminality including begging, drug running, pickpocketing and theft are commonplace in many camps and shelters.⁸⁵ Reports indicate that children are sold and pregnant women are trafficked into the EU in order for someone to buy their baby and sell it to the illegal market.⁸⁶ What is most troubling is that there is a clear, organised criminal element that is specifically targeting child refugees most often for sex, and other forms of slavery and that official authorities in Europe are turning a blind-eye. The tragic irony of children who have lost their homes, escaping violence, poverty or disaster, only to end up in appalling conditions in the EU, which, according to Europol, are getting worse.⁸⁷

Finally, according to Claude Moraes, the chair of the European Parliament's Justice and Home Affairs committee, "the amount of child abuse, rape and smuggling that is going on is horrific...if the EU is to have any sort of value it has to care for unaccompanied minors when they arrive in Europe."⁸⁸



Refugee children who crossed the Macedonia - Serbia border are seen on their way to Berkasovo town on the Serbia. (Talha Öztürk - Anadolu Agency)

Human trafficking is a serious crime with increasing prevalence throughout the European Union.

⁷⁸ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32002F0629>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bulman, May. "Surge in Child Refugees Trying to Reach UK creates Terrifying New Market for People Traffickers," in *The Independent*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/child-refugees-france-uk-new-market-smugglers-traffickers-a7622656.html>

⁸¹ Lee, Laurence. "Italy Refugee Crisis: Gangs Running Child Prostitution Rings," in *Aljazeera Online*. (2017, June). Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/europe/2017/06/italy-young-refugees-care-centre-reveal-dark-side-trafficking-170601050104059.html>

⁸² Digidiki, Vasileia and Bhabha, Jacqueline. "Emergency within an Emergency: The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece," by FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University. (2015). Retrieved from <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wpcontent/uploads/sites/5/2017/04/Emergency-Within-an-Emergency-FXB.pdf>

⁸³ Samuels, Gabriel. "Refugee Children Sexually Exploited in France," in *The Independent*. (2016, June). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-children-being-sexually-exploited-and-forced-into-crime-by-traffickers-in-northern-france-a7079446.htm>

⁸⁴ Taylor, Diane. "Child Refugees Forced to Sell Bodies in Europe," in *The Guardian*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/apr/18/child-refugees-in-europe-forced-to-sell-bodies-to-pay-smugglers>

⁸⁵ Lee, Laurence. "Italy Refugee Crisis: Gangs Running Child Prostitution Rings," in *Aljazeera Online*. (2017, June). Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/europe/2017/06/italy-young-refugees-care-centre-reveal-dark-side-trafficking-170601050104059.html>

⁸⁶ <https://euobserver.com/justice/133482>

⁸⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/situational_report_trafficking_in_human_beings_europol.pdf

⁸⁸ Nelson, Arthur. "Horrific levels of Child Abuse in Unsafe Refugee camps," in *The Guardian*. (2017, April). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/apr/24/eu-urgent-protection-23000-unaccompanied-child-refugees-squalid-camps-greece-italy>

LOST IN TRANSLATION



A refugee child is seen at the temporary refugee camp on Piraeus Port, Athens, Greece. (Omar Marques - Anadolu Agency)

An unaccompanied minor who has fled to the EU faces many challenges - even being recognised as a refugee is an arduous and convoluted process. The imposed bureaucracy and unjustified pedantry present in the application process reveals a disingenuous call-to-help from the EU. By entangling child refugees in fastidious deliberations concerning their legal status and definition, certain EU countries seem to be using sophistry to evade their responsibilities to them. More often than not, the legal statuses of 'refugee' and 'migrant' cannot be used interchangeably, since each have different implications in precise legal contexts. Considering that, choosing to prefer the term 'migrant' is problematic because it does not seek to distinguish between an economic migrant, and a refugee who is feeling persecution by any means.⁸⁹ The ensuing ambiguity allows EU member states to treat those refugee backgrounds the same way they treat other migrants, paving the way for exploitation, misconduct and rights violations.

Moreover, this terminology contestation exacerbates the social challenges the child refugees endure. By defining them as migrants - or implicitly as economic migrants, it

not only mischaracterises them, but fails to recognise the seriousness of their plight and situation. Similarly, this allows a certain stigma to be associated with them; rendering them an 'unpopular' issue, and consequently turning the wave of public opinion against them. Hence, an inaccurate label gives way for an unfair characterisation of the refugees, and subsequently results in negative repressions regarding both state policy and social acceptance.

There is no doubt that the influx of refugees into Europe has taken the continent by surprise. Yet, in comparison to Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Jordan or Iran, the EU and other developed countries have not done their fair share. The 'Responsibility to Protect', as affirmed by the 2005 World Summit, obligates UN member states to assist persecuted populations in any capacity possible. As such, for the Refugee Crisis to have spilled into Europe, one would expect that stable continent to lead in providing answers for sustainable policies and solutions; a starting point would be clarifying the ambiguity around definitions, and making clear literary, policy and social distinctions between those seeking a better life, and those fleeing with no provision nor no plan B to fall upon.

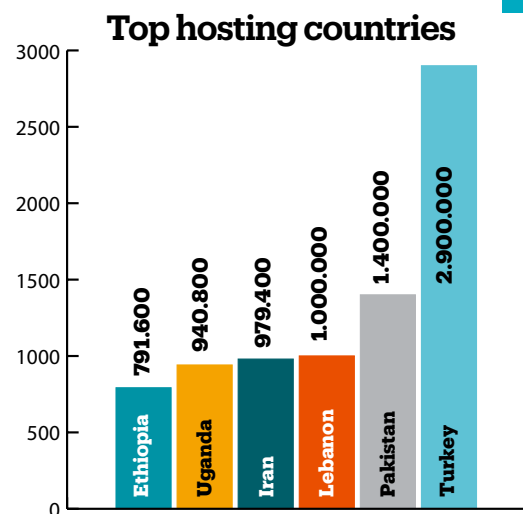
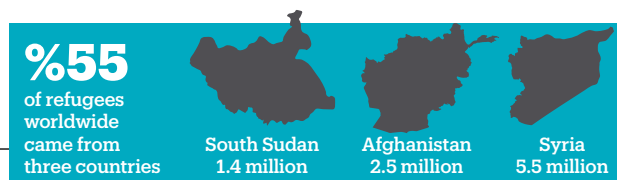
Table 15

65.6 million
forcibly displaced people worldwide

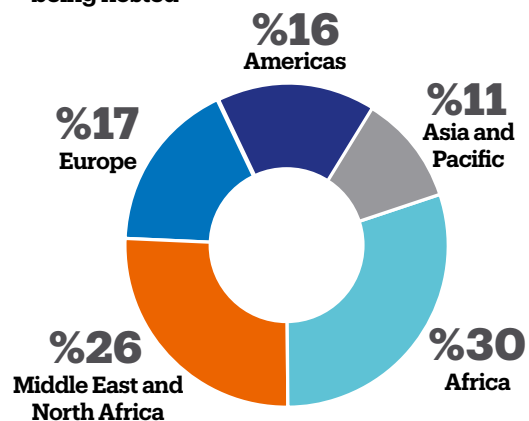
22.5 million Refugees
17.2 million under UNHCR mandate
5.3 million Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA

10 million
Stateless people

189.300
Refugees resettled in 2016



Where the world's displaced people are being hosted



Source: UNHCR

⁸⁹ Collins, Lauren. "Europe's Child Refugee Crisis," in *New Yorker*. (2017, February). Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/europes-child-refugee-crisis>

Conclusion: The Responsibility to Protect



A refugee child eats ice cream at Vienna's Westbahnhof train station as refugees wait to board trains for Germany. (Hasan Tosun - Anadolu Agency)

The EU, and each of its individual member states, have the responsibility to protect the lives of the 170,000 unaccompanied and minor child refugees within their borders. Presently, this is not being done. Contrarily, we are witnessing a travesty of justice and a mockery of human rights. In particular, the rights of a child are being largely ignored and in fact, often being denied. Fleeing war, poverty and disasters, hundreds of thousands of desperate child refugees arrive in Europe only to be sexually exploited, physically harmed and emotionally scarred. These children, alone, without any form of parental support, are existing in atrocious conditions throughout various European cities. This presents a formidable challenge by which the very moral fibre of Europe is being questioned. Will the EU act and fulfill its obligations to these child refugees or contribute to further harming them? Will the EU, in good faith, act in the best interests of these children? Will Europe live to its

lofty ideals of humanitarianism, the inherent dignity of all peoples and the rights of all children? Or will Europe enter a dark phase in which its words, obligations and promises no longer hold value or meaning? Certainly, it would be in Europe's immediate and long-term interest to reach out and welcome these child refugees, who, by being presently ignored, will pose further social concerns in the future. Moreover, it would be in Europe's and the world's best interest to intervene in conflict zones. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi stated: "Taking measures to reduce the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, without at the same time stepping up peace-making, development, and safe pathways is morally unacceptable."⁹⁰ The following are selected policy recommendations from leading international organizations, NGOs, law enforcement agencies and civil society representatives with the sole aim of protecting child refugees in Europe.

⁹⁰ UNHCR. "Europe Refugee and Migrant Arrivals Fall But Abuse and Deaths Persist," UNHCR: UN Refugee Agency Online. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/8/599ec5024/europe-refugee-migrant-arrivals-fall-reports-abuses-deaths-persist.html>

Policy Recommendations

1 Create a place of “protection” in camps or detention centers that are secure and specific to unaccompanied child refugees.

These children must be offered unconditional support, and officials must act on the basis of the ‘best interest’ rule.

2 Access to clean water, food and safe living quarters.

3 Provide all child refugees with access to high-quality legal representation.

4 Provide all child refugees with exemplary health services.

5 Assign a specific ‘guardian’ for each child refugee to act in their best interest and represent them as their temporary legal custodian. This qualified individual should be acutely aware of the cultural, religious and linguistic background of the child refugee for ease of communication.

6 Strict entry and exit policies of camps to ensure safety and security, especially in areas that child refugees are being housed at.

7 Guarantee access to the right to information and various services for all children.

8 Support and co-ordinate with those working in refugee camps with the aim of implementing uniformity of practices and distributing information that enables access to all children.

9 Introduce regular training for the organisational workers, police forces, ad hoc administrators and volunteers on child protection, identification of situations involving human trafficking and produce a practical reference document which can be easily distributed.

10 Refer back to the legal framework for the protection of children, which includes the importance of reporting to Public Prosecutor departments, as well as that of unsettling information, which will allow the departmental councils to become empowered in their mission to care for children in danger.

11 Report all evacuations if there are no adapted arrangements for the reception and guidance of unaccompanied children.

12 Ensure that the EU and individual governments dedicate sufficient resources to a system that enables family reunification.

13 Ensure that the child refugees have received reliable information regarding the family reunification procedure under the Dublin Regulation.

14 Build partnerships with local religious and cultural organizations, especially with those coming from similar backgrounds, to assist local governments in supporting child refugees.

15 Publish practical advice on how to handle family reunification cases under the Dublin Regulation.⁹¹



Volunteers help refugees upon their arrival on the shore of Lesbos Island, Greece, after crossing the Aegean sea. (Özge Elif Kızıl - Anadolu Agency)

⁹¹ [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef_NeitherSafeNorSound_\(003\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef_NeitherSafeNorSound_(003).pdf)

Anti-Trafficking Policy Recommendations

- 1** All EU member states should increase investigation and prosecution of traffickers.
- 2** Modern technology should be utilised to combat human trafficking and collect evidence relating to crimes against child refugees.
- 3** Outreach services should be formed to work with the vulnerable populations, particularly children.
- 4** Systems providing long-term support should be put in place, which will help to meet the specific needs of trafficked persons.
- 5** Policies and legislations should be established to ensure that victims are not punished for being trafficked.
- 6** The role of technology in trafficking should be given more attention.
- 7** EU countries should ensure that their laws, policies and business practices should not encourage or facilitate trafficking.
- 8** The rules and regulations for the identification and protection of asylum seekers should be internationally standardised.
- 9** Awareness campaigns about people at risk of human trafficking should be launched in collaboration with business sectors so as to inform corporate responsibility when engaging in ventures that could potentially contribute to the problem.
- 10** A victim-centered approach should be maintained in the interaction between trafficked persons and the criminal justice system.



by Jane Kim



(AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

