CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN ITALY AND GREECE

ITALY / GREECE

REPORT

JUNE 2017

unicef for every child

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Cover Photo: © UNICEF/Gilbertson, 2016

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org.
You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

Over 100,000 refugee and migrant children, of whom more than 33,800 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) (34 per cent), arrived in Europe in 2016.[1] In the first three months of 2017, 5,700 children landed on European shores.[2] The vast majority of them entered Europe irregularly through the two main gateways to the continent: Italy, using the Central Mediterranean sea route, or Greece, transiting through the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey, mostly via sea. Once on European soil, Italian and Greek authorities should take charge of UASC, with the support of humanitarian organisations, local and international NGOs and volunteer groups.

While there has been an increased focus on children in the governmental and humanitarian response to refugees and migrants in both countries,[3] information on children's profiles, child-specific drivers of migration and children's lives once in Europe remain limited. However, this information is key to enable an integrated and targeted response for refugee and migrant children. To fill this information gap, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted an assessment on the profiles and experiences of children who arrived in Italy and Greece in 2016 and 2017, why they left home, the risks children encountered on their journey and their life once in Europe. Analysis is based on primary and secondary data collection carried out between December 2016 and May 2017 in Italy and Greece. As the vast majority of children arriving in Italy are unaccompanied or separated,[4] the focus of this study in Italy was determined accordingly; in Greece, most children arrive in the country accompanied, which is why accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children were interviewed as part of the study. In Italy, a total of 720 unaccompanied and separated children were interviewed in 72 reception facilities in Sicily and outside reception facilities in the key transit sites of Rome, Milan, Ventimiglia and Como; in Greece, a consolidated secondary data analysis was carried out, supplemented by primary data collection, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 40 parents and 30 service providers, as well as 17 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a total of 130 children, of whom 70 were unaccompanied or separated.

Key Findings

The assessment found that refugee and migrant children in Italy and Greece come from conflict-ridden countries and areas with poverty; all leave behind a situation where they feel they have no access to their basic rights as a child and do not see any prospects for themselves in the foreseeable future. For many children who have arrived in Italy or Greece, the journey is not yet over, as they aim to join family elsewhere. Others would like to stay in Italy or Greece to continue their education and build a life in the country.

All face challenges in realising their objectives, as access to documentation, including asylum and residence permits, takes longer than they had anticipated and legal pathways are inherently slow. In the meantime, children lose out on education. Often, children do not understand how procedures work and why they need to wait. As a result, children lose their trust in the child reception system and attempt to reach their goals through irregular means, relying on smugglers and putting themselves at risk of abuse and exploitation.

Profiles of children travelling via the Central Mediterranean route and of children traveling via the Eastern Mediterranean route are significantly different, reflecting Italy's and Greece's geographical proximity to North Africa and the Middle East, respectively. While **children in Italy are mostly unaccompanied (91 per cent), boys (92 per cent), and children aged 16 to 17 (93 per cent)** coming from a variety of countries in West and the Horn of Africa,[5] **children in Greece tend to arrive with family (91 per cent), at an almost equal level between boys**

[1] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[2] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Interagency Factsheet on refugee and migrant children and UASC in Europe Q1 2017, forthcoming.
[3] Notably visible in the new draft law approved in Italy on unaccompanied minors and, in Greece, in the growing development of child-friendly spaces and growth of availability of shelters for UASC.
[4] 92% of child arrivals in Italy in 2016 were unaccompanied or separated. UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[5] UNHCR, Unaccompanied and separated children dashboard, December 2016.

and girls, and from all age groups. In addition, children who arrive in Greece primarily come from three countries: Syria (54 per cent), Iraq (27 per cent) and Afghanistan (13 per cent).[6]

Leaving Home

Children in Italy tend to have made the decision to migrate individually, as was the case for 75 per cent of children interviewed as part of this study and, as a result, embarked on the journey alone. Only in a minority of cases (11 per cent) did children take the decision to leave jointly with their family, contrary to what the literature on migration of unaccompanied and separated children often suggests.[7] Indeed, in almost one third of cases (31 per cent), children decided to migrate because of violence or problems at home and/or with their families. This was particularly common among children from The Gambia, as almost half of them reported to have left The Gambia because of problems or violence within their family (47 per cent). Children from Guinea Conakry reported particularly often to have left home due to political, religious or ethnic persecution in the country (33 per cent).

In contrast, children in Greece tend to have taken a joint decision within their family to flee countries marked by years of conflict and generalised violence. Coming primarily from countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, the decision to leave was mostly based on the generalised insecurity in their home country, as well as the prospect of not seeing this situation improve any time soon. Conflict and insecurity have a key impact on all aspects of children's lives, including their ability to go to school; as such, many also left home in the hope to go back to school somewhere safe.

Less than half of children interviewed in Italy reported that they left home with the aim of reaching Europe, including Italy (46 per cent). Indeed, one fifth of respondents (20 per cent) had left their home with the aim to go to North Africa or to remain in a neighbouring country (12 per cent), such as Mali or Senegal. **Among children who left home with the intention to reach Europe, access to education (38 per cent) and respect for human rights (18 per cent) were important factors which influenced children's decision to reach a European country**. In contrast, among children who planned to travel to neighbouring countries in West Africa or North Africa, work was the primary reason to move, as reported by 44 per cent and 68 per cent respectively, and children tended not to expect better services, such as education.

Children and parents interviewed in Greece had rarely anticipated upon their departure that they would stay in Greece once arrived in Europe. With the closure of the Western Balkans route and the EU Turkey statement in spring 2016, refugees and migrants inadvertently stayed in Greece. However, Northern European countries were the most frequently intended final destinations, including countries such as Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. Besides safety, which was a key driver for migration, parents and children saw migration as an opportunity to access better education and work opportunities, both of which they felt were more available in Northern Europe, rather than in Greece.

Families traveling from the Middle East to Greece were often aware of the risks the journey to Europe could entail; however, less than half of children assessed in Italy reported to have thought about the risks of the journey prior to leaving home (43 per cent). This suggests that in many cases, children left their country of origin with little preparation and knowledge of what would lay ahead. At the same time, when children had thought about the risks of the journey before leaving (47 per cent), children were well-informed of the level of risk, reportedly knowing that they could be killed on the way (42 per cent) or drown at sea (30 per cent). This illustrates the level of determination and urgency many children must have felt in leaving their country of origin.

The Journey

On average, children who arrived in Italy travelled for one year and two months between leaving home and reaching Italy. Among children in Greece, the length of travel varied significantly, but was overall shorter than for children arriving in Italy. Among children arriving in Italy, children from The Gambia and Guinea Conakry took longer to arrive in Italy than, for instance, children arriving from Nigeria. **The length of the journey was often tied to distance, but also to children's need to work to finance the journey and, thereby, their exposure to**

[6] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[7] See e.g. UNHCR, Trees only move in the wind: A study of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe, 2010.

exploitation. The majority of children traveling along the Central Mediterranean route worked throughout their journey, often in heavy physical labour and most commonly in key transit sites in Niger, Algeria or Libya.

Children in Italy unanimously spoke of their stay in Libya as the most traumatising part of their journey, except for the sea crossing. Almost half of them (47 per cent) reported to have been kidnapped against ransom in Libya, and one in four children (23 per cent) reported to have been arbitrarily arrested and held in prison without charges. Children in Greece were also exposed to a number of risks along the journey, including violence and exploitation.

When traveling with family members, children arriving in both Italy and Greece reported the risk of being separated from a family member during their journey. One in six children in Italy reported to have left home with a sibling and having been accidentally separated from them during the journey (12 per cent); in a minority of cases, the separation occurred once the child reached Italy. Family separation was also reported as a key challenge for children travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route.

More than half of children who arrived in Italy decided to go to Europe once they were already outside their country of origin and 'on the road' (53 per cent). This means that children's journeys to Europe were often fragmented; children often changed destination once life in a neighbouring state or in North Africa was not as expected. Some children who had been hoping to be able to work in Libya, left for Italy because they were terrified by the generalised violence in the country, as reported by 63 per cent of children who had planned to stay in Libya.

Once in Europe

Once in Europe, all children faced challenges when attempting to realise their objectives through legal pathways and the national child reception system in place. Indeed, for many children, a difficult part of their journey is yet to start once in Italy or Greece. Finally in Europe, too often, children are vulnerable to finding themselves in challenging situations, often exposed to risks of abuse and exploitation.

1. Access to International Protection

Children who wanted to stay in Italy or Greece and build a life reported waiting for months, or even years, to receive a legal status in country. In Italy, between 2014 and 2016, the procedure between submitting a request for asylum and receiving the final outcome lasted between 15 to 24 months.[8] In Greece in 2016, of 6718 asylum claims filed by refugee and migrant children, only 963 claims were considered.[9]

The lack of documentation heavily impacts children's lives in Italy and Greece and their ability to settle in the country. In Italy, the lack of legal status means that children aged 16 or 17 are not allowed to work and risk to become increasingly marginalised and isolated in reception facilities. In Greece, incertitude over children's legal stay has contributed to children suffering from anxiety and depression, as many do not know the status of their claim and feel caught in limbo.

In both countries, the length of status determination procedures is of particular concern for children aged 16 to 17 as they fear they will reach adulthood before their case is determined, and do not know what will happen to them when they are no longer treated as a child. In such cases, a child loses valuable months for their asylum application and may lose the opportunity to ask for a permit of stay as a minor.

2. Access to Legal Pathways for onward Travel

Often, children arrive in Italy or Greece and already know that they do not want to stay in the country as they may have family in other EU countries. However, **children who arrive in Italy or Greece and decide to travel onward through legal pathways find themselves stuck in transit for months, or even years, while waiting for their family reunification or relocation claim to be processed.**

[8] Italian Parliamentary Commission, May 2016.
[9] Greek Asylum Service, Asylum Service Statistical Data, February 2017.

In Italy in 2016, family reunification often took more than one year; of over 14,229 requests for family reunification in 2016, only 61 people were transferred in the same year.[10] With regards to relocation, as of May 2017, only three UASC have been relocated from Italy, all to the Netherlands, as the procedures for relocating UASC from Italy have not yet been standardised.[11] In Greece, many children have been waiting to be relocated or reunified with their families since the closure of the Western Balkans route in spring 2016. In 2016, out of the 5,000 requests for family reunification made from Greece (out of which 700 by UASC), only 1,107 successful applicants reached their destination country by the end of the year.[12]

3. At Risk of Abuse and Exploitation in Europe

As a result of lengthy procedures and a lack of clarity around access to documentation and legal onward travel, many children drop out of the Italian and Greek reception system to travel onwards irregularly and take their future into their own hands. Indeed, while 25,846 UASC arrived by sea in Italy in 2016,[13] at the end of that year, only 17,373 UASC were being hosted in the Italian reception system.[14] In Greece, numbers of children who left the country irregularly since the closure of the Western Balkans route are unknown. Yet, both humanitarian organisations and Greek authorities have confirmed a significant decrease in the total number of the refugee and migrant population in the country since the closure of the Western Balkans route, suggesting that many, including children, have left the country irregularly.

Children outside reception facilities and those trying to reach elsewhere irregularly, are often at particular risk of abuse and exploitation as they live in precarious shelter arrangements and have limited access to food, water and money to finance their journey. In Italy, children in transit cities such as Rome, Ventimiglia or Como were found to often live in insecure shelter arrangements, in some instances sleeping under bridges and without regular access to food. In Greece, reports of children engaging in transactional sex to finance their journey to other parts in Europe are increasing.

However, children inside reception facilities in Italy and Greece can also be at risk of abuse. Refugee and migrant children in Greece reported frequent fights in accommodation sites (camps); in other types of accommodation, fear of theft and physical violence also exist. In Italy, reports show that children's mental health may deterioriate in reception facilities which are not sufficiently tailored to their needs, when they are left with little to do for prolonged periods of time.

4. Limited Access to Information & Psycho-social Distress

In both Italy and Greece, children often do not understand the procedures to follow, as well as why applications for international protection, legal pathways or residence take so long. As a result, children suffer from anxiety, which is aggravated by the extensive waiting times and unclear timeline. In Italy, limited understanding of procedures and limited effective information provision can lead to children dropping out of reception facilities in the south, hoping that procedures elsewhere in the country may be quicker. This can be either due to a lack of effective information provision, or due to a lack of information provision in a language that children understand. In Greece, reports of children suffering from severe anxiety and depression are growing.

5. Access to Education

For many children, the possibility to continue their education was one of the key reasons why they decided to come to Europe. Yet, once they arrive in Italy and Greece, children face challenges in accessing education. As a result, both children who want to stay in Italy or Greece in the longer term and those who plan to continue their journey through legal pathways lose out on education.

In Italy, access to education for unaccompanied and separated children is only obligatory for children hosted in secondary reception centres. However, on average, children remain in primary reception centres for six months, meaning that children do not go to school for extended periods of time. When children do go to school, children interviewed often reported that schooling was not sufficient, as it often only took place for a few hours each week.

[10] AIDA, Country Report Italy, February 2017.
[11] European Commission, Twelfth report on relocation and resettlement, May 2017.
[12] Ibid.
[13] UNHCR, Italy – Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) Dashboard, December 2016.
[14] Italian Ministry of Labour, Monitoring report on unaccompanied and separated children in Italy, December 2016.

Indeed, to some children, education was of such importance that they dropped out of primary reception centres in the South of Italy to reach reception centres where they thought they would be able to go to school.

In Greece, while refugee and migrant children are, by law,[15] entitled to go to school, many children felt that the education available is not tailored to their needs, often due to the language of instruction. For children who want to stay in Greece, it is difficult to follow classes that are entirely in Greek, as children do not speak the language well enough. Children who want to continue their journey through family reunification or relocation tend to think that teaching in Greek is not useful for them. As a result, children often do not attend school and miss out further on their education.

[15] Law 220/2007, Article 14 PD.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Acronyms

AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
CARA	Centre for Accommodation of Asylum Seekers, Italy
CAS	Emergency Reception Centre, Italy
CIE	Identification and Expulsion Centre, Italy
CPSA	First Aid and Reception Centre, Italy
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EKKA	National Centre for Social Solidarity, Greece
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAS	Greek Asylum Service
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RIS	Greek First Reception Service
SPRAR	System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Italy
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Geographical Classifications

Region	Highest form of governance below the national level
Municipality	Urban administrative division with status and powers of jurisdiction as granted by national government

List of Figures

INTRODUCTION

Over 100,000 refugee and migrant children, of whom more than 33,800 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) (34 per cent), arrived in Europe in 2016.[16] In the first three months of 2017, 5,700 children landed on European shores.[17] The vast majority of them entered Europe irregularly through two main gateways to the continent: Italy, using the Central Mediterranean sea route, or Greece, transiting from Turkey, mostly via sea. In Italy, refugee and migrant arrivals peaked in 2014, quadrupling from the previous years' 43,000 arrivals to 170,000 arrivals.[18] Since then, arrivals continued at that scale, in accordance with seasonal fluctuations, with much higher arrivals recorded in the spring and summer months of each year. In Greece, after months of unrestricted passage to neighbouring countries with thousands of people transiting through the Aegean islands in autumn 2015 on a daily basis,[19] the closure of the Western Balkans route left refugees and migrants inadvertently staying in Greece. More than one and a half year later, as of May 2017, the Greek government estimates that more than 60,000 refugees and migrants still remain in Greece,[20] with children constituting an important proportion of overall arrivals. In Greece, more than one third of refugees and migrants are children (19,000; 37 per cent in 2016);[21] in Italy, the proportion of children of total arrivals is much lower (16 per cent);[22] yet, arrivals of children are increasing with arrivals of UASC doubling from 2015 to 2016, from 12,000 children arriving in 2015 to more than 25,000 in 2016.[23]

In both Italy and Greece, the respective government is in charge of the reception and identification of refugee and migrant children to ensure that children can access their rights, as determined by national and international legislation. Yet, while Italian authorities have been dealing with an increasing number of new arrivals on a yearly basis, in Greece, the peak of arrivals in 2015 caught by surprise both local authorities and European member states. As a result, the landscape of stakeholders offering assistance to refugees and migrants differs between the two countries. In Italy, the role of humanitarian organisations, in relative terms, remains marginal; in Greece, humanitarian actors have launched a major humanitarian intervention in 2015 and 2016, supported by a significant deployment of ECHO funding.

While there has been an increased focus on children in the governmental and humanitarian response to refugees and migrants in Europe,[24] knowledge on children's profiles, child-specific drivers of migration and children's experiences of their lives once in Europe remain limited. This is of particular concern as, once in Europe, children have different aspirations and needs. For many children, once they reach Italy and Greece, their journey is not yet over as they aim to reach family and friends elsewhere in Europe. Others would like to stay in Italy or Greece, and build a life for themselves in the country. Understanding children's aspirations once in Italy and Greece will enable Italian, Greek and European policy makers, local service providers and humanitarian actors to provide an integrated and targeted response to children, as well as to ensure that children stay safe in Europe and can live up to their potential and capabilities.

To fill this information gap, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted an assessment on the profile, drivers and intentions of refugee and migrant children who arrived in Italy and Greece in 2016 and 2017. The aim of this assessment is to shed light on the profiles and experiences of children, and increase understanding as to their motivations, the risks they encountered on their journey and their life once in Europe. It is based on primary and secondary data collection carried out between December 2016 and May 2017 in Italy and Greece. In Italy, more than 500 UASC were interviewed in 72 primary and secondary reception facilities in Sicily. Findings on children's profiles were triangulated and supplemented with secondary data from the Ministry of Labour. For Greece, findings are based on a consolidated analysis of secondary data on refugee and migrant children who arrived in the country between 2015 and 2017, as well as 70 key informant interviews with parents service providers and focus group discussions with 130 children, including UASC. Analysis presented on the profile and drivers of

[16] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[17] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Interagency Factsheet on refugee and migrant children and UASC in Europe Q1 2017, forthcoming.
[18] Consolidated data from the Italian Ministry of Interior.
[19] See, among other: BBC, Migrant crisis: explaining the exodus from the Balkans, 8 September 2015.
[20] UNHCR, Mediterranean Situation Overview, Accessed 19 May 2017.
[21] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[22] Ministry of Labour, Monitoring Report on UASC, December 2016.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Notably visible in the new draft law approved in Italy on unaccompanied children and, in Greece, in the growing development of child-friendly spaces and growth of availability of shelters for UASC.

UASC migration in Italy is statistically significant at 95 per cent confidence level with a five per cent margin of error. Findings in Greece are based on the most up-to-date data on refugee and migrant children in the country.

The report is structured as follows: the first section provides a background on migration in the region. The second section outlines the methodological approach used, including details on the data collection methods, sampling frames and limitations of approaches chosen. The following section presents a general background on migration to Europe and country-specific information on Italy and Greece. Thereafter, country chapters on Italy (Chapter four) and Greece (Chapter five) outline the main findings of the study in relation to the profile of refugee and migrant children, decision-making and drivers of migration, routes and ways of travel. Each country chapter closes with a sub-chapter on children's lives once in Italy and Greece and their aspirations for the future. Finally, the conclusion presents overarching findings emerging from the country studies and closes with a set of recommendations for further research.

BACKGROUND

Perspectives on Migration

Migration to Europe from the Middle East and Africa is not a new phenomenon. Yet, both regular and irregular migration have been increasing in recent years. In the early 2000s, more and more Sub-Saharan migrants joined the irregular travel via sea to Europe, becoming overall the largest category of new arrivals in Italy. Crises in the Middle East and North Africa, such as the Arab spring, the crisis in Libya and the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, have influenced migration dynamics towards Europe. In Italy, sea arrivals quadrupled in 2014 from the previous year and have remained at that scale since, with 181,000 new arrivals recorded in 2016.[25] In Greece, 2015 marked a landmark year in terms of arrivals with more than 850,000 refugees and migrants arriving via sea, most of whom were from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, an almost twenty-fold increase compared to the previous year.[26]

European states have adopted a number of measures to stem the flow of arrivals. In autumn 2015, the hotspot approach was launched in Italy and Greece, with the aim to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming refugees and migrants in frontline states.[27] In the same period, in Greece and along the Western Balkans route, gradually more restrictive border policies were implemented from autumn 2015 onwards, which culminated in a complete closure of the borders in February 2016. In the ensuing EU Turkey statement in March 2016, the European Union and Turkey agreed that any irregular refugee or migrant arriving in Greece after 20 March 2016 from Turkey would be sent back there, in exchange for, among other, financial support to Turkey to support refugees and migrants within its territory.[28] In Italy, bilateral agreements for the management of migration flows have been put in place, including the Khartoum Process in 2014[29] and, more recently, a number of Migration Compacts[30] between the EU and key origin and transit states, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Ethiopia and Libya.[31] They aim to stem migration flows by offering border management support and capacity building to partner states in exchange for increased safeguarding of borders.

However, refugees and migrants still arrive on European shores, with arrivals in Italy, in particular, increasing. As of 21 April 2017, more than 36,000 refugees and migrants have arrived by the Central Mediterranean route to Italy alone; an increase by 76 per cent compared to the same time period the previous year.[32] In Greece, while arrivals have drastically reduced compared to the same time the previous year, still 4,800 refugees and migrants have arrived in the first four months of 2017.[33]

Refugee and Migrant Children on the Move

The proportion of children within migration flows to Italy and Greece, and especially the presence of UASC, is growing. While in Greece, children constituted 25 per cent of all arrivals in 2015, their presence increased to 37 per cent of all arrivals in 2016.[34] In the first months of 2017, refugee and migrant children still constitute one third (30 per cent) of all sea arrivals. In Italy, the proportion of children of overall arrivals is significantly lower with 17 per cent of arrivals between January and April 2017.[35] Yet, arrivals of unaccompanied and separated children have exponentially increased since 2012 from 5,821 to 25,846 in 2016.[36] From 2015 to 2016 alone, the arrivals of unaccompanied and separated children in Italy have doubled.[37]

However, the profile of children arriving in Italy and Greece respectively is different. Whilst in Italy, 92 per cent of children who arrived in 2016 were unaccompanied or separated, a much larger proportion of children in Greece

[25] Italian Ministry of Interior, Daily update, 28 December 2016.
[26] UNHCR, Mediterranean Situation Overview, Accessed 23 April 2017.
[27] European Commission, The Hotspot approach to managing exceptional migratory flows, May 2015.
[28] European Commission, Implementing the EU-Turkey Statement: Questions and answers, June 2016.
[29] http://www.khartoumprocess.net/
[30] Migration Compacts are partnership agreements between countries of origin and transit and EU states aiming to manage migration to Europe.
[31] European Commission, Commission announces New Migration Partnership Framework: reinforced cooperation with third countries to better manage migration, 7 June 2016.
[32] UNHCR, Mediterranean Situation Overview, Accessed 23 April 2017.
[33] Ibid.
[34] UNHCR, Mediterranean Situation Overview, Accessed 23 April 2017.
[35] UNHCR, Mediterranean Situation Overview, Accessed 23 May 2017.
[36] Italian Ministry of Labour, Monthly report on UASC, October 2016.
[37] Italian Ministry of Labour, Quarterly monitoring report on UASC, December 2016.

arrived to the country with their family; a comparatively low nine per cent of refugee and migrant children are unaccompanied.[38] Also, primary countries of origin of children in Italy and Greece are different. Children arriving in Italy come from a much larger variation of countries, compared to children in Greece, including countries in Sub-Saharan, North or the Horn of Africa. In 2016, the primary countries of origin of arriving UASC were Eritrea (18 per cent), The Gambia (12 per cent) and Nigeria (11 per cent), followed by UASC from Egypt (10 per cent) and Guinea Conakry (eight per cent).[39] However, not all children who arrive in Italy subsequently stay in the officially reception system. As of December 2016, the most represented countries of origin of UASC in Italy's UASC dedicated reception facilities were Egypt (16 per cent), The Gambia (13 per cent), Albania (9 per cent), Nigeria (8 per cent) and Eritrea (8 per cent), reaching a total of 54 per cent of arrivals.[40] This suggests that UASC of certain nationalities often do not remain in reception facilities in Italy, but rather drop out to continue their journey or do not, once disembarked, go to a reception facility for UASC.

In contrast, in Greece in 2016, the three primary countries of origin of children were Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, totalling more than 90 per cent of all child arrivals.[41] Children in Greece are of all ages, including many younger children who arrived in the country with (parts of) their family. The top three nationalities of UASC registered by EKKA, the National Centre for Social Solidarity, the national referral system for UASC in Greece, were Pakistani, Afghan and Syrian.[42] In both Italy and Greece, the proportion of girls compared to boys is lower, though for Italy it is far lower, with girls representing only seven per cent of children in Italy and 44 per cent of children in Greece.[43]

Legal Framework

Upon arrival on European soil, children are entitled to a range of rights, irrespective of their origin and status. In Italy and Greece, children are protected by all human rights treaties signed by each country, as well as applicable national legislation. The primary international pieces of legislation applicable and ratified in Italy and Greece are:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which came into force in 1990 and was ratified by both Italy and Greece that same year, is the first comprehensive legal document spelling out the complete range of international human rights law applicable to children. The guiding principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; adherence to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right to participate. Both Italy and Greece have ratified the Convention, which means that any legislation passed in relation to children in both countries must adhere to the rights spelled out in the CRC.[44]

The 1951 Refugee Convention

The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key document that defines the term 'refugee' and outlines the rights of the displaced, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them. Ratified by Italy in 1954 and by Greece in 1960, it sets out the right to seek asylum, as well as the right individual case determination. The Refugee Convention sets standards that apply to children in the same way as to adults; a child who has a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group or political opinion' is a refugee.[45] Article 22 of the Convention sets standards of particular importance to children, as refugees must receive the 'same treatment' as nationals in primary education.[46]

[38] 19,000 refugee and migrant children are estimated to be in the country; EKKA currently estimates that 2,150 children in country are unaccompanied.
[39] UNHCR, Italy – Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) Dashboard, December 2016.
[40] Remaining nationalities were all reported at less than 5% and included countries in West Africa, South Asia and Balkans. Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UASC Monthly Monitoring Report, December 2016.
[41] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Convention on the rights of the child, November 1989.
[45] UNHCR, Refugee children: Guidelines on protection and care, 1994.
[46] Ibid.

The European Convention on Human Rights

The European Convention on Human Rights, adopted in 1950, was the first instrument to give binding effect to some of the rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It came into force on 3 September 1953.[47] Key articles relating to rights and freedoms in the convention include: 1) the right to life; 2) prohibition of torture; 3) the prohibition of slavery and forced labour; 4) the right to liberty and security; 5) the right to a fair trial; 6) no punishment without law; 7) the right to respect for private and family life; 8) freedom of thought, conscience and religion and 9) freedom of expression. Since its adoption in 1950, the Convention has been amended a number of times and supplemented with many rights in addition to those set forth in the original text. The European Court of Human Rights, set up in 1959 in Strasbourg implements the convention.

The rights set out by the Convention have an immediate impact on the situation of refugee and migrant children in Europe. The right to respect for private and family life, as reflected in the Convention and interpreted by the Court, is of relevance to family reunification procedure in line with Dublin III (see below). The prohibition of torture, as well as the right to liberty and security, have been considered by the Court when dealing with cases of immigration detention of children. Finally, the Protocol No 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights on the Prohibition of Collective Expulsions of Aliens[48] has been used by the Court to determine the legality of returns and push-back.

Dublin III

The Dublin III regulation sets the legal basis for establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of 28 EU member states and Switzerland, Norway, Lichtenstein, Iceland by a third-country national or a stateless person.[49] It sets out the right to family reunification and the right of unaccompanied children to seek asylum where they have family. 'Family' in this context includes: mother, father, siblings, grandparents, uncle or aunt, provided it is deemed in the child's best interests to be with their family member. In the case where a child applies for asylum in more than one Member State, the best interests of the child should prevail, which means that the application can be considered by the State where the child is.

Emergency Relocation Mechanism

Launched in September 2015 as a responsibility-sharing measure among EU countries, the emergency relocation mechanism is a two-year plan to relocate asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU Member States. Those who are relocated have their asylum claims processed in the European Member State that accepts their application. Under this scheme, 66,400 asylum-seekers were foreseen to be relocated from Greece, and 39,600 from Italy. Relocation is only available to asylum-seekers who arrived in Italy or Greece after 24 March 2015 and before the EU Turkey statement in March 2016.[50] Furthermore, eligibility for relocation is restricted to certain nationalities[51] which have at least a 75 per cent recognition rate across the EU. The recognition rate is based on the percentage of applications granted refugee status or subsidiary protection across the EU according to the latest Eurostat quarterly statistics.[52] This means that eligibility has changed over time; for example, Iraqi asylum seekers are no longer eligible for relocation as of July 2016.[53] Vulnerable persons, including children, are to be given priority during relocation procedures. No specific procedures were outlined for UASC.

Child Reception System in Italy and Greece

Both Italy and Greece have a dedicated child reception system in place for the reception of refugee and migrant children, including unaccompanied and separated children, in the country.

[47] European Court of Human Rights, The European Convention.
[48] European Court of Human Rights, Collective Expulsions of Aliens, February 2017.
[49] European Union, Dublin III regulation (EU) No 604/2013, 2013.
[50] European Commission, Tenth EU Relocation and Resettlement Report, March 2017
[51] As of 1 April 2017, the following nationalities are eligible for relocation: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahrain, British overseas countries and territories, Eritrea, Grenada, Guatemala, Syria and Yemen or a stateless person previously residing in one of these countries. For more information on relocation see https://www.easo.europa.eu/questions-and-answers-relocation
[52] Eurostat, Asylum quarterly report, March 2017
[53] News that Moves, Iraqis no longer eligible for relocation, July 2016

Italy

According to the European Agenda on Migration, [54] search and rescue operations conducted by the Italian coast guard and international NGOs in the Mediterranean waters end in disembarking operations at hotspots or ports, also named "mobile hotspots". According to the Italian Roadmap - the blueprint for the implementation of the hotspot approach in Italy – the key operations that should take place in hotspots are medical screening, pre-identification, registration, photographing and fingerprinting of arrivals, including children.[55] As the number of currently existing hotspots is not sufficient to ensure the disembarkation and processing of all arrivals, the concept of the mobile hotspot has been introduced. Mobile teams which undertake identification operations in ports where there is no hotspot are now fully operational in Southern Italy.

According to the "Roadmap", during disembarking procedures an individual interview with police officials should take place. The first interview aims to identify the presence of potential unaccompanied and separated children. When a person is identified as an unaccompanied or separated child during this interview, police authorities proceed, in collaboration with the social services of the competent municipality, to transfer the child to a dedicated primary reception facility. After a maximum of 30 days in such facilities, children should be transferred to a secondary reception facility, identified in accordance with the child's needs and aspirations, where he/she has more extensive access to services, as well as the obligation to go to school.[56] By law, conditions in primary reception centres only need to satisfy a basic level, while in the secondary reception system, projects should develop 'integrated accommodation' which focuses on individual paths and aims to give children hosted the tools needed to regain individual autonomy.[57] In secondary reception facilities, children should have access to, among other services, school, health assistance, psycho-social support and information on recreational, sport and cultural activities.[58] Children should also be automatically integrated into the obligatory National Education System in Italy.[59] Unaccompanied and separated children should be accommodated for six months after they turn 18, after which, upon renewal of their permit of stay, they are transferred to reception facilities for adults.[60]

Greece

Since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016, all irregular arrivals to Greece by sea are registered by the Reception and Identification Service and must either apply for asylum or face being sent back to Turkey. Upon arrival, refugees and migrants, including children, are systematically placed in detention in reception and identification centres while their claim is considered.[61] An initial three day restriction on 'freedom of movement' can be extended to a maximum of 25 days, if reception and identification procedures have not been completed. [62] After this, refugees and migrants, including children, are prohibited from leaving the island until their asylum claim has been examined.[63] On each island, the reception and identification centres serve as detention centres for 25 days and then become a place of open accommodation, although there are shelters run by NGOs for vulnerable groups.[64] People who cannot be returned to Turkey, such as vulnerable groups,[65] including unaccompanied children, are transferred to the mainland.[66] As of 10 February 2017 around 5,400 such people have been transferred to the mainland.[67]

[54] European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A European Agenda on Migration, May 2015.
[55] ASGI, Italian Roadmap, September 2015.
[56] Camera dei Deputati, Legge Zampa sui minori non accompagnati, March 2017.
[57] AIDA, Italy country report, February 2017.
[58] According to Article 30 MoI Decree 10 August 2016; see AIDA, Italy country report, February 2017.
[59] AIDA, Italy country report, February 2017.
[60] Camera dei Deputati, Legge Zampa sui minori non accompagnati, March 2017.
[61] AIDA, Greece country report, March 2017.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] According to Article 14(8) L 4375/2016, relating to **reception and identification** procedures, the following groups are considered as vulnerable groups: unaccompanied minors; persons who have a disability or suffering from an incurable or serious illness; the elderly; women in pregnancy or having recently given birth; single parents with minor children; victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation; persons with a post-traumatic disorder, in particularly survivors and relatives of victims of ship-wrecks; victims of trafficking in human beings. See AIDA, Greece country report, March 2017.
[66] AIDA, Greece country report, March 2017.
[67] European Commission, Fifth report on progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, March 2017.

Children who are identified through reception and identification procedures as unaccompanied and separated are referred to EKKA (National Centre for Social Solidarity), the government authority responsible for managing the placement of unaccompanied and separated children in shelters. Unaccompanied and separated children should then be transferred to dedicated shelters, and the Juvenile Public Prosecutor is informed, who acts by law as temporary guardian.[68] Pending transfer to a dedicated reception facility, Greek law allows for the detention of unaccompanied children for 25 days, and for up to 45 days in limited circumstances.[69] Nongovernmental organisations, along with UNHCR, have established five safe zones in accommodation sites (camps) as temporary alternatives to detention for unaccompanied and separated children.[70]

On the Greek mainland, refugee and migrant children are being hosted in accommodation sites (camps), apartments and shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers. According to European law, children should be accommodated in specialised facilities to guarantee the protection and care necessary for their well being, including an adequate standard of living, access to education and healthcare.[71] All children in Greece have the right to access school, and the Ministry of Education aims to provide access to education for the estimated 18,000 refugee and migrant children who are between four and 15 years of age.[72] Children living in accommodation sites (camps), are therefore enrolled in afternoon preparatory classes in public schools where they are taught Greek as a second language, English, mathematics, sports, arts and computer science.[73] Children living in urban areas are allowed to attend selected schools identified by the Ministry of Education.[74] A new law adopted in 2016 provides free access to public health services for people without social insurance and vulnerable groups, including asylum seekers, however staff are not always aware of the 2016 law which means it is not always applied.[75]

[68] AIDA, Greece country report, March 2017.
[69] Human Rights Watch, 'Why are you keeping me here?': Unaccompanied children detained in Greece, September 2016.
[70] EKKA, Situation update: Unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, May 2017. Safe zones are designated supervised spaces within accommodation sites which provide UAC with 24/7 emergency protection and care. They should be used as short term (maximum three months) measures to care for UAC in light of the insufficient number of available shelter places. Safe zone priority is given to UAC in detention as well as other vulnerable children, in line with their best interests.
[71] European Union, Reception conditions directive 2013/33/EU, June 2013.
[72] Greek Ministry of Education, Q & A access to education, April 2017.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Greek Ministry of Education, Q & A access to education, April 2017.
[75] AIDA, Greece country report, March 2017.

METHODOLOGY

This study is the result of a partnership between REACH Initiative (REACH) and UNICEF. It aims to contribute to an improved understanding of the profile of children on the move in Europe, including child-specific migration patterns, drivers and trends, in support of evidence-based decision making on migration in the region. The focus of the study has been jointly developed in collaboration with UNICEF in the months of November and December 2016. Data collection took place between January and May 2017.

Objective

The overall objective of this assessment was to present a comprehensive overview of the profile of children who migrated to Europe irregularly between 2015 and 2017 with focus on the two main gateways to Europe: Italy and Greece. It aims to provide in-depth information on population profiles of unaccompanied and separated children in Italy and refugee and migrant children in Greece, as well as migration drivers, decision-making, routes and intentions of refugee and migrant children in both countries, with special focus on the situation of children and access to services in Greece.

More specifically, the research questions were:

1) What is the personal profile of refugee and migrant children in Greece and unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children in Italy?
2) What was the decision-making process behind children's migration to Europe?
3) How did refugee and migrant children travel and why?
4) What do refugee and migrant children plan and aspire for their future once in Italy and Greece?

Methodology

Secondary data review was used to identify the level of information available on refugee and migrant children in Italy and Greece, and to inform the study's focus in respective countries.[76] It found that significantly more information and research has been conducted on refugee and migrant children who arrived in Greece since 2015, compared to data available on refugee and migrant children in Italy. As a result, while the same indicators were measured in both countries, a different methodology was used in Italy and Greece respectively. The methodology used in each country is presented below.

Further, the secondary data review found that the profile of the refugee and migrant child population in each country differs significantly. Whilst 92 per cent of all refugee and migrant children in Italy are unaccompanied or separated,[77] a comparatively low nine per cent of children in Greece are unaccompanied or separated. The population of interest for this study in each country was determined accordingly, with a focus on UASC in Italy, and a broader focus on refugee and migrant children in Greece.

Fully trained data collection teams were employed in both countries. For individual and key informant interviews (KIIs), hand-held mobile devices were used, and data was stored using digital data collection software (KOBO). During focus group discussions (FGDs), data was inputted manually and later transcribed. Questionnaires were drafted in English and then translated into the language used for respondent interviews, including: French, Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Dari and Urdu. Where possible, interviews were held in the respondents' mother tongue or a second language in which the respondent felt confident to be interviewed. Data was analysed using SPSS for individual and KIIs; Atlas Ti was used for the analysis of FGDs.

In total, 850 children took part in the study across Italy and Greece. In Italy, data collection took primarily part in Sicily, where the largest proportion of UASC across the country, 41 per cent of all UASC in reception facilities,

[76] A REACH/UNICEF internal SDR on Refugee and migrant children in Italy and Greece between 2014 and 2016, which can be shared with external actors upon request.
[77] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.

are hosted. Further, rapid assessments took place in key transit sites to capture children outside reception facilities, with data collection in the key transit cities of Rome and Milan and the border towns of Como, at the border with Switzerland, and Ventimiglia, at the border with France. In Greece, both accompanied, and unaccompanied and separated children took part in the study, mirroring the prevalence of refugee and migrant children who are in Greece with (parts of) their family. Data collection took place in shelters for UASC, shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, hotels and appartments in the urban areas in and around Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as in a selected number of accommodation (open) sites.

Table 1: Children interviewed across all interventions in Italy and Greece

Country	Where	Who	How	Number of children participating
Italy	Reception facilities for UASC in Sicily	UASC aged 15-17	Individual interviews	570
	Reception facilities for UASC in Sicily	UASC aged 15-17	Focus group discussions	90
	Outside reception facilities in key transit cities: Rome, Milan, Como, Ventimiglia	UASC aged 16-17	Individual interviews	60
Greece	Shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, hotels, appartments in/ around Athens, Thessaloniki	Accompanied children aged 15-17	Focus group discussions	60
	Shelters for UASC in Athens, Thessaloniki	UASC aged 15-17	Focus group discussions	52
	Accommodation (Open) sites around Athens, Thessaloniki	UASC aged 15-17	Focus group discussions	18
Total number of children participating				**850**

Italy

In Italy, a total of 720 UASC took part in the study. The vast majority of them, 660 UASC, were interviewed in reception facilities in Sicily, where the largest proportion of UASC across the country is hosted (41 per cent). Sixty children were interviewed outside reception facilities in informal gathering sites in Rome, Milan, Como and Ventimiglia, the key transit cities for UASC in Italy.

In Sicily, a mixed-method methodology was used, combining an individual survey with 570 UASC with 15 FGDs with 90 purposively sampled UASC hosted in reception facilities aged 15 to 17 years. Data collection took place between January and May 2017. Respondents to the individual survey were randomly sampled through cluster sampling to reach statistically significant results at 95 per cent confidence level and five per cent margin of error.

Population of Interest

The population of interest included all UASC hosted in reception facilities in Sicily – over 7,000 children, representing 41 per cent of the entire UASC population hosted in Italy's reception facilities.[78] The focus on UASC was chosen as they constitute the large majority of children arriving in Italy overall (92 per cent of all child arrivals

[78] Ministry of Labour, Monitoring Report on UASC, December 2016.

in 2016).[79] The geographic focus on Sicily was chosen due to the high proportion of UASC present on a regional level; the largest proportion of UASC in any region in Italy.

In informal gathering sites in the key transit cities of Rome, Milan, Como and Ventimiglia, the population of interest included UASC outside reception facilities aged 16 to 17. The cities were chosen purposively as they mirror the key places of transit for UASC who are not in the Italian reception system.

As children in reception facilities were selected randomly, only few girls were interviewed, mirroring the limited presence of female UASC in Italy overall. In informal gathering sites, particular attention was taken to include girls in the study; however, less girls were found in informal gathering sites overall. As such, findings may not be statistically significant in relation to girls.

UASC Level Sampling

To identify respondents to the individual survey, the sampling framework implemented a random cluster sampling strategy in reception facilities across Sicily.

Sampling Frame

There is no consolidated list of all children hosted in the different types of reception facilities in Sicily.[80] As a result, REACH developed a consolidated list of all UASC in reception facilities in Sicily on the basis of data shared by competent authorities (Sicily Regional Government, Ministry of Interior), which served as sampling frame. To expedite field-level data collection, cluster-level sampling was employed, whereby a minimum of four children per facility was to be interviewed. At facility level, children were randomly selected for interview using a randomised counting pattern on the basis of occupants lists provided by site managers. To ensure statistically significant information on some particular groups of interest of children in Sicily, notably children from The Gambia, Nigeria, Egypt and Guinea, who are among the top arrivals to the country, children from these countries were sampled on top of the random sample to reach 90 per cent confidence level and 10 per cent margin of error. The top-up strategy employed was as follows: upon completion of interviews as per random sample, enumerators would select in each facility on the basis of presence sheets all additional children of the given nationality of interest for interview. This data would be stored separately to ensure that it would not impact the findings of the overall sample. In total, 69 children were identified and interviewed on this basis. To account for non-response rate, a 10 per cent buffer was included in the sample size.

In informal gathering sites in Rome, Milan, Como and Ventimiglia, participants were selected purposively on the basis of age and pre-identified traits, including nationality and gender. In line with Italian legislation, which foresees that only children aged 16 or above can give informed consent without the consent of a legal guardian (unavailable in informal gathering sites), only children aged 16 to 17 were selected for interview.

Data Collection Methods

Individual interviews were administered using KOBO mostly through multi select questions; on average, individual interviews lasted 40 minutes. Participants for FGDs were selected through homogeneous screening in order to form groups of individuals who share similar characteristics or traits, in terms of country of origin, gender and age.

Limitations

The sample for the survey in Sicily was calculated on the best available set of information on UASC presence in reception facilities across Sicily. Yet, data sources were not always up-to-date, meaning that in some instances, facilities which have been closed were included in the sampling frame and others, which opened, were not included. More specifically, the following limitations are to be drawn in relation to data sources used:

- Data provided by the Regional Government of Sicily was updated as of July 2016, and did not account for most recent changes in centres, such as changes in management, or introduction of Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) - funded projects. Where randomly sampled facilities were found not to be

[79] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[80] As of July 2016, 79 per cent of reception facilities for UASC in Sicily were community housing (*communita allogio*), followed by primary reception centres (9 per cent), secondary reception centres (8 per cent), SPRAR (three per cent) and family housing (*case famiglia*, two per cent). Data provided by Sicilian government, updated as of July 2016.

operational anymore, these were replaced with other facilities active in the municipality, selected through random extraction.

- The list of UASC-dedicated System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) facilities was last updated in December 2015, as no more up-to-date data was available at time of assessment.[81] As such, the sampling frame containing SPRAR facilities may not present the most accurate picture of present SPRAR facilities and occupation rates in Sicily.

At field level, the following mitigation strategies were employed to ensure randomisation of the survey was maintained:

- Where fewer children were found to be present in a facility than indicated in the overall sampling frame; the target for respondents in the facility was not reached, but fell within the 10 per cent non-response rate buffer.
- Where no common language of communication between enumerator and respondent could be found (20 out of 501 cases), the randomly extracted participant was replaced by randomly extracting a new respondent
- Where the randomly extracted individual at facility level was found to fall outside the age target of 15 to 17 years, he/she was replaced with another randomly selected respondent.
- In cases where an individual identified through randomised sampling for interview was known to be a victim of trafficking or particularly vulnerable (as identified by site managers and data collectors), the respondent was not interviewed and replaced by another randomly selected respondent.

In a limited number of cases (three out of 72), access to a randomly sampled facility was not granted by either local authorities or by centre managers. In such case, another facility in the same municipality was randomly extracted.

Further, the sampling frame for findings on the profile, decision making, drivers of migrantion and the journey, included only UASC hosted in reception facilities. As such, children who have dropped out of reception facilities or have absconded prior to being registered in a reception facility are excluded from the findings in these sections. Children below 15 and particular vulnerable groups have been excluded from the assessment, due to protection concerns; as such their views are underrepresented. Given the smaller sample size, comparisons between sub-groups should be treated as indicative only.

[81] ANCI, I comuni e le politiche di accoglienza dei minori stranieri non accompagnati, 2016.

Table 2: How to use findings presented, by chapter

Chapter	What are findings based on?	How to use the findings
Profile of unaccompanied and separated children in Sicily	570 interviews with UASC identified through a random cluster sample of all UASC hosted in reception facilities across Sicily; triangulated with 15 FGDs with UASC purposively sampled in reception facilities in Sicily	Statistically representative at 95/5 confidence level of UASC residing in reception facilities in Sicily, where the largest proportion of UASC across Italy (41 per cent) are hosted
Decision Making and Drivers of Migration	570 interviews with UASC identified through a random cluster sample of all UASC hosted in reception facilities across Sicily; triangulated with 15 FGDs with UASC purposively sampled in reception facilities in Sicily	Statistically representative at 95/5 confidence level of UASC residing in reception facilities in Sicily, where the largest proportion of UASC across Italy (41 per cent) are hosted
The Journey	570 interviews with UASC identified through a random cluster sample of all UASC hosted in reception facilities across Sicily; triangulated with 15 FGDs with UASC purposively sampled in reception facilities in Sicily	Statistically representative at 95/5 confidence level of UASC residing in reception facilities in Sicily, where the largest proportion of UASC across Italy (41 per cent) are hosted
Life in Italy and Aspirations for the Future	60 interviews with UASC outside reception facilities in the key transit cities of Rome, Milan, Como, Ventimiglia; 15 FGDs with UASC purposively sampled in reception facilities in Sicily	Illustrates trends and key concerns for UASC hosted inside reception facilities and UASC living outside the reception system

Greece

Population of Interest

The population of interest included refugee and migrant children in Greece between 2015 and 2017, including, but not limited to, unaccompanied and separated children.

Girls were selected purposively, to include their views. Yet, less girls in the relevant age group (15 to 17 years) could be found in the locations assessed at the time of the assessment, meaning that girls' views, in particular, may be underrepresented.

Secondary Data Collection

Following a thorough secondary data review, it was determined in collaboration with UNICEF that no primary data collection on refugee and migrant children's profile, drivers of migration and journey would take place. This was due to the level of information available, as well as to counter assessment fatigue among refugee and migrant children in Greece and avoid duplication of data collection efforts. Main sources for secondary data included the UNHCR Mediterranean situation portal, IOM's data on arrivals, statistics from the Greek asylum service, UNHCR's profiling of the Syrian and Afghan population arriving on the Greek islands in early 2016, and UNHCR's profiling of Afghan UASC in 2015, as well as research carried out by REACH along the Western Balkans in late 2015 and early 2016. Information gaps were nevertheless identified on the intentions of refugee and migrant children in Greece and how they saw their future in Europe; these were to be filled through primary data collection.

Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection took place for the sub-chapter on 'Life in Greece and Aspirations for the Future' between February and April 2017.

In total, 130 refugee and migrant children, including UASC were interviewed, together with 40 parents and 30 service providers. A mixed methodology was used which combined focus group discussions with refugee and migrant children, including UASC in shelters for UASC, shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, hotels, apartments and accommodation (open), sites with key informant interviews (KII) with parents of refugee and migrant children and service providers.

Children were sampled purposively on the basis of country of origin, age group and whether children were accompanied or unaccompanied. Children from the top four countries of origin were selected: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In total, 21 FGDs were conducted in shelters for UASC, shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, hotels, apartments and accommodation (open) sites and a total of 130 children participated. All children participating were from 15 to 17 years old. Both boys and girls participated, however, less girls took part overall as less female participants could be found at the time of the assessment. FGDs took place in children's mother tongues in either Dari, Arabic or Urdu. In few instances, where shelters hosted a limited number of children only, FGDs were conducted in a mix of languages with trained enumerators translating for the group.

Parents and service providers were selected purposively. Parents were sampled purposively on the basis of having at least one child in Greece and by most represented nationality and gender. In total, 40 interviews with parents were conducted, of which 15 with Syrians (seven mothers and eight fathers), 10 with Iraqis (six mothers and four fathers), 10 with Afghans (five mothers and five fathers), and five with Pakistanis (two mothers and three fathers). Per site assessed (10 sites overall), three KIIs with service providers working on the site were conducted; in these instances service providers were selected on the basis of their role and knowledge of the services and needs in the location assessed; these included, among others, child protection actors and site managers.

Limitations

Analysis on the profile of refugee and migrant children, drivers and decision-making on migration and the journey is based on existing secondary data only. As such, in some cases, it may not provide the most up-to-date picture of the situation of refugee and migrant children in Greece or, in some instances, be limited in its disaggregation and focus on children. Throughout the analysis, data sources and potential limitations are highlighted in footnotes. Primary data collection on the life and aspirations of children in Greece presents findings as reported by children and key informants assessed, and should not be seen as representative of the entire refugee and migrant child population in Greece. The views of girls and younger children, who were not included in the assessment, in particular may be underrepresented.

Table 3: How to use findings presented, by chapter

Chapter	What are findings based on?	How to use the findings
Profile of Refugee and Migrant Children in Greece	Consolidated secondary data analysis of publicly available data on refugee and migrant children who arrived in Greece between 2015-17	Identification of key profiles, trends and dynamics of refugee and migrant child population in Greece
Decision Making and Drivers of Migration	Consolidated secondary data analysis of publicly available data on refugee and migrant children who arrived in Greece between 2015-17	Identification of key profiles, trends and dynamics of refugee and migrant child population in Greece
The Journey	Consolidated secondary data analysis of publicly available data on refugee and migrant children who arrived in Greece between 2015-17	Identification of key profiles, trends and dynamics of refugee and migrant child population in Greece
Life in Greece and Aspirations for the Future	Focus group discussions with refugee and migrant children, including UASC, totalling 130 children, in shelters for UASC, shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, hotels, appartments; 40 interviews with parents of refugee and migrant children	Illustrates trends and key concerns for refugee and migrant children, their parents, and UASC hosted in urban areas and accommodation (open) sites in and around Athens and Thessaloniki

Ethical Safeguards

The following safeguards were put in place to ensure that data collection activities did not jeopardise the best interests of the child.

Prior to Data Collection

- *Research design*: Research design, data collection tools and procedures were developed in close collaboration with UNICEF and certified by an External Ethics Committee to ensure that all safeguards in relation to data collection with children were upheld.
- *Population of interest*: To ensure that children had the cognitive ability to make an informed decision over participating in the assessment, only children aged 15 to 17 participated in the assessment.
- *Training*: Data collection personnel was thoroughly trained on: data collection with children; interacting with children; ethical consideration in data collection with children; referral mechanisms and how to identify signs of distress.

During Data Collection

- *Information sharing*: Prior to the interview, children were thoroughly informed about: the objective of the study; the types of questions asked; length of questionnaire; that respondents would not be remunerated; the anonymity of respondents and, in case of FGDs, the confidentiality of responses.
- *Assent & Consent*: Written assent by children and the written consent of the legal guardian of children were collected.
- *Referral & Complaints*: Referral and Complaints mechanisms were put in place for children who participated as respondents.
- *Vulnerable respondents*: Where randomly sampled children were found to be of a particular vulnerable group, such as victims of trafficking, children were excluded from participating in the study.
- *Safe & confidential space*: Data collection was only administered where a safe and private space for interviews could be identified.

As no cases requiring urgent action, as defined by ethical safeguards, were identified during data collection, no referrals were made as a result of the research in Greece or in Italy.

ITALY

This section of the report outlines the findings of data collection in Sicily. It starts with a presentation of the profile of unaccompanied and separated children assessed in reception facilities, including personal profile, countries of origin and previous schooling and work experience. Thereafter, findings in relation to drivers, decision making on migration and the journey are presented. The chapter closes with children's lives once in Italy and their aspirations for their future.[82]

Profile of Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Sicily

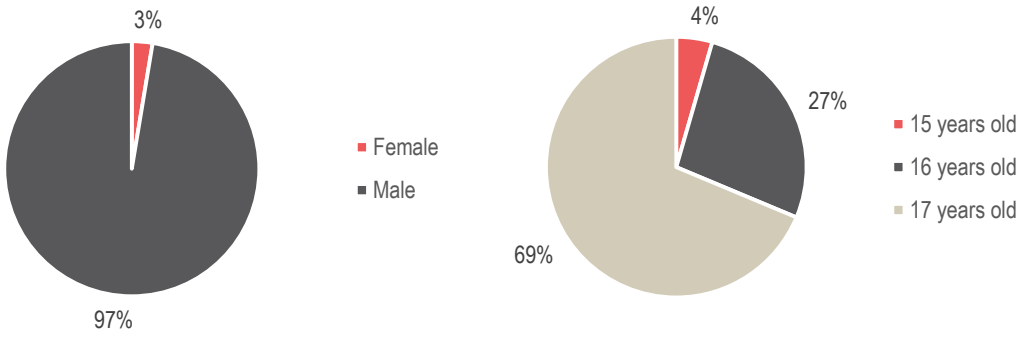
Key findings

- The vast majority of unaccompanied and separated children in reception facilities assessed in Sicily are boys (97 per cent).
- The majority of children are 17 years old (69 per cent); 27 per cent of children are 16 years old, and four per cent of children are 15 years old.
- The majority of children assessed are from West Africa; the primary countries of origin reported were The Gambia (29 per cent), Ivory Coast (14 per cent) and Guinea Conakry (12 per cent).
- Most children lived in their country of origin most of their lives prior to migrating (98 per cent).
- The majority of children assessed (84 per cent) reported having attended formal education prior to arriving in Italy

Age and Gender

Unaccompanied and separated children hosted in Sicily's reception facilities in the months of January to May 2017 were overwhelmingly boys (97 per cent), and three per cent were girls. Nation-wide, the Italian Ministry of Labour recorded that 93 per cent of unaccompanied and separated children in reception facilities are boys and seven per cent are girls.[83] The slightly higher proportion of boys in the present sample is likely attributable to the sampling of respondents in the present study, as vulnerable individuals, mostly girls, were in some instances removed from respondent selection due to protection concerns.[84]

Figure 1: Profile of UASC in UASC-dedicated facilities in Sicily by gender and by age breakdown



The majority of children were 17 years old (69 per cent), followed by 27 per cent of children who were 16 and four per cent who were 15 years old. The profile recorded is comparable to children's profiles in 2015 and 2016 nationwide.[85] In both years, 95 per cent of children in reception facilities were boys and five per cent were girls. In total, 14 girls were interviewed. The age distribution of assessed children in Sicily is comparable to the nation-wide

[82] NB: The findings herein presented relate to unaccompanied and separated children only. To ease readability, however, they will be referred to in some instances as 'children' only. Graphs and maps use the short form 'UASC' to maintain clarity about the findings displayed.
[83] Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UASC Monthly Monitoring Report, March 2017.
[84] See Methodology section for more detail.
[85] Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UASC Monthly Monitoring Report, December 2015; Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UASC Monthly Monitoring Report, December 2016.

age distribution of children recorded in reception facilities by the Ministry of Labour.[86] The age breakdown was also comparable, with 92 per cent of children in 2015 aged 15 or above, and 91 per cent of unaccompanied and separated children in 2016.[87]

Country of Origin

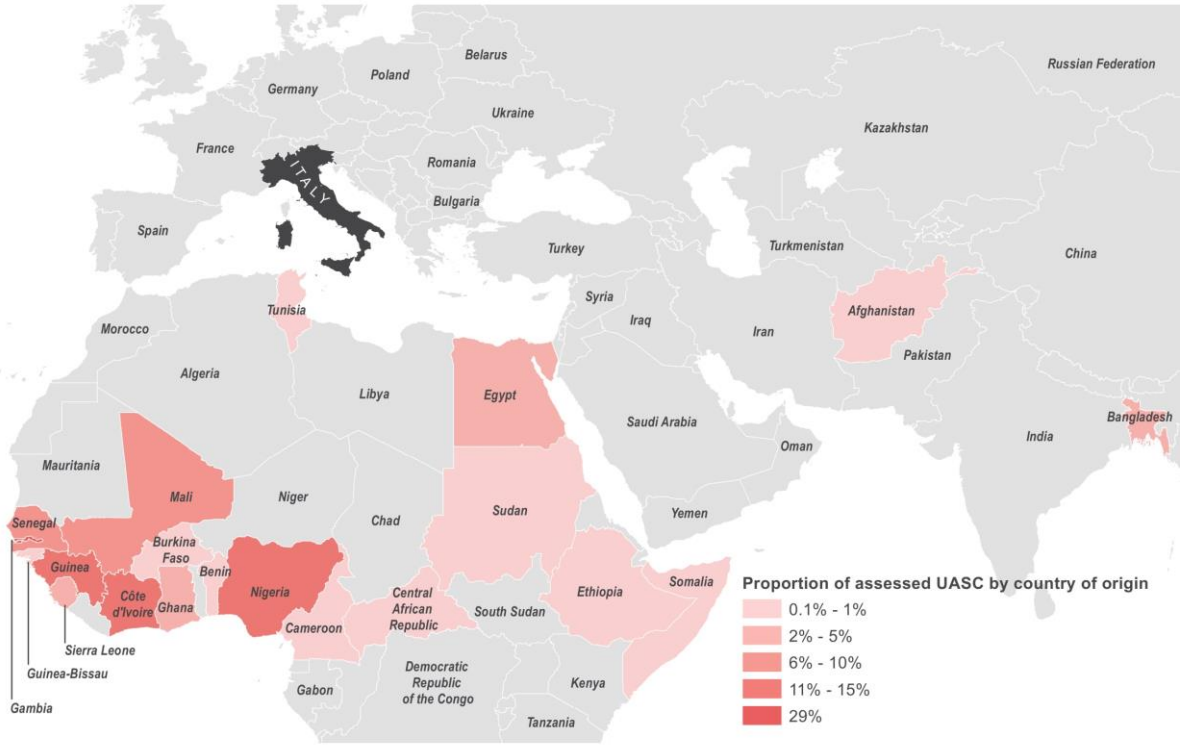
The majority of unaccompanied or separated children in dedicated facilities in Sicily are from West Africa. Most reported countries of origin were The Gambia (29 per cent), Ivory Coast (14 per cent), followed by Guinea Conakry (12 per cent), Nigeria (11 per cent) and Senegal (nine per cent). Most children (98 per cent) lived in their country of origin for the majority of their life prior to migration. **The countries of origin of children in reception facilities assessed in Sicily are notably different from the nation-wide countries of origin of children recorded by the Ministry of Labour in March 2017**.[88] Nation-wide, Egypt is the most reported country of origin of unaccompanied and separated children (16 per cent), while in the facilities assessed in Sicily only four per cent of children are from Egypt. In contrast, while 29 per cent of children assessed in Sicily are from The Gambia, the national average is significantly lower at 13 per cent. As findings herein presented are statistically representative of the unaccompanied and separated child population in dedicated facilities in Sicily, this suggests that the countries of origin of children hosted in different regions in Italy are notably different, with lower proportions of children from Egypt, but a much higher proportion of Gambian children hosted in Sicily.[89]

Also, countries of origin of UASC in reception facilities are different from total arrivals to Italy in 2016. In 2016, the primary countries of origin of arriving UASC were Eritrea (18 per cent), The Gambia (12 per cent) and Nigeria (11 per cent), followed by UASC from Egypt (10 per cent) and Guinea Conakry (eight per cent).[90] In comparison, as of December 2016, the most represented countries of origin of UASC in Italy's UASC dedicated reception facilities were Egypt (16 per cent), The Gambia (13 per cent), Albania (9 per cent), Nigeria (8 per cent) and Eritrea (8 per cent), reaching a total of 54 per cent of arrivals.[91]

Further, in 2016 the most prevalent nationality of UASC arriving in Italy was Eritrea, with 14 per cent of all UASC arrivals (3800 children) being from Eritrea.[92] Data from the Ministry of Labour suggests that six per cent of children in dedicated facilities in Italy are from Eritrea, of whom 12 per cent in Sicily.[93] However, **only six Eritrean children could be found during data collection activities in Sicily, suggesting that Eritrean children may not stay in dedicated facilities in Sicily, but drop out of facilities to continue their journey in Italy.**[94]

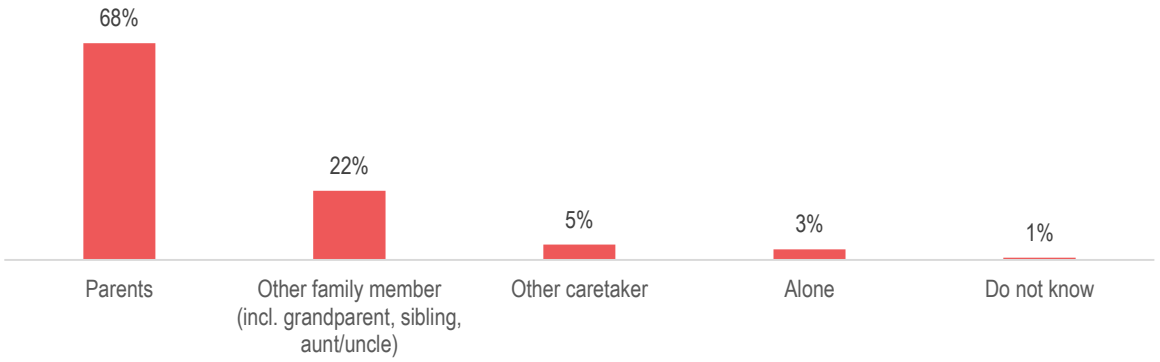
[86] Once UASC under 15 years of age, who account for 7% of UASC overall, are excluded from the Ministry of Labour data, the breakdown recorded is as follows: 10% of UASC are 15 years old; 26% of UASC are 16 years old and 65% of UASC are 17 years old.
[87] No information on disability of UASC in Italy is currently available.
[88] Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UASC Monthly Monitoring Report, March 2017.
[89] For a regional breakdown of the areas of origin of UASC from The Gambia, Nigeria, Guinea Conakry and Egypt please consult: -link to factsheets to be added once final-
[90] UNHCR, Italy – Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) Dashboard, December 2016.
[91] Remaining nationalities were all reported at less than 5% and included countries in West Africa, South Asia and Balkans. Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UASC Monthly Monitoring Report, December 2016.
[92] UNHCR, Italy UASC Dashboard, December 2016.
[93] Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UASC Monthly Monitoring Report, March 2017.
[94] Please consult sub-chapter 'Intentions and Aspirations for the future' for further information.

Map 1: Countries of origin of UASC in dedicated facilities in Sicily as of May 2017



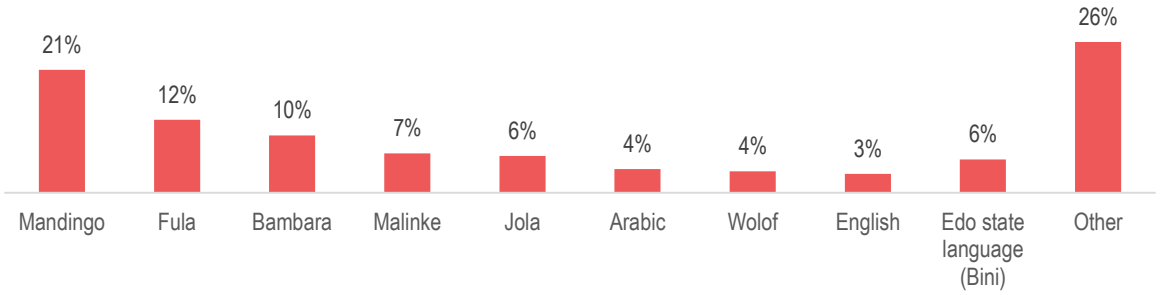
Prior to migrating, the majority of children assessed (90 per cent) were cared for by a parent or other family member (Figure 2). Only a very small proportion of children assessed reported to have children themselves (1.8 per cent; four girls).

Figure 2: Caretaker of UASC in country of origin



While most reported primary languages spoken mirrored children's countries of origin, the majority of children assessed (96 per cent) were fluent in more than one language. **The most reported primary languages spoken were Mandingo (21 per cent), Fula (12 per cent) and Bambara (10 per cent)** (Figure 3). Mandingo is the principal language of The Gambia and Ivory Coast, and spoken in parts of Senegal and Guinea Bissau. Combined with the second and third most reported primary languages spoken, Fula and Bambara, both languages spoken in the Western African region, it mirrors children's primary areas of origin in West Africa.

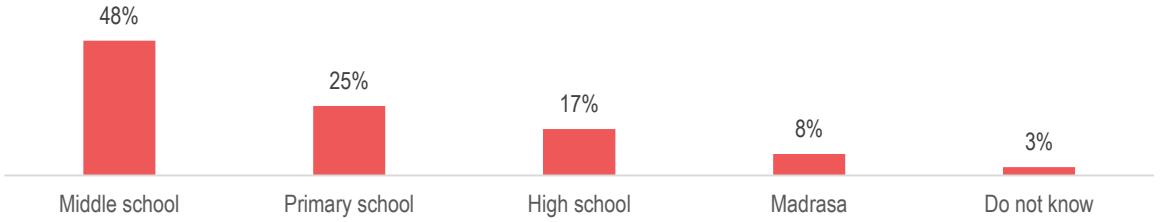
Figure 3: Mother tongue of UASC



Education received

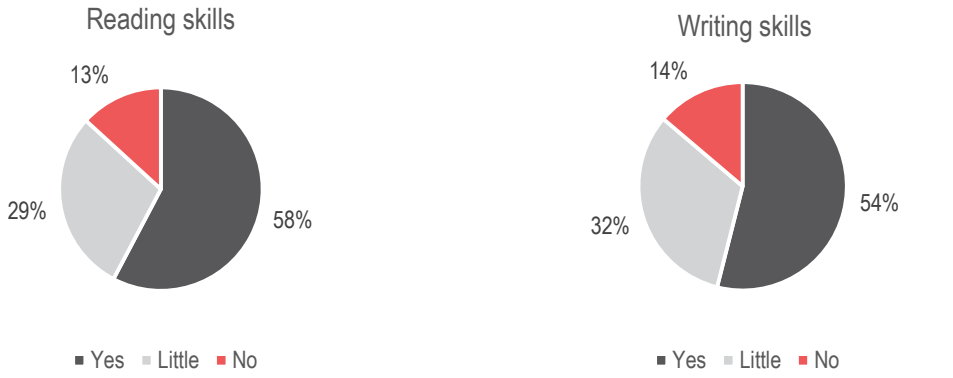
The great majority of children assessed (84 per cent) reported having attended formal education prior to arriving in Italy. Half of them reached middle school or beyond, while another 25 per cent of children indicated attending primary school only. In addition, 17 per cent of children interviewed had attended high school. During FGDs, most children stressed the importance of education and expressed the desire to be able to regularly go to school. This was particularly often the case among children who had been to school in their country of origin and who wished to attend school also in Italy. Children who had never been to school reported that they felt their lack of education made it more difficult for them to attend school while being in Italy.

Figure 4: Self-reported education level achieved by UASC prior to arriving in Italy, of those who attended formal education[95]



Children reported to be slightly more be able to read (58 per cent) than to write (54 per cent). In contrast, the proportion of children reporting not being able to read and write was constant, at 13 per cent for the ability to read and 14 per cent for the ability to write. This suggests that **where children are able to read, they are likely to be able to write as well, albeit with more difficulty.** No statisticially significant difference was found between children from different nationality in their self-reported ability read and/or write.

Figure 5: Self-reported reading and writing skills (in any language) of UASC



[95] 'Madrasa' was defined as a 'college for Islamic instruction'. Level of education was broken down as follows: one to five years: primary school; six to nine years: middle school; 10 to 12 years: high school.

FOCUS 1: EDUCATION AND WORK EXPERIENCE OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN IN ITALY

Methodology

Between January and May 2017, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted an assessment of the profile, drivers and journey of refugee and migrant unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) who arrived in Italy in 2016 and 2017. In particular, UASC originating from The Gambia, Guinea Conakry and Nigeria were assessed, who represent 40%, 7.8% and 8.5% of the total UASC population in Italy respectively.

This assessment is based on cluster level sampling of UASC in dedicated reception facilities across Sicily. In total, 123 UASC from The Gambia, 71 from Guinea Conakry and 68 from Nigeria were interviewed in respectively 73, 40 and 32 facilities. Results are statistically representative of each of these UASC populations in Sicily with a 90% confidence level and a 10% margin of error.

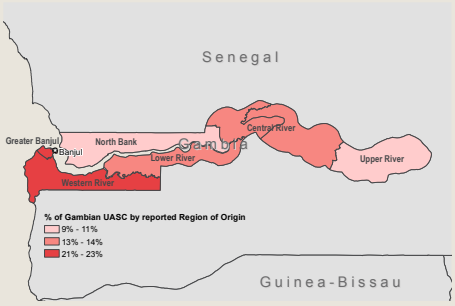
Further findings from this assessment are presented in Factsheets, accessible here. *(will be inserted when final products are published)*

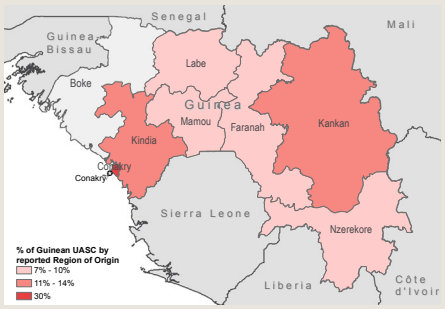
The Gambia

Guinea Conakry

Nigeria

Maps of children's areas of origin





Reported ability of children to read and write in any language:

The Gambia			Guinea Conakry			Nigeria		
Read		Write	Read		Write	Read		Write
49%	Fluent	49%	51%	Fluent	42%	51%	Fluent	57%
36%	A little	37%	35%	A little	37%	33%	A little	26%
15%	Not at all	14%	14%	Not at all	21%	16%	Not at all	17%

Reported level of school achieved before migration:[1]

The Gambia		Guinea Conakry		Nigeria	
1. Middle school	44%	1. Middle school	52%	1. Middle school	44%
2. Primary school	40%	2. High school	21%	2. Primary school	40%
3. High school	16%	3. Primary school	13%	3. High school	16%
		4. Madrasa	13%		

Reported previous work experiences:

43% of children reportedly **worked prior to arriving in Italy**.

Most reported professions were:
1. Physical labour (construction work)
2. Low skilled service labour

35% of children reportedly **worked prior to arriving in Italy**.

Most reported professions were:
1. Physical labour (construction work)
2. Low skilled service labour

43% of children reportedly **worked prior to arriving in Italy**.

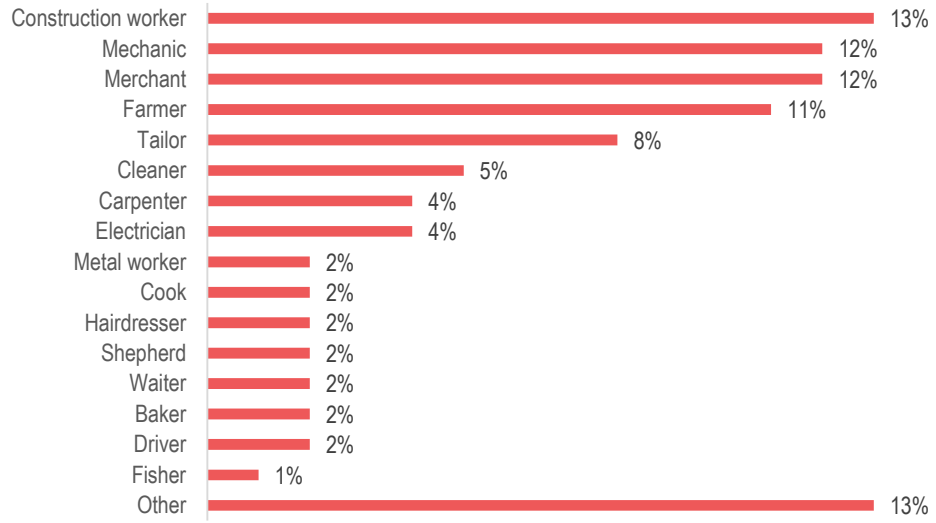
Most reported professions were:
1. Physical labour (construction work)
2. Low skilled service labour

[1] School years were divided as follows: primary school: 1-5 years; middle school: 6-9 years; high school: 10-12 years. 'Madrasa' was defined as a 'college for Islamic instruction'.

Work Experience

The largest proportion of children assessed reported not to have worked prior to arriving in Italy (49 per cent). Yet, **39 per cent of children reported to have worked prior to arriving in Italy, and 12 per cent reported to have engaged in subsistence work, such as helping out on the family's farm. Most commonly, children worked in the low skill service sector or as daily labourers**.[96]

Figure 6: Type of work conducted by UASC prior arriving in Italy



Decision Making and Drivers of Migration

Key Findings

- Most reported drivers of migration included: violence, conflict and exploitation (70 per cent); limited livelihoods in country of origin (48 per cent); limited public services (20 per cent)
- Children reported to be the primary decision makers in deciding to migrate (75 per cent), as many reportedly lacked a caretaker who looked after them in their country of origin or did not want to worry their parents.
- Around half (47 per cent) of children thought about the risks of migration before leaving. Where they did, they appeared to be well-informed, knowing that they could be killed (42 per cent) or drown at sea (23 per cent).

Drivers of Migration

Most commonly, children's decision to leave was influenced by three, often intersecting, types of challenges in the country of origin: some form of violence (70 per cent), lack of livelihoods (48 per cent) or limited public services available in the country of origin (28 per cent). **The vast majority of children (88 per cent) reported that several of these factors influenced their decision to leave their country of origin.**

[96] No particular differences were found in this regard between different nationalities. Due to the low amount of girls interviewed, these findings were not disaggregated by girls' work.

Figure 7: Primary reported drivers for leaving country of origin, in order of prevalence[97]

Violence, Conflict, Exploitation		Limited livelihoods in country of origin		Limited public services	
70%		48%		20%	
Violence at home	31%	Lack of economic opportunities	32%	Limited education available	18%
Persecution[98]	18%				
Generalised violence[99]	8%				
Conflict	6%				
Detention	3%	Lack of survival essentials[100]	16%	Limited health services	2%
Child Labour	2%				
Forced Recruitment	1%				
Forced Marriage[101]	1%				

Almost three out of four children assessed (70 per cent) reported to have experienced some form of violence, conflict or exploitation, which forced them to leave their country of origin. The most reported form of violence experienced was violence at home (31 per cent), followed by ethnic, social or religious persecution (18 per cent). Other forms of violence included generalised violence (six per cent), conflict (five per cent) and child detention (three per cent).

Children often reported not having someone to take care of them in their country of origin, as their family life had been disrupted following the sudden death or the marriage of one of the parents. Among children from The Gambia, in particular, violence or tensions at home were one of the primary reasons why children left their country of origin, as reported by 47 per cent of Gambian children.

Almost half of children assessed (48 per cent) further reported that they did not see any future for themselves in their country of origin due to limited economic opportunities. Some children were the eldest in their family and wanted to support their siblings; in other cases, children reported wanting to take a chance at a better life elsewhere. An additional 16 per cent of children reported that, beyond limited economic opportunities, they lacked survival essentials in their country of origin, such as food, water or shelter.

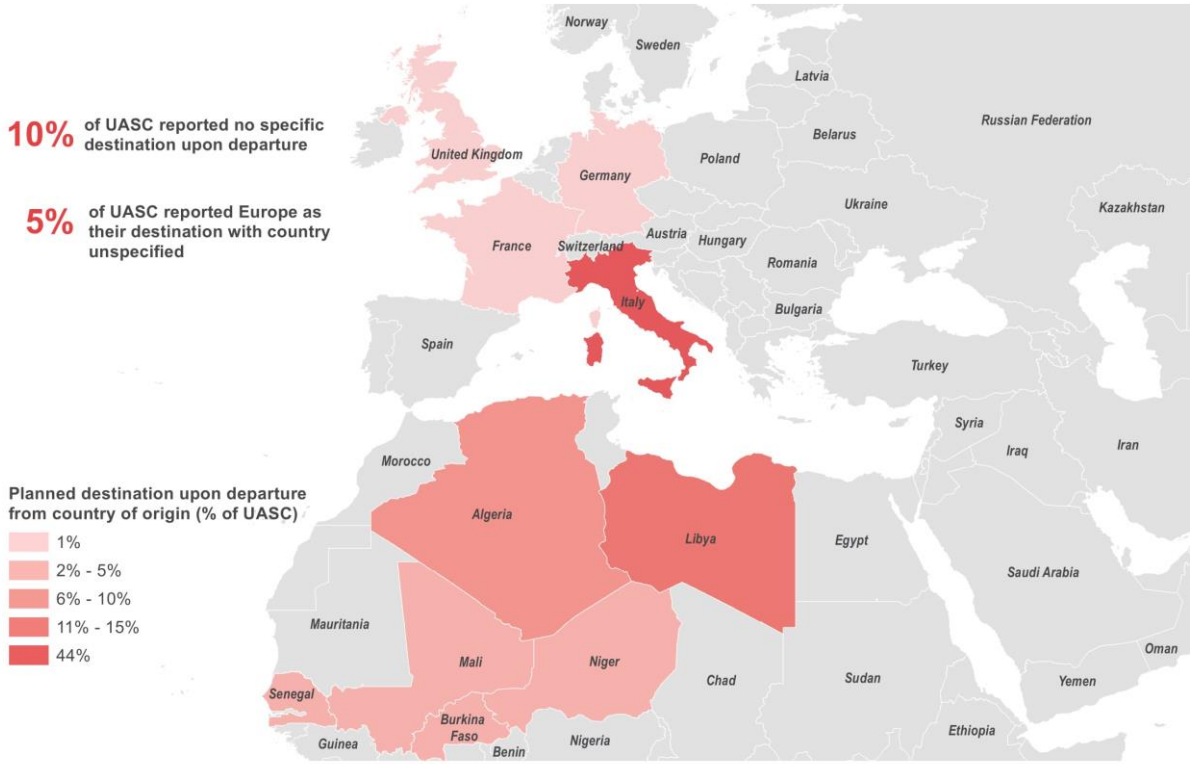
Limited access to public services in the country of origin was an important reason for leaving their country of origin for 20 per cent of the children assessed. Children reported that the education available was limited or not available at all (18 per cent), and that health services were not sufficient or not accessible (two per cent). This made children leave their country in hope of better education or health services elsewhere.

Choosing a Destination

The most commonly reported final destination children had in mind when they left their country of origin was Italy (44 per cent). Yet, one fifth of respondents (20 per cent) had first planned to go and stay in North Africa, including Libya (12 per cent) and Algeria (eight per cent). While 12 per cent had planned to stay in a neighbouring country, including Mali (four per cent), Senegal (three percent) or Burkina Faso (two per cent). Five per cent of children reportedly wanted to go to 'Europe' with no specific EU country in mind.

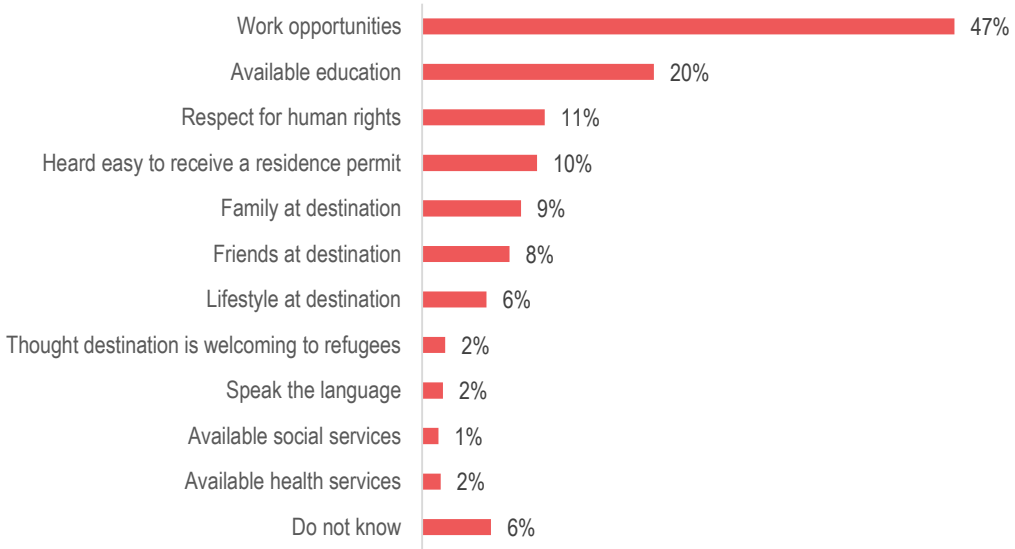
[97] Respondents could select up to three answer categories, which is why percentages exceed 100%.
[98] Defined in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention as persecution 'for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group or political opinion'.
[99] Generalised violence was described as ' a context where violence is widespread, but not tied to personal persecution of the child in question, different to the Refugee Convention.
[100] Defined as the 'lack of access to the most basic needs, including food, water and shelter.'
[101] All cases of reported or feared forced marriage, excluding one, were reported by girls. Reported by one in five girls assessed.

Map 2: Planned countries of destination upon departure of UASC



When asked why children preferred certain destinations, answers varied but often mirrored the reasons why they left their country of origin. The most reported reasons for choosing a destination were the hope for better work opportunities (27 per cent), followed by available education (20 per cent) and social services at destination (18 per cent). This suggests that having opportunities **to improve children's prospects for the future was key in deciding where to go**.

Figure 8: Reported reasons for choosing country of destination[102]



The importance of work, however, as well as other driving factors, differed by intended destination. **Among children who left home with the intention to reach Europe, access to education, as reported by 38 per cent**

[102] Respondents could select up to three answer categories.

of children who wanted to reach Europe, and respect for human rights, reported by 18 per cent, were important factors which influenced children's decision to reach a European country. In contrast, among children who planned to travel to neighbouring countries in West Africa, the hope to find work was more often coupled with the wish to join friends, as reported by 24 per cent, or family (14 per cent).

Figure 9: Reported reasons for choosing country of destination, by region of destination[103]

Reason for choosing destination	Destination in Europe	Destination in West Africa	Libya
Work opportunities	48%	44%	68%
Available education	36%	5%	0%
Respect for human rights	18%	0%	0%
Heard easy to receive a residence permit	17%	0%	0%
Family at destination	7%	14%	12%
Friends at destination	4%	24%	9%
Lifestyle at destination	9%	2%	2%
Thought destination is welcoming to refugees	4%	0%	0%
Available health services	3%	0%	0%
Available social services	3%	0%	0%
Speak the language	2%	0%	0%
Do not know	3%	3%	2%
Do not want to answer	0%	8%	8%

Children who aimed to go to Libya, usually wanted to work there, as reported by 68 per cent of children. A smaller share of children wanted to join family in Libya (12 per cent).

Decision making

As migration among respondents was often considered as an opportunity to create a better future for oneself and one's family, the decision to migrate was primarily an individual decision, as reported by 75 per cent of children assessed. Almost all children who participated in FGDs reported to have decided to leave their country of origin alone. Sometimes the decision was very sudden, triggered by a specific event, such as a fight within the family; in other cases, it was the result of a longer reflection, but **in all cases children had very rarely spoken about their decision with adults or family members, and sometimes did not even inform friends**. This is in contrast to what the literature on the migration of unaccompanied and separated children often suggests.[104] For some children, the family decided on his/her behalf (11 per cent) and in few instances, the decision was taken by the wider family group (two per cent).

[103] Respondents could select up to three answer categories.
[104] See e.g. UNHCR, Trees only move in the wind: A study of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe, 2010.

FOCUS 2: DEPARTURES AND JOURNEY OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN IN ITALY

Methodology

Between January and May 2017, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted an assessment of the profile, drivers and journey of refugee and migrant unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) who arrived in Italy in 2016 and 2017. In particular, UASC originating from The Gambia, Guinea Conakry and Nigeria were assessed, who represent 40%, 7.8% and 8.5% of the total UASC population in Italy respectively.

This assessment is based on cluster level sampling of UASC in dedicated reception facilities across Sicily. In total, 123 UASC from The Gambia, 71 from Guinea Conakry and 68 from Nigeria were interviewed in respectively 73, 40 and 32 facilities. Results are statistically representative of each of these UASC populations in Sicily with a 90% confidence level and a 10% margin of error.

Further findings from this assessment are presented in Factsheets, accessible here. *(will be added once the final products are published)*

The Gambia

Top five reported reasons for leaving their country of origin:

1. Problems or violence at home	47%
2. Limited economic opportunities	26%
3. Limited access to education	17%
4. Social pressure to leave	11%
5. Do not want to answer	12%

Reported desired destinations when leaving their country of origin:

46%	Italy
18%	Libya
18%	West Africa
12%	Europe (unspecified)
6%	Did not know

Top three reasons for planned destination:

1. Better economic opportunities	57%
2. Respect for human rights	20%
3. Better education	20%

Journey:

On average, children took **one year from leaving The Gambia until arriving in Italy.**

91% of children **left The Gambia traveling alone.**

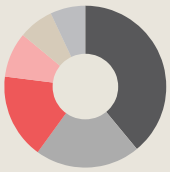
42% of children **changed their destination during their journey.**

Guinea Conakry

Top five reported reasons for leaving their country of origin:

1. Political or religiously motivated persecution	31%
2. Lack of economic opportunities	31%
3. Problems or violence at home	25%
4. Limited access to education	24%
5. Lack of survival essentials	24%

Reported desired destinations when leaving their country of origin:



39%	Italy
21%	West Africa
17%	Algeria
9%	Europe (unspecified)
7%	Libya
7%	Did not know

Top three reasons for planned destination:

1. Better economic opportunities	55%
2. Better education	24%
3. Respect for human rights	10%

Journey:

On average, children took **one year and two months from leaving Guinea Conakry until arriving in Italy.**

94% of children **left Guinea Conakry traveling alone.**

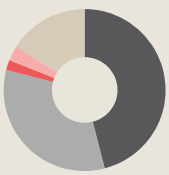
49% of children **changed their destination during their journey.**

Nigeria

Top five reported reasons for leaving their country of origin:

1. Limited economic opportunities	26%
2. Political or religiously motivated persecution	24%
3. Problems or violence at home	22%
4. Separation from family	16%
5. Generalised violence	9%

Reported desired destinations when leaving their country of origin:



46%	Italy
33%	Libya
2%	West Africa
3%	Europe (unspecified)
16%	Did not know

Top three reasons for planned destination:

1. Better economic opportunities	38%
2. Respect for human rights	13%
3. Better education	11%

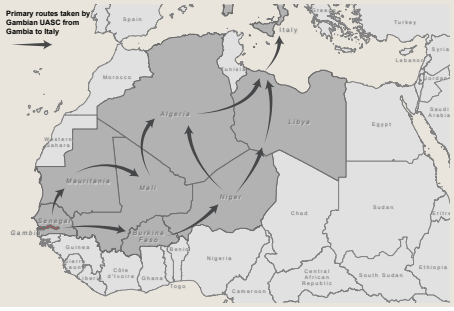
Journey:

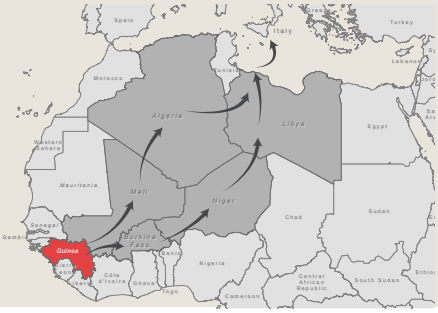
On average, children took **eight months from leaving Nigeria until arriving in Italy.**

83% of children **left Nigeria traveling alone.**

37% of children **changed their destination during their journey.**

Maps of primary routes taken from their country of origin to Italy





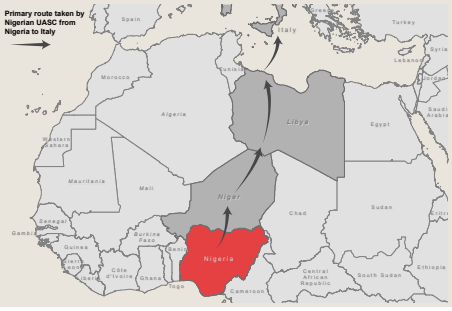
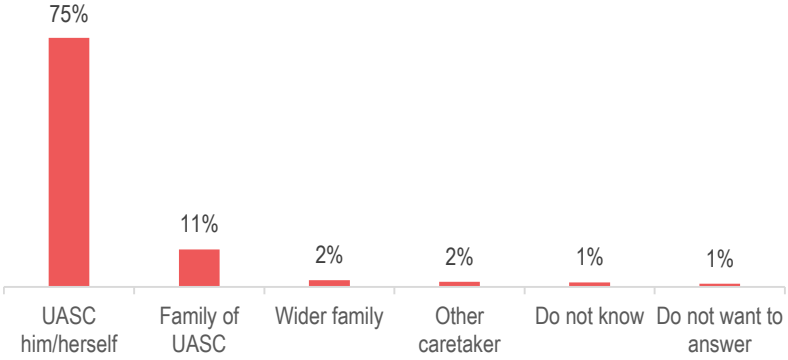


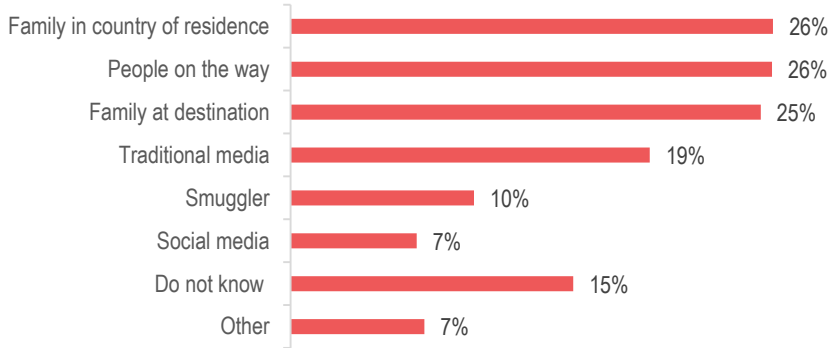
Figure 10: Primary decision maker about migration



Based on FGDs, the three main reasons why parents or other caretakers were not involved in children's decision to migrate were: firstly, the majority of **children reported that their first concern was not to worry their parents, as they would most likely not have approved of their decision to leave because of the risks involved in the journey**; secondly, in many cases, children's departure had been prompted by discussions and fights within the family group, so the decision to leave was taken in opposition to their parents; finally, some children reported to have taken the decision to leave alone because they did not have parents or caretakers to rely on.

Children reported to use a range of information sources to decide where to go, but primarily relied on personal advice from their families in the country of residence (26 per cent), travel companions or people children met during their journey (26 per cent), followed by family at destination (25 per cent) and traditional media (19 per cent), such as television and radio. Children's reliance on personal connections and traditional media, and less use of social media in informing their destination decision, illustrates **different dynamics to children's migration patterns along the Western Balkan route, where children were found to be well-connected and informed through regularly updated information online.**

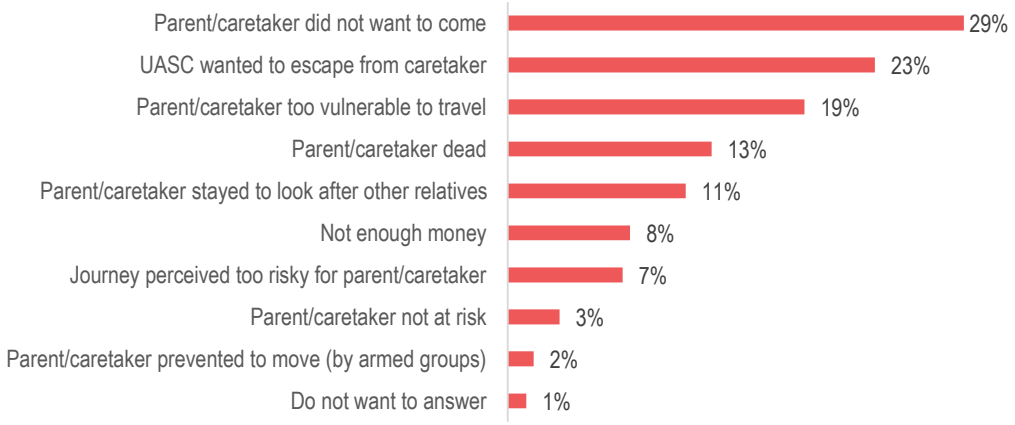
Figure 11: Reported sources of information on the destination used[105]



As for the majority of children the decision to migrate was taken at the individual level (75 per cent), 87 per cent of children left their country of origin travelling alone. The most reported reasons why children travelled alone, as opposed to with a parent or caretaker, were the parent or caretaker's unwillingness to migrate (21 per cent) or their inability to come due to vulnerability (19 per cent), limited resources (eight per cent) or other reasons.

[105] Respondents could select all that applied.

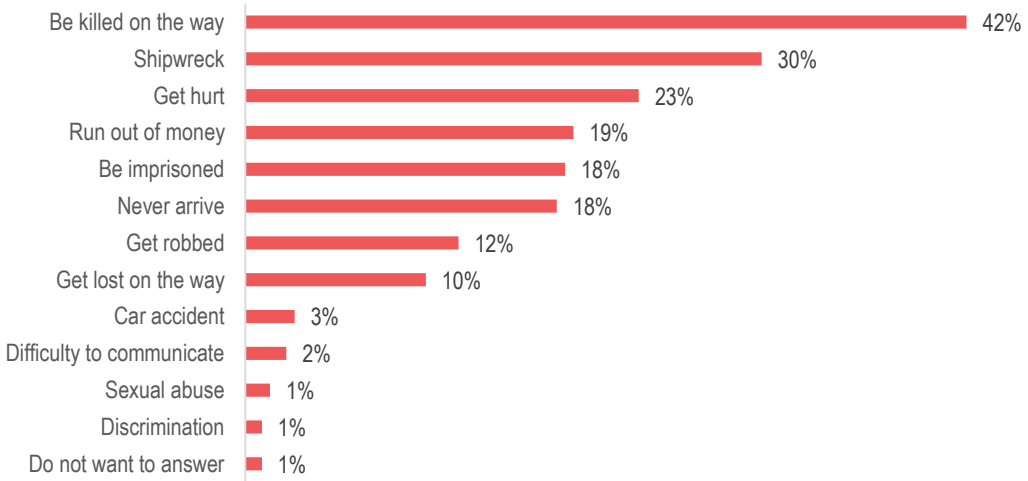
Figure 12: Reported reasons for migrating alone[106]



During FGDs, children reported they had almost never considered the possibility of undertaking the journey with their own parents; quite often, when asked, they even appeared to be surprised by the question. Children reported that the journey is too risky for an older person, who would suffer from the protracted lack of food or water, and the heavy physical work required to raise money along the journey. Still, children often showed distress when discussing the reasons why they travelled without their parents.

Less than half of children interviewed reported to have considered risks they could encounter on their journey before leaving (47 per cent). However, when they had thought about risks, they seemed aware of the gravity of the journey ahead, considering that they could get killed on the way (42 per cent), drown at sea (30 per cent) or get hurt in another way (23 per cent). During FGDs, many reported to know about the risks involved in crossing the desert, such as the prolonged lack of food and water, and the risk of getting lost and dying in the desert.

Figure 13: Risks of migration considered prior to migrating[107]



[106] Respondents could select up to three answer categories.
[107] Respondents could select all that applied.

The Journey

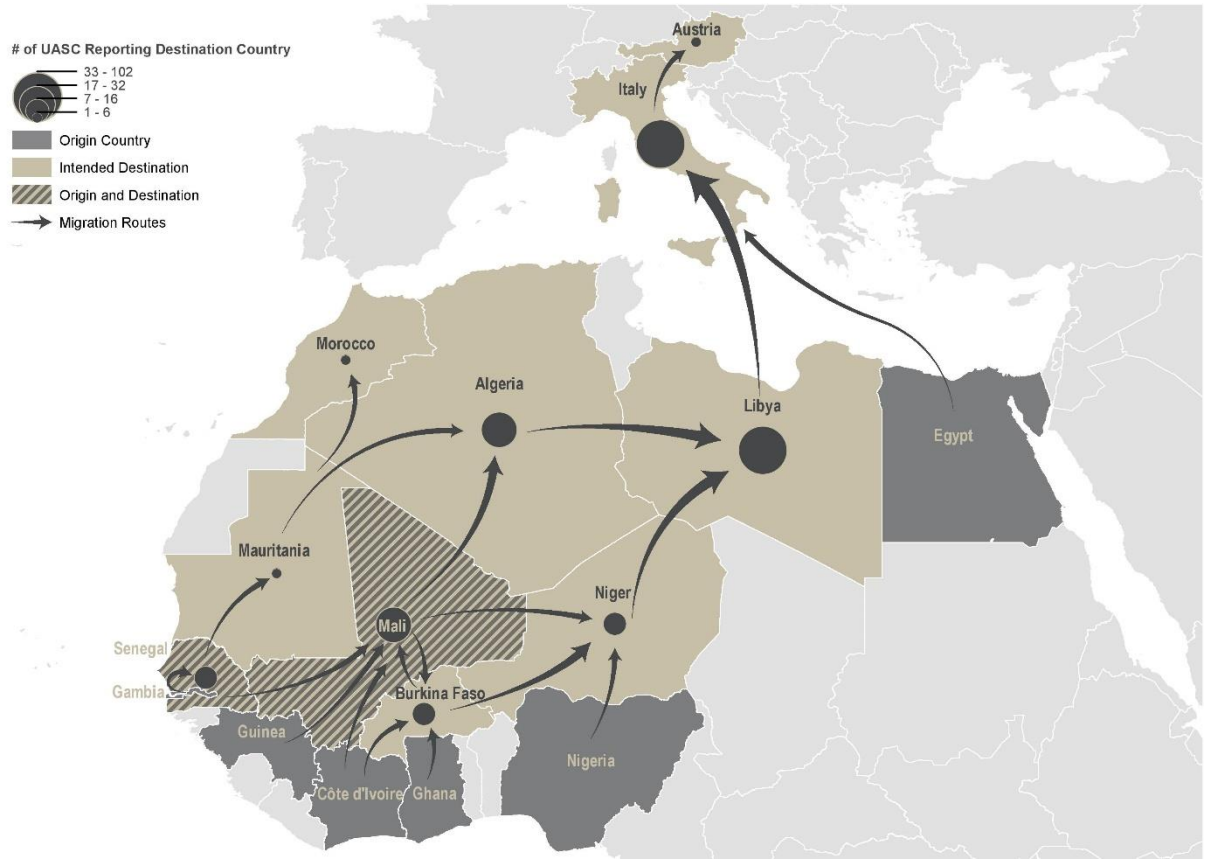
Key Findings

- On average, children's journey lasted one year and two months between departure from their country of last residence and arrival in Italy.
- More than half of children assessed (53 per cent) did not leave their country of origin with the aim to reach Italy or Europe; most wanted to stay in the region but decided to leave for Europe once already in an unknown country.
- Children faced severe risks during their journey; most of these reportedly occurred in Libya, where almost all children stayed for more than one month, and were kidnapped for ransom (46 per cent) and arbitrarily arrested (23 per cent)

Routes

All children reported to have crossed more than one country during their journey from their countries of last residence to arrive in Italy. Most common routes from the West African region (e.g. The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Conakry) passed through Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria and Libya. All children crossed Libya before arriving in Italy.

Map 3: Map of routes taken by UASC in reception facilities to Italy

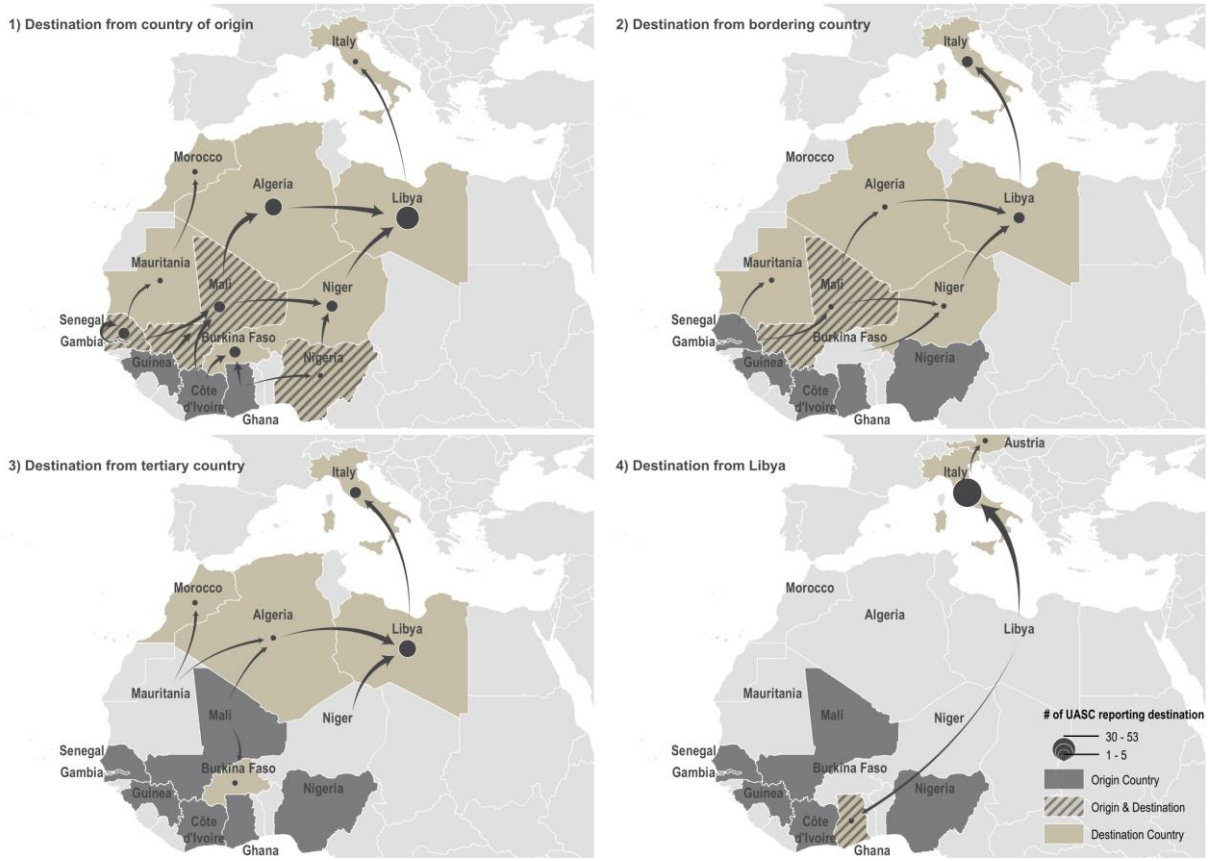


Children's journeys from their country of origin to Italy were rarely linear and often involved prolonged stop-overs. Fifty-three per cent had not intended to reach Italy when they left their country of origin. Map four (below) illustrates the step-by-step decision making process of children when they first left home. In the country of origin, children wanted to move to a range of countries, many of which in West or North Africa. Gradually, as

children moved to neighbouring countries, their destinations changed, with, eventually, all children moving to Italy, often after months of stay in neighbouring countries or North Africa.

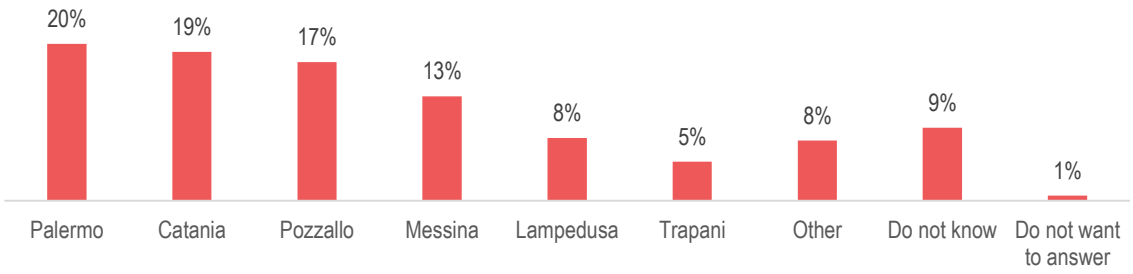
Reasons for such changes of plan were often motivated by the inability to find work or the dangerous situations children found themselves in in West and North Africa. Among children who had previously planned to stay in neighbouring West African countries, their change of plans was mostly motivated by their inability to find work, as commonly reported by children who stayed for some time in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Algeria. Among children who had reached Libya to find work, the majority decided to leave the country due to the systematic violence they had witnessed, both against themselves and others, as reported by 63 per cent of children who had originally planned to remain in Libya.

Map 4: Changes of destination of UASC along the route



More than half of children assessed arrived at three ports in Sicily: Palermo (20 per cent), Catania (19 per cent) and Pozzallo (17 per cent).

Figure 14: Ports of UASC arrival in Italy



Length of Travel

The length of the journey varied depending on the number of countries crossed and the length of stay in different countries. Yet, common trends emerged. **On average, children's journeys lasted one year and two months**.[108] However, for 20 per cent of children, the journey was considerably longer, lasting on average two years and seven months. In contrast, the same proportion of children (20 per cent), on the lower end of the distribution, took an average of three months (87 days), suggesting that even for children who travelled comparatively quickly, the journey was long.

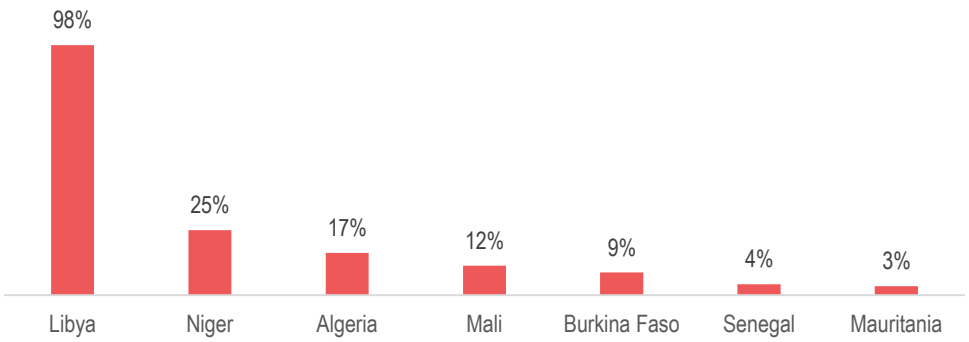
Children from The Gambia and Guinea Conakry tended to travel for longer than, for instance, children from Nigeria or Egypt. This is likely to be because Nigerian children were more likely to leave home with the intention to reach Italy; children from Egypt had a shorter journey as they reportedly departed directly from Egypt to Italy. In contrast, children from The Gambia and Guinea Conakry were more likely to stay in neighbouring countries, as their intention to travel to Italy developed at a later point in time, often outside their country of origin. Girls' journeys tended to be shorter overall; reportedly, this was because girls were victims of trafficking from their country of origin to Italy and, therefore, their trip was organised in advanced.[109]

The length of the journey also suggests that **when children left their country of origin they were significantly younger than once they arrived in Italy**. Indeed, if on average children left one year and two months ago, one third (33 per cent) of children assessed are likely to have left when they were only 14 or 15 years old. Among the 20 per cent of children who left their country of last residence two years and seven months or more ago, there are likely to be children who have left at an even younger age.

The vast majority of children (93 per cent) reported to have stayed in at least one country along the route for more than one month, most commonly Libya (98 per cent). Other common countries were Niger (25 per cent) and Algeria (17 per cent), usually to work.

Before leaving home, children reportedly were aware that they would have to work temporarily along the way in order to raise enough money to continue their journey. Yet, most children in FGDs reported that they were not aware of the intensity of the work and the often exploitative work practices that they could face during their journey. Generally, during their journey children engaged in heavy physical work and, more rarely, worked with smugglers in organising transfers with pick-ups.

Figure 15: Main countries where children stayed for more than one month[110]



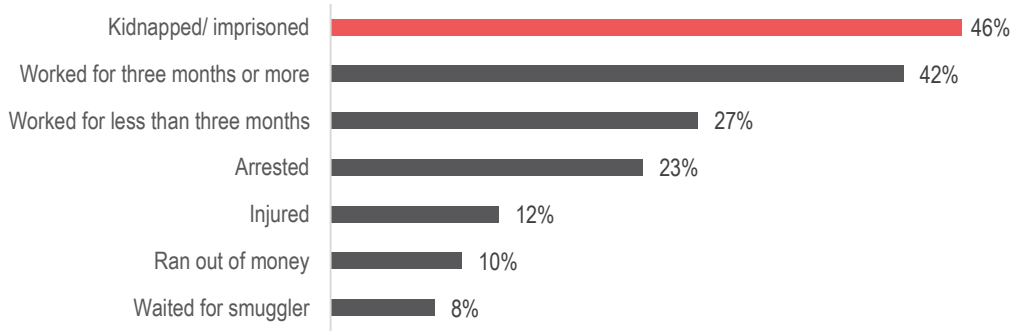
Libya

Almost all children reported to have stayed in Libya for more than one month (98 per cent); in FGDs, children uniformly spoke about their stay in Libya as the most traumatising experience of their journey. All children who had stayed for some time in Libya reported to have spent days without food, water and a safe place

[108] N=392; not all children interviewed could remember when they started or finished their journey.
[109] Due to the limited number of these cases, no poportions are given. Reporting on trafficking is based on self-reported cases; in all such cases, girls were already in specific child protection procedures for survivers of trafficking.
[110] Respondents could select all that applied.

to sleep. Also, during FGDs, all children reported to have experienced systematic discrimination, exploitative work, as well as violence by adults against them. The majority (69 per cent) of children reported to have stayed in Libya against their will, been kidnapped or imprisoned for ransom (46 per cent), or arrested (23 per cent). Many children further reported to have stayed in Libya to work, often under exploitative conditions, most commonly for three months or more (42 per cent), or for shorter periods of time (27 per cent).

Figure 16: Reasons for staying in Libya for more than one month, among UASC who reported staying in Libya for more than one month[111]



Repeatedly in FGDs, children reported to have been kidnapped by armed groups, who brought children to compounds called 'connection houses' in order to extort money from children's families, or force children to work in hard physical labour. Children spoke of their time spent in 'connection houses' as the most dramatic experience of their life. 'Connection houses' were described as open compounds, where a large number of people were kept in captivity, sometimes in underground basements. Children described to have witnessed daily tortures, killings and sexual violence; all children reported having been beaten, burned and tortured, and many of them were still wearing the signs of these tortures. Tortures usually followed the failed attempts to escape from connection houses.

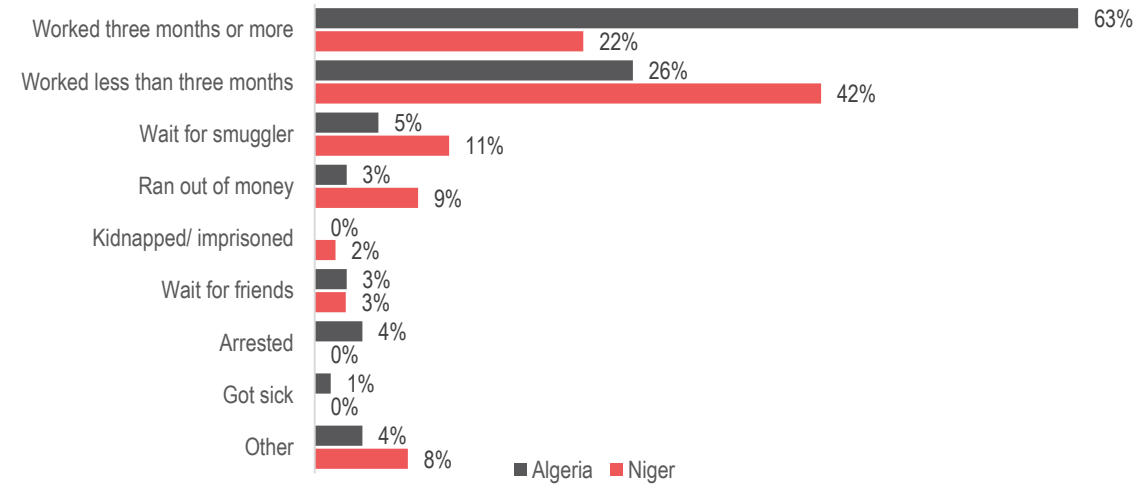
When kidnapped, Gambian children, in particular, reported that as their families did not have money to pay for their bail out, they were treated as slaves and sold as workforce to different local bosses. Children described slave markets in Libya, saying that if young boys could be bought as workforce, girls were turned into sex slaves.

Algeria and Niger

The majority of children who stayed in either Algeria or Niger for more than one month did so to work (89 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively). The majority of children who stayed in Algeria worked for three months or more in the country (60 per cent), while 26 per cent of children worked temporarily in order to earn some money before continuing their journey. Children in Niger were more likely to stay in the country for shorter periods of time, working for less than three months (42 per cent), but still 22 per cent of children reported to have stayed there for three months or more to work.

[111] Respondents could select all that applied.

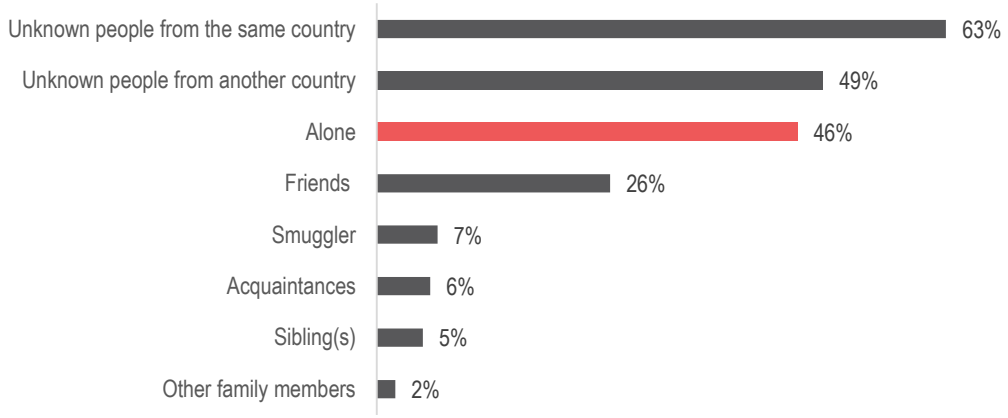
Figure 17: Reasons for staying in Algeria and Niger for more than one month[112]



Travel Companions

The vast majority of children (87 per cent) left their home alone. Yet, across different parts of their journey, children travelled in different constellations. Some children (12 per cent) left home with a family member, in which case they would usually travel with a sibling (49 per cent) or someone from the extended family (22 per cent). In the vast majority of these cases, **children got separated from their family member, either during their journey or, less often, once they arrived in Italy**.

Figure 18: Travel companions en route to Italy[113]



While the majority of children during FGDs confirmed that they had left their home travelling alone, the majority of children reported to have met along the way other people who were going in the same direction, as routes and stopovers were often the same. **Children stressed the need to have travel companions along the route to be able to help each other, exchange and gather information and support each other to deal with anxiety and fear.**

[112] Respondents could select all that applied.
[113] Respondents could select all that applied.

Life in Italy and Aspirations for the Future

Key Findings

- Primary concerns reported by children in and outside reception facilities were: (1) international protection, including access to documentation and legal pathways for onward travel; (2) access to education and (3) access to information and psycho-social support.
- Children reported to be happy to stay in Italy provided they are able to access their rights as children.
- Children with family in other EU country are eager to continue their journey; mostly travelling through irregular means as legal pathways are slow and not transparent to children.

Once children arrive in Italy and they are identified as unaccompanied, children should be accommodated in dedicated primary reception facilities. After 30 days in such facilities, children should be transferred to secondary reception facilities, where they have more extensive access to services, as well as the obligation to go to school and should be hosted there until they turn 18.[114] However, many children do not reach these facilities or drop out shortly after registration. Others, who stay in reception facilities, may remain until they turn 18 or also drop out after a few months in the facility.[115]

In 2016, 25,846 unaccompanied and separated children arrived by sea.[116] Yet, at the end of 2016, only 17,373 unaccompanied and separated children were being hosted in the Italian reception system.[117] While preliminary registration figures of unaccompanied and separated children recorded upon first arrival tend to be of limited reliability due to the conditions and rush in which this information is collected, **as of 31 March 2017, the Ministry of Labour estimated that 5,170 unaccompanied and separated children who were registered upon arrival in Italy are not anymore in reception facilities in the country**.[118]

As part of its partnership with UNICEF, REACH has captured both the views of children living inside and outside the reception system in Italy, focussing on the key transit sites of Rome,[119] Ventimiglia[120] and Como.[121] It found that **children in and outside of the reception system often share similar concerns over their life in Italy and Europe. Whether inside or outside reception facilities, many children suffer from limited access to international protection, education, risk of abuse and limited information which affect their safety in country, as well as children's mental health.**

Life in Italy

In all FGDs in reception facilities in Sicily, as well as in interactions with children outside reception facilities in transit cities, children reported to be concerned about their future in Italy. **The most commonly reported reasons for concern, mentioned by all participants, were access to international protection, including the progress of their asylum claim or residence permit in Italy or legal pathways to onward travel, followed by access to education and the ability to work**.

Access to International Protection

Throughout FGDs in reception facilities in Sicily, children stressed the importance of receiving documents to be allowed to legally stay in Italy, including being granted asylum or a residence permit. **Many children outside the formal reception system in Como, Milan and Rome, reported to have dropped out of reception facilities in Sicily in the hope of getting documents elsewhere in Italy or beyond.** In most FGDs in reception facilities in Sicily, children seemed not to have yet claimed asylum. This was reported as a cause for concern and

[114] Camera dei Deputati, Legge Zampa sui minori non accompagnati, March 2017.
[115] For a detailed analysis on the Monitoring practices employed in reception facilities in Italy, please consult: REACH/UNICEF, Monitoring Report, Italy, forthcoming.
[116] Italian Ministry of Labour, Monitoring report on unaccompanied and separated children in Italy, December 2016.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Italian Ministry of Labour, Monthly report on Unaccompanied and separated children in Italy, March 2017.
[119] Situation Overview to be published in June 2017.
[120] REACH/UNICEF, Situation overview: Unaccompanied and separated children in transit in Ventimiglia, February 2017
[121] REACH/UNICEF, Situation overview: Unaccompanied and separated children dropping out of the primary reception system, February 2017.

FOCUS 3: UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN DROPPING OUT OF THE PRIMARY RECEPTION SYSTEM

Methodology

From 7 to 9 February 2017, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted a rapid assessment of the experiences of unaccompanied and separated children in transit in the Northern Italian cities of Como and Milan. It aims to provide qualitative information on the dynamics which shape decision making amongst children dropping out of primary reception centres.

It is based on seven in-depth interviews with key informants, including service providers and activists, as well as 14 semi-structured interviews with unaccompanied and separated children from Guinea, Somalia, Eritrea and Egypt. Due to the limited number of girls in the sites visited, the vast majority of respondents were boys, meaning that the views of girls in particular may be underrepresented. Information from both sources was triangulated and complementeed with secondary data.

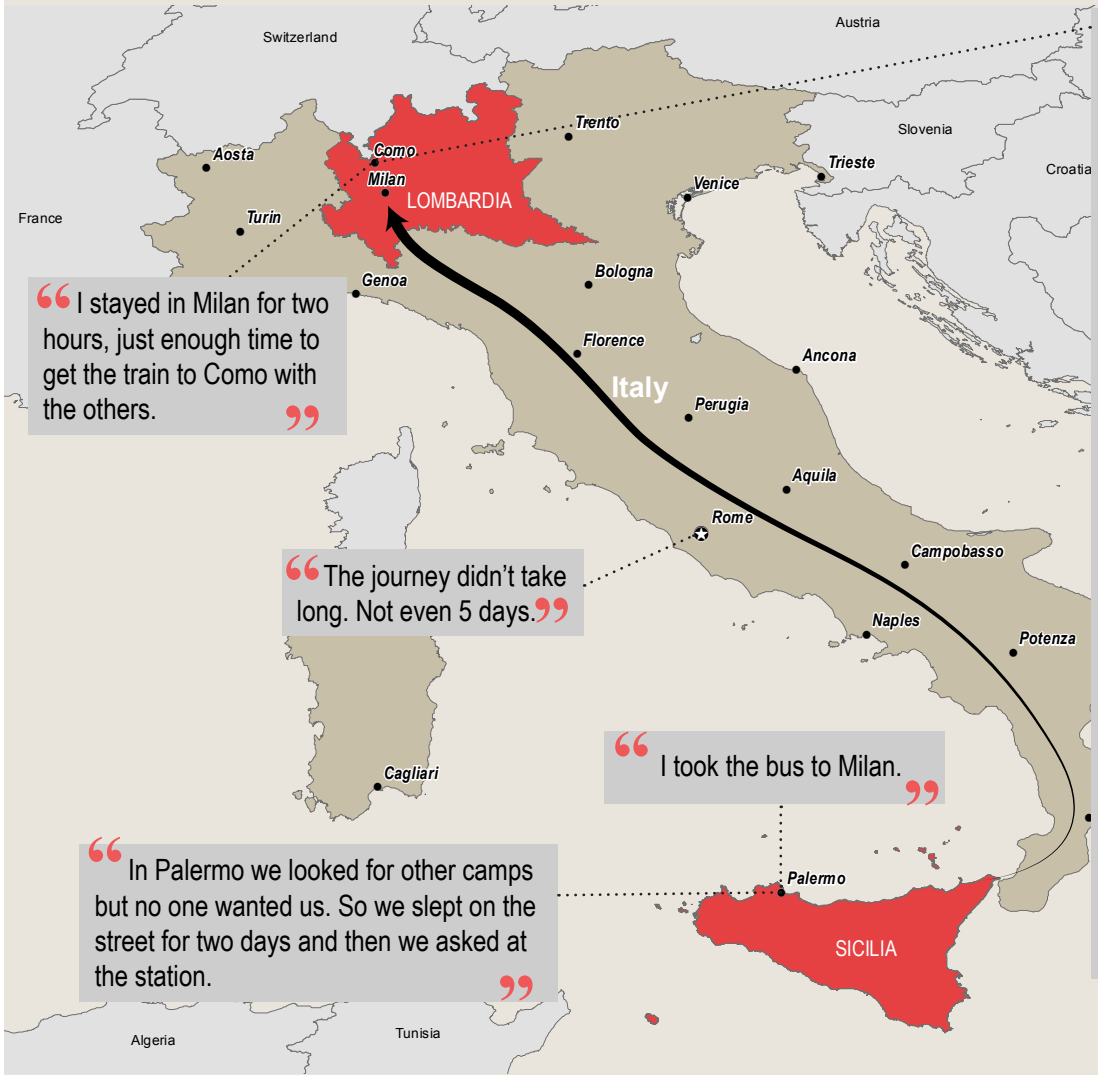
Further findings from this assessment are presented in a Situation Overview, accessible here.

Findings Overview

It is commonly assumed that unaccompanied and separated children drop out of reception centres in the South of Italy because they had already planned to leave Italy before arriving in the country. However, this rapid assessment found that some children drop out of the Italian reception system because they do not know the correct procedure to claim asylum and legally stay in Italy. In lieu of official trusted information, children follow hearsay and anecdotal advice on social media, hoping to have better access to protection and services, such as education and health care, by heading to the North of Italy.

Children who drop out of the reception system in this way lose valuable months in their asylum application, and while waiting to be assigned to a new centre in Northern Italy, stay in precarious shelters with limited means to sustain themselves. This group is at particular risk of exploitation, which is exacerbated due to their lack of knowledge about international protection procedures and their rights.

The journey of an unaccompanied 17 year old boy from Guinea



"In Palermo I wanted to go to school and I couldn't. I had to wait. No one explains how it works: the others [migrant children] tell you what you have to do, where to go, when to eat, how to ask to go to school. But you can't believe everything!

[The camp authorities] told me I had to wait and if I didn't like that I could leave. So I left for the North. I followed the others.

The problem is that no one in the centre listens to you.

I didn't know much [about Milan], but people from my country have put photos on facebook of them playing football and going to school [in Milan]. I just wanted to study.

I don't know [about Como]; if I get to a place where I can study I'll stay there. I don't want to stay like this... The only thing that scares me is to have done all this [the journey] for nothing, I mean to get nothing and to stay on the street."

The designations employed and the presentation of the material on this map do not imply the expression of any option whatsoever on the part of the Secretaria ofthe United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.
Every effort is made to ensure this map is free of errors but there is no warrant the map or its features are either spatially or temporally accurate or fit for a particular use. This map is provided without any warranty or any kind whatsoever, either express or imply.

anxiety for most children, as they felt in a state of limbo, waiting, but without a clear idea of how long the procedures would take. In four FGDs, children expressed anxiety linked to the fact that they were turning 18 and were not sure what would happen to them, or where they would be able to stay once reaching adult age.

In individual interviews in reception facilities in Sicily, more than **half of the children indicated that they had not applied for asylum, even though children reported to have been in Italy for several months already (57 per cent)**. However, this was mostly not a consequence of their choice, as only two per cent of children reported that they did not want to apply for asylum. The most common reason for not having applied for asylum, reported by 42 per cent of children, was that legal services were not available.[122] **Many children in FGDs reported that they had not yet been appointed a legal guardian**. According to Italian law, legal guardians should be appointed within 48 hours; however in practice, judges for guardianship tend to appoint a guardian several weeks after the asylum request, and sometimes do not appoint a legal guardian when a child is 17 years old.[123] Since children have to wait for the appointment of the legal guardian before being able to access asylum procedures, **asylum claims by children can often take longer than for adults**.[124]

Access to Legal Pathways for onward Travel

Access to legal pathways for onward travel was of particular concern for children in informal gathering sites. For children who have family elsewhere in Europe, family reunification is a lengthy procedure, often taking over a year. As a consequence, many children choose to make their own way to other European countries without waiting for formal procedures to be completed. Out of 14,229 requests for family reunification in Italy in 2016, only 61 people were transferred in 2016.[125] According to key informants in Ventimiglia, children in transit who are eligible for family reunification, even when offered by qualified legal personnel in the country, often prefer not to claim their right due to the lengthy procedures.

Relocation from Italy to other countries is particularly slow for unaccompanied and separated children, as the procedures have yet to be standardised. As of May 2017, only three UASC have been relocated from Italy to other European countries since the Relocation Scheme was launched in September 2015.[126] Eritrean UASC interviewed in informal gathering sites in Rome had reportedly dropped out of the reception system in the South of the country to access relocation, which, they believed, was only available in Rome.

At Risk of Exploitation and Abuse in Italy

Children who dropped out of reception facilities to join family and friends elsewhere in Europe were found to be at particular risk of exploitation and abuse in Italy, often living in informal sites with limited access to shelter, food and other basic services. UASC interviewed in Ventimiglia, for instance, were found to sleep under bridges and without regular access to food and water. Eritrean UASC interviewed in informal gathering sites in Rome lived in precarious conditions close to train stations without access to electricity and only limited access to sanitary services, as well as food and drinking water. Staying for prolonged periods in such situations, children were at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, including exploitative work and, overall, more likely to travel onwards to other EU countries irregularly.

Psycho-social Support Needs

Children both inside and out of reception facilities in Italy are further likely to suffer from anxiety or other mental health disorders. According to one study with refugees and migrants, including unaccompanied and separated children, in reception facilities in Italy, 87 per cent of those suffering from mental health disorders reported that the reception system was making their condition worse.[127] As a result of having to wait for documents, children were not able to attend school or work as quickly as they had expected, which meant they were left waiting in incertitude and worry. Children in informal gathering sites in Ventimiglia reported to be severly distressed. Key informants reported that children's mental health, once in Ventimiglia, was found to rapidly deteriorate within weeks of stay, due to the poor conditions and systematic push backs witnessed at the French Italian border.

[122] AIDA, Italy country update, February 2017.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] AIDA, Italy country update, February 2017.
[126] European Commission, Twelfth report on relocation and resettlement, May 2017.
[127] Medecins Sans Frontieres, Neglected Trauma: Asylum seekers in Italy: an analysis of mental health distress and access to healthcare, July 2016.

FOCUS 4: UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN IN TRANSIT IN VENTIMIGLIA

Methodology

From 28th February to 3rd March 2017, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted a rapid assessment of the protection risks faced by unaccompanied and separated children in transit in the Italian town of Ventimiglia at the border with France.

A total of 34 semi-structured interviews with unccompanied and separated children were conducted, of which 30 in Ventimiglia and four on the French side of the border. Also, six in-depth interviews with key informants were held, including with representatives of international NGOs and local activists. The top two nationalities of children were Sudanese (nine interviewees) and Eritrean (seven interviewees), while 16 interviewees were from West African countries (including six interviewees from Ivory Coast and six from Guinea).

Further findings from this assessment are presented in a Situation Overview, accessible here.

Findings Overview

All unaccompanied and separated children interviewed in this assessment reported to have been **pushed back at the French/Italian border without the possibility to claim asylum in France**. All children expected to be sent back to Ventimiglia by police, and usually did not seem aware of their right to request asylum or family reunification. **None of the children had been informed of their rights in a language they understood at the border.**

As a result, children were aware neither of the violations of their rights, nor of the means to challenge the practice of push backs. Instead, children resorted to taking less safe routes, such as walking through mountains or paid smugglers in order to minimise the risk of being caught by the police.

Due to the practice of push backs, **children stayed in Ventimiglia longer than they had anticipated** - often in precarious conditions and exposed to risks. With limited access to shelter, food and water, this resulted in a rapid deterioration of children's mental health. Still, children remained determined to keep trying to cross the border.

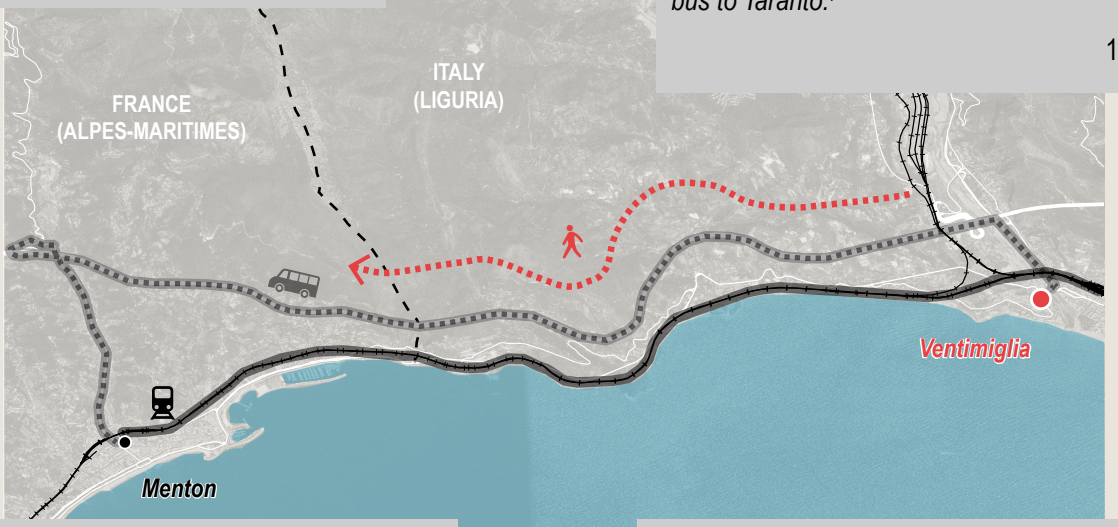
Children's accounts of Push-Backs when attempting to cross the border between Ventimiglia and Menton

'It's dangerous to walk, because at night it's dark and you don't see. Especially when you go on the mountain, you don't know the way and you get lost.'

17 M, Mali

'If you are white it's ok, but if you're black it's not easy to live in Europe. There are lots of police. I got to Nice and was at the station trying to get a ticket to Marseille where my brother lives, and the police caught me. They put me in prison for three days. Then they sent me by bus to Taranto.[7]'

16 M, Guinea



'The walk towards the border is five or six hours long, so we walked more than ten hours back and forth for three days in a row because the Italian police would not carry us back by car.'

17 M, Ivory Coast

"I tried to cross twice by train since I arrived. I do not want to walk because I don't know the way on the mountains and it is dangerous. Both times I tried to cross, the French police stopped me at the border in Menton and handed me over to the Italian police, who made me walk back to Ventimiglia along the street.'

17 M, Guinea

Education

Most children in and outside of reception facilities reported that education was a primary concern for them. Children in all FGDs in reception facilities reported that they wanted to learn Italian, as they felt that the language barrier was preventing them from building their life in the country. For many children, education had been an important reason for leaving their country of origin, and so the ability to attend school were seen as one of the most important aspects of their future.

However, the majority of children in reception facilities reported that they do not attend formal school in Italy. Children in all FGDs reported that they wanted to attend formal school, though this was not always available, and often children did not understand why they had to wait. Children who did attend school often reported that it was only for a few days per week, which was not sufficient according to them to be able to continue their education. Some children reported that it was particularly difficult for them to follow classes as they had not attended school in their country of origin.

Some children who had dropped out of reception facilities reported that the frustration of not being able to attend school while in primary reception facilities had been one of the main reasons for dropping out of the reception system.[128] Some children reported that they had heard from other children that they could attend school in Northern Italy, and so had dropped out of the reception system in order to be able to continue their education.[129] However, children found they then had to wait to be given a place in reception facilities in this area, meaning that they were still waiting to attend school and their education was still disrupted.

Employment

Children's concerns about documentation and education were almost always linked to the aspiration to be able to work and support themselves in Italy. Children aged 15 to 17 in all FGDs reported that they wanted to work to improve their situation, and understood that they needed documents in order to be able to work legally. In some cases, children reported being worried about their inability to work, as their family back home needed support, which the children, as often the eldest sibling in the family, felt to be their responsibility. Children who had dropped out of the reception system and were interviewed in northern Italy reported that money was one of their main concerns, and as a result, some of them wanted to work in order to meet their needs.[130]

Access to Information

Cross-cutting children's concerns on protection, education and employment were children's limited understanding of procedures and lack of awareness on how to access reliable information. Less than half of children participating in FGDs in reception facilities in Sicily seemed to understand asylum procedures or knew what the progress was of their asylum claim. Children had understood that they needed documents in order to be able to find work or leave the facility, yet, they mostly did not understand what 'asylum' meant or what the difference was between 'asylum' and 'residence permit'. Further, they reported not knowing how to access this information.

Children interviewed in informal sites in Como confirmed this, as they had dropped out of the Italian reception system, because they had heard that procedures in the north were faster and followed hearsay.[131] They had often dropped out of reception facilities because procedures to access documentation were lengthy, and they had heard that their claim would be processed faster in the North of Italy. In fact, once in northern Italy, children realised that they needed to start the process from the beginning and lost valuable months in their asylum application.[132] Similarly, Eritrean UASC interviewed in Rome were found to have dropped out of the Italian reception system because they did not understand the procedures for relocation. They had travelled to Rome on the basis of rumours spread among the Eritrean community that in the capital they would be able to access relocation, which, allegedly, was not available in other parts of Italy.

While in most instances, children reported to have been given some information, they had reportedly not understood the information or were unable to apply what they were told to their situation and to make, on

[128] REACH/UNICEF, Situation overview: Unaccompanied and separated children dropping out of the primary reception system, February 2017.
[129] Ibid.
[130] REACH/UNICEF, Situation overview: Unaccompanied and separated children in transit in Ventimiglia, February 2017.
[131] REACH/UNICEF, Unaccompanied and separated children dropping out of the primary reception system, February 2017.
[132] Ibid.

that basis, an informed decision on what next. This illustrates that beyond the delivery of information, children faced challenges in the retention of the information provided.

Aspirations for the Future

Children in reception facilities mostly reported that they planned to stay in Italy, to go back to school and find employment in the country. Also the majority of children interviewed in informal sites in Como reported that as long as they were able to access services and international protection, they did not see a reason to leave Italy.[133]

However, where children had a set destination in mind when they first arrived in Italy, notably the case for children with family elsewhere in Europe, they remained determined to reach their intended final destination. **Continuing their journey through irregular pathways seemed the main option for children, as procedures were too lengthy and they were not given clear indications on how long the procedures would take and why.**

[133] REACH/UNICEF, Situation overview: Unaccompanied and separated children dropping out of the primary reception system, February 2017.

FOCUS 5: UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED ERITREAN CHILDREN OUTSIDE OF THE RECEPTION SYSTEM IN ROME

Methodology

From 8th to 10th May 2017, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted a rapid assessment of the decision making process leading Eritrean unaccompanied and separated children to stay outside of the official reception system in Rome.

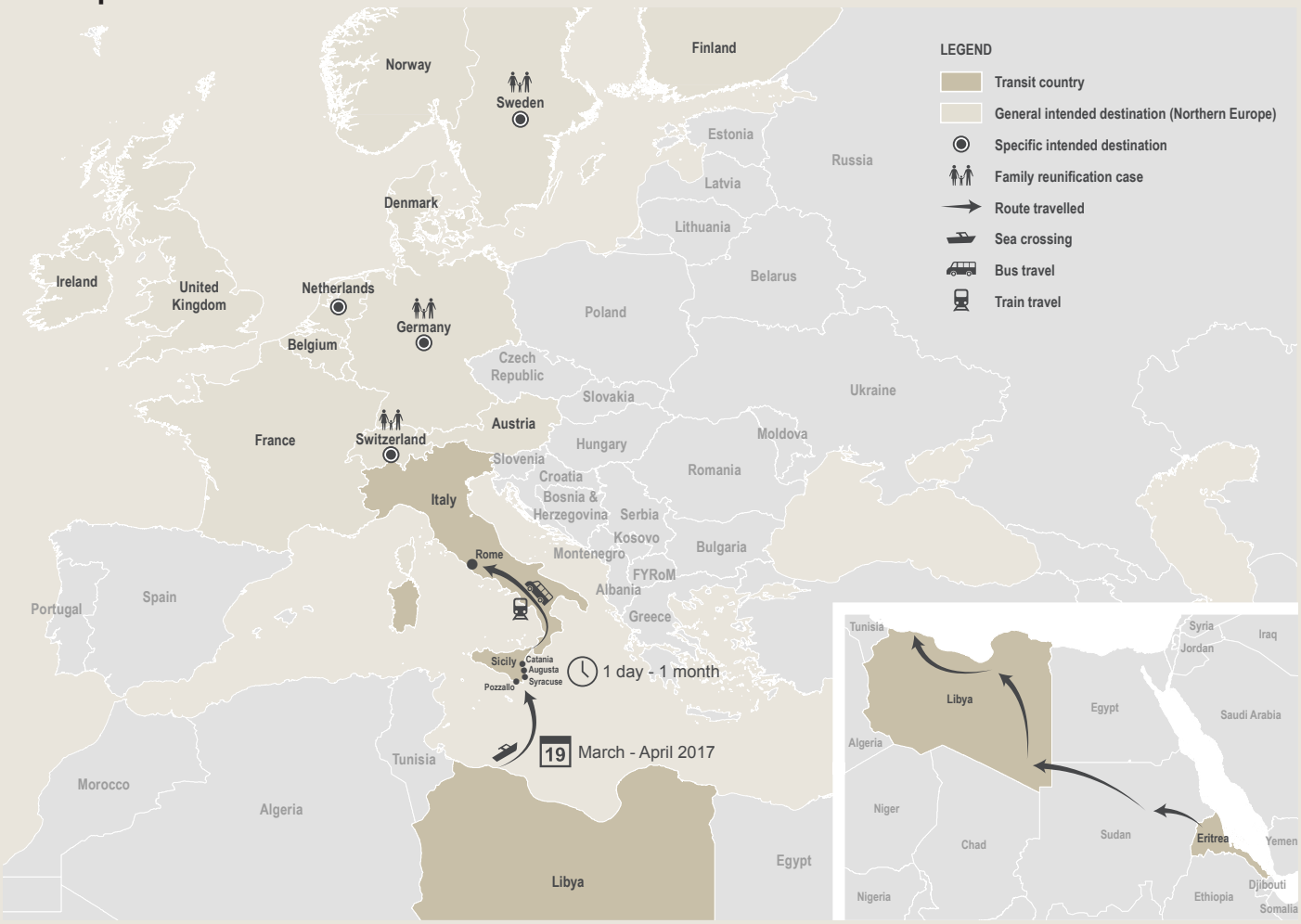
Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with Eritrean UASC in informal gatherings sites, as well as four in-depth interviews with key informants (KIs), including representatives of international NGOs and local activists. Eritrean UASC in informal gathering sites were identified through snowball sampling; KIs were selected purposively on the basis of their expertise and knowledge of the topic.

Further findings from this assessment are presented in a Situation Overview, accessible here. *(hyperlink will be added once the final product is published)*

Findings Overview

This assessment finds that, in some cases, the decision of Eritrean UASC to drop out and stay in informal gathering sites is prompted by a general lack of information regarding procedures. Upon arrival in Italy, Eritrean UASC face a language barrier that prevents effective communication with the Italian authorities and other refugees and migrants. This can prompt Eritrean UASC to rely on rumours from other Eritreans about relocation, and to drop out of the official reception system under the misapprehension that this will speed up procedures. Once outside of the reception system, Eritrean UASC can find themselves living in precarious shelter arrangements and be left without a legal guardian. This means that legal pathways are more difficult to access, and there is a greater risk that children will decide to continue their journey through irregular means.

Interviewed Eritrean unaccompanied and separated children's reported journey to Italy and future plans



FAST FACTS

- All interviewed Eritrean UASC arrived throught the Central Mediterranean Route, departing from Libya;

- They all arrived in Sicily, between March and April 2017, and were disembarked at the Hotspot in Pozzallo, or at the ports of Syracuse, Augusta, and Catania.

- The large majority of them (10 out of 12) were accommodated in specific UASC reception facilities in Sicily, where they stayed for a maximum period of one month.

- After the drop out, interviewed UASC arrived in Rome either by train or bus.

- In the future, interviewed UASC want to reach Norther Europe, and six of them hope to join their family in Switzerland, Germany, The Netherlands, and Sweden.

GREECE

This chapter of the report presents the findings of the assessment in relation to refugee and migrant children in Greece. It starts with a presentation of the profile of refugee and migrant children in the country, including arrivals, asylum applications between 2016 and 2017 and personal profile, countries of origin and previous schooling and work experience. Thereafter, available information on drivers and decision making on migration of children to Greece are presented. The following sub-chapter presents the main routes that children and their families followed until reaching Greece. The chapter closes with an analysis of the intentions of refugee and migrant children and their parents in Greece, and their aspirations for their future.

Whilst 63,290 refugee and migrant children arrived in Greece in 2016,[134] 19,000 children are estimated to still be in the country as of May 2017.[135] A comparatively low 2,150 of the children are unaccompanied or separated.[136] Therefore, due to the relatively low proportion of UASC, the report provides information on the overall refugee and migrant child population, with a separate focus on unaccompanied and separated children.

Profile of Refugee and Migrant Children in Greece

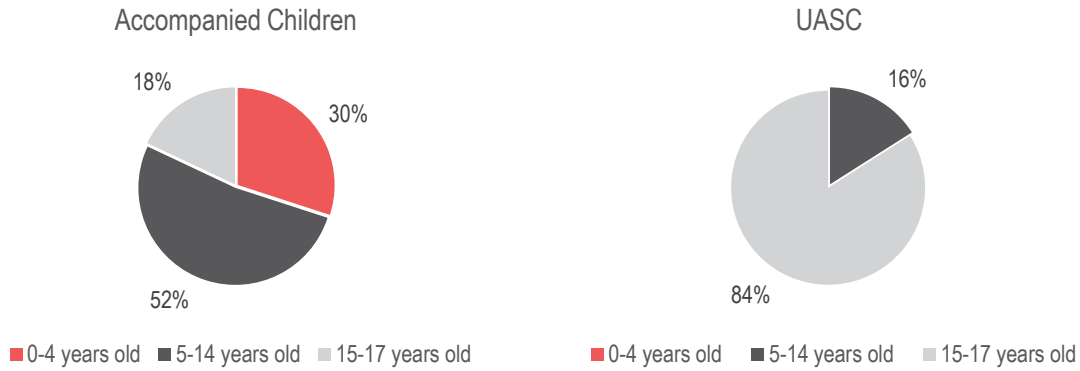
Key Findings

- The profiles of children who arrive accompanied in Greece are very different to the profiles of UASC.
- Accompanied children are of all ages and of almost equal gender distribution.
- Unaccompanied and separated children are mostly boys (92 per cent) and tend to be between 15 and 17 years old.
- Accompanied children are primarily from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- The primary countries of origin of UASC in 2017 are Pakistan (42 per cent), Afghanistan (19 per cent) and Syria (14 per cent).[47]

Age and Gender

The majority of refugee and migrant children who are currently in Greece arrived in the country with a parent or legal guardian (89 per cent).[137] Children arriving in Greece with their parents are of all ages, as some parents arrive with very small children. Among the 58,728 accompanied children who arrived in Greece in 2016, the majority were young children, whereas UASC were mostly 15-17 years old.[138] (Figure 18)

Figure 19: Ages of children who arrived in Greece in 2016[139]



For the majority of the estimated 19,000 children who are currently in the country, the most approximately accurate demographical information is available from the pre-registration exercise run by the Greek Asylum Service, with

[134] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[135] This is largely due to the large number of arrivals in the early months of 2016, who transited through Greece before the EU Turkey statement in March 2017.
[136] EKKA, Situation Update: Unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, 15 May 2017.
[137] Author's own calculation based on figures from UNICEF and EKKA.
[138] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[139] Ibid.

support from UNHCR and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), between May and July 2016. In this exercise, 12,700 children were pre-registered, the vast majority of whom are still estimated to be in the country.[140] Almost as many girls as boys were recorded in the pre-registered population; children represented a total of around 46 per cent of the overall population, of whom 25 per cent were boys and 22 per cent were girls.[141]

Figure 20: Age and gender of all children in the pre-registered population in Greece[142]

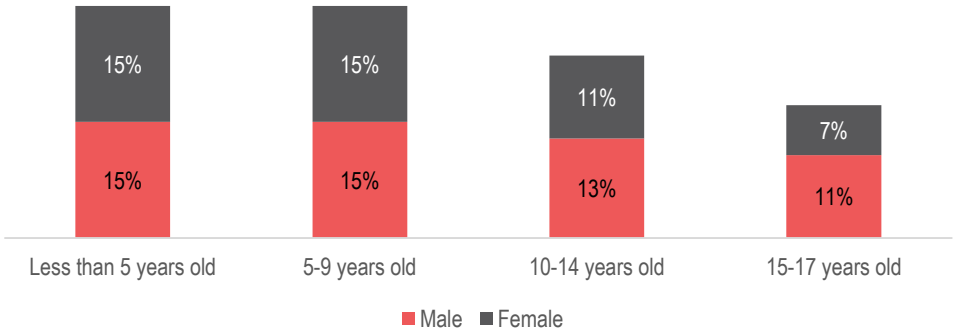
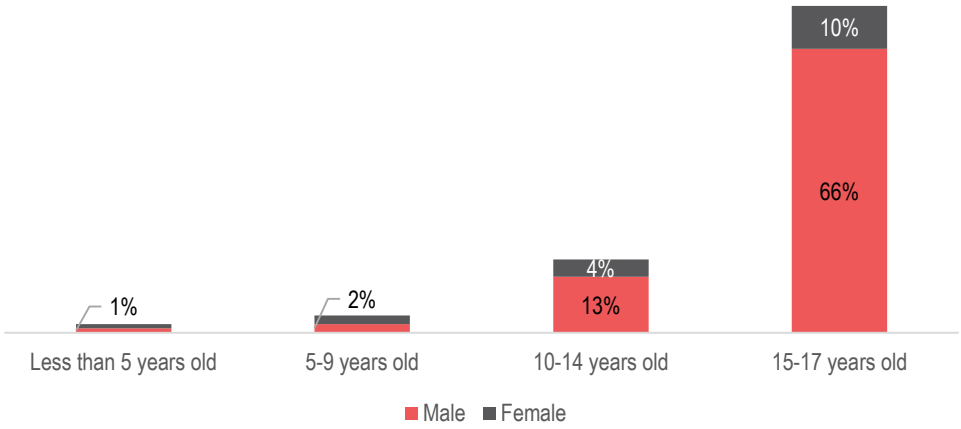


Figure 21: Age and gender of children identified as unaccompanied in the pre-registered population in Greece[143]



From 1 January 2016 to 15 May 2017, 6,683 unaccompanied and separated children were referred to EKKA (the National Centre for Social Solidarity, the national referral mechanism undertaking the placement of unaccompanied and separated children in appropriate accommodation such as shelters).[144] Of the unaccompanied and separated children, **92 per cent were boys, and 8 per cent were girls**.[145] The large majority of children were aged 14-17; however, 429 (six per cent) of unaccompanied and separated children were under 14 years old.[146]

Limited information is available on refugee and migrant children with disabilities in Greece, which means that children often do not receive the particular care and services that they require. Human Rights Watch has reported that refugees and migrants with disabilities are not usually identified in Greece because of the rushed registration process and lack of guidance for staff.[147] The Fundamental Rights Agency reported that mental health issues in Greece are identified as most prevalent among women and children, most of whom come from

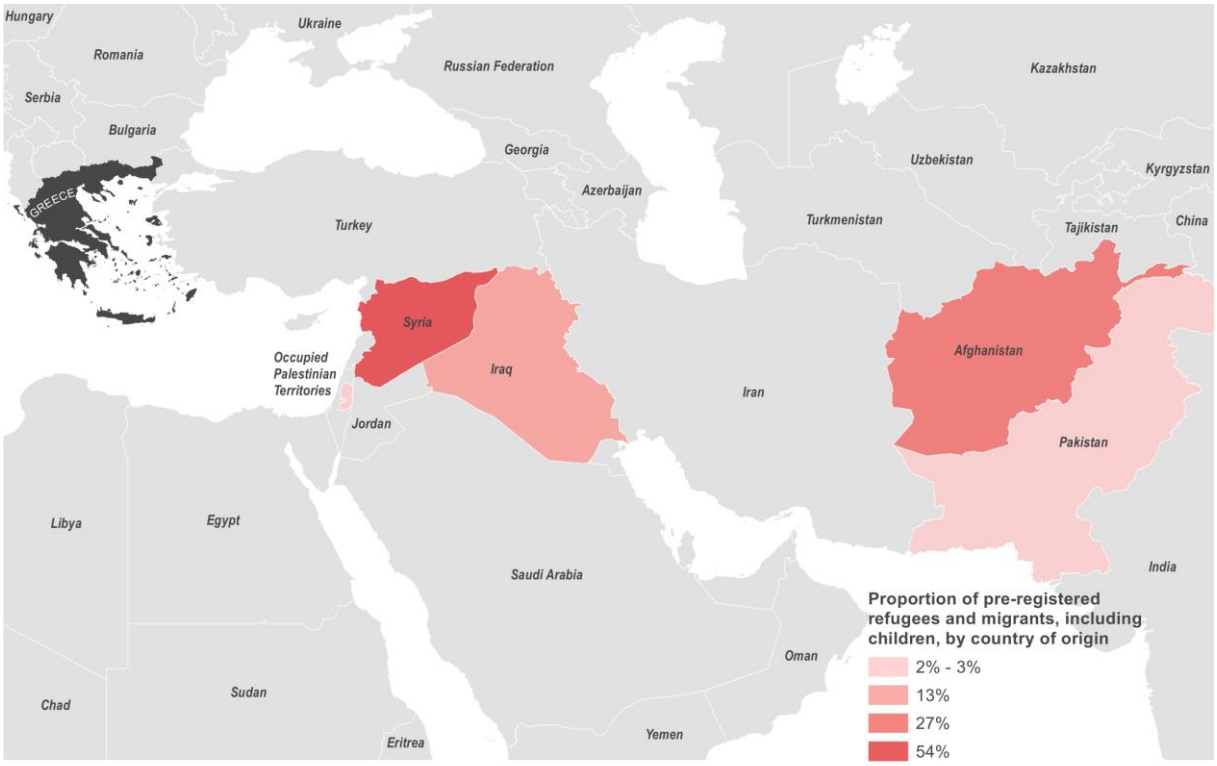
[140] Greek Asylum Service, Pre-Registration statistical data, July 2016. All information based on children's profiles herein presented are based on this data, if not specified otherwise.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] EKKA, Situation update: Unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, May 2017.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Human Rights Watch, Greece: Refugees with disabilities overlooked, underserved, January 2017.

Afghanistan and Syria.[148] However, identification procedures are reportedly often based on need for medical treatment, rather than on identifying impairments.[149]

Country of Origin

The majority of children arriving in Greece in 2015 to 2016 were from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. This reflects Greece's geographical proximity to the Middle East through its border with Turkey. The pre-registration exercise showed that children are of same proportion of the overall population of each nationality recorded.[150] Therefore, the available breakdown of the overall population gives a strong indication of the countries of origin of refugee and migrant children in Greece today.

Map 5: Countries of origin of pre-registered refugee and migrant population in Greece, including children



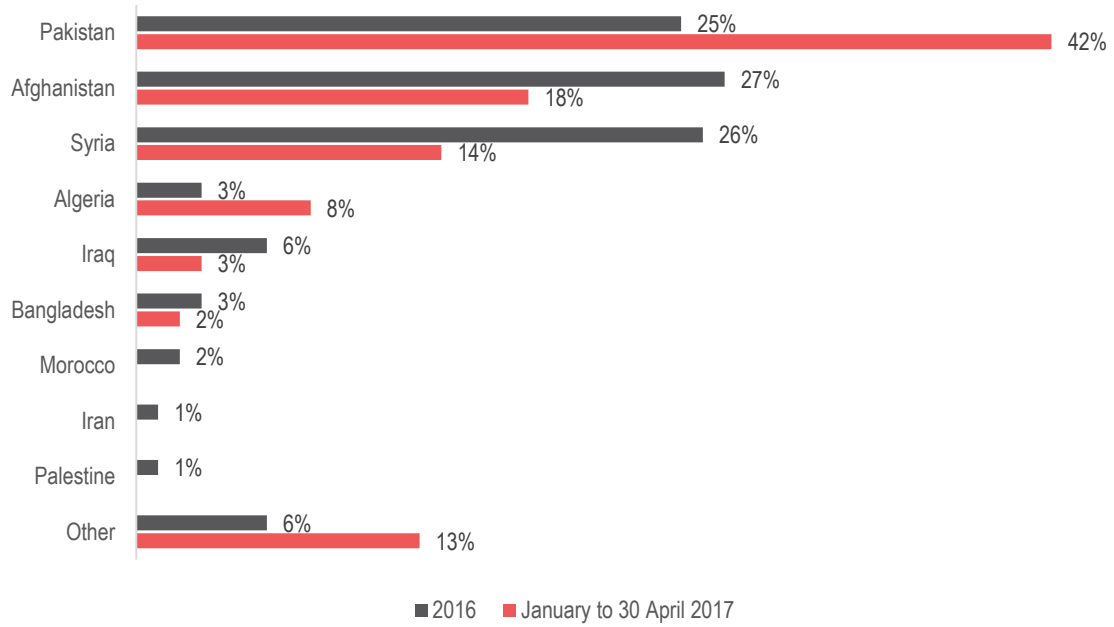
In the first four months of 2017, the primary countries of origin of children arriving in Greece via sea were Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. Among UASC, most of them were from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria.[151]

Unaccompanied and separated children

The primary countries of origin of unaccompanied and separated children are different to children who arrived in Greece with their family. In 2016, the top three nationalities of UASC in Greece were Pakistani (25 per cent), Afghan (27 per cent) and Syrian (26 per cent);[152] in the first few months of 2017, the most common nationality of identified UASC was Pakistani, representing 42 per cent of UASC referred to EKKA.[153] The second and third top nationalities were Afghan (19 per cent) and Syrian (14 per cent).[154]

[148] Fundamental Rights Agency, Current Migration Situation in the EU: Migrants with disabilities, August 2016.
[149] Ibid.
[150] 47% of Syrians were children; 46% of Afghans were children; 52% of Iraqis were children.
[151] UNHCR, Mediterranean Situation Data Portal, June 2017.
[152] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[153] As of 30 April 2017, EKKA, Situation update: Unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, May 2017.
[154] Ibid.

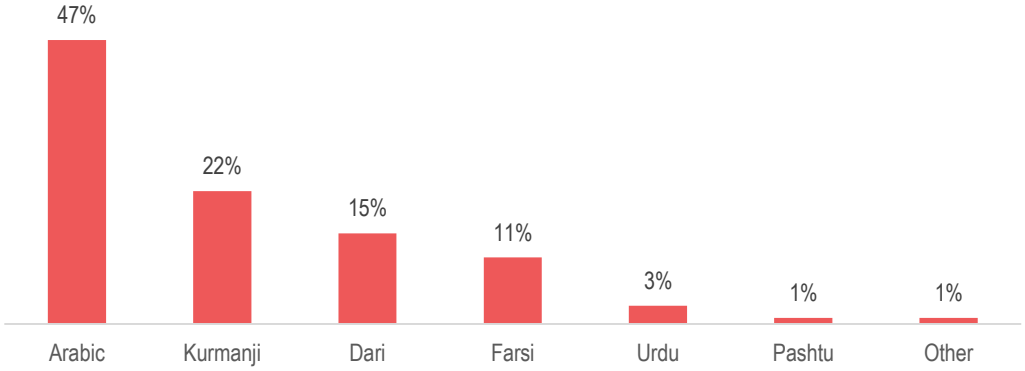
Figure 22: Countries of origin of UASC in Greece in 2016 and 2017[155]



Languages spoken

Comprehensive information on the languages spoken by refugee and migrant children in Greece is not currently available. However, children represented 46 per cent of the pre-registered population and figure the same nationality breakdown as the overall population.[156] As such, accompanied children in this population are expected to share the primary languages spoken by this population, giving a good indication of the languages spoken by refugee and migrant children in the country. **The most commonly spoken primary languages in the pre-registered population were Arabic (47 per cent), Kurmanji (22 per cent), Dari and Farsi (15 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively)**.[157]

Figure 23: Languages spoken by the pre-registered refugee and migrant population in Greece[158]



Education received

Many children in Greece have had their education interrupted and have spent years out of school. According to UNICEF and the Greece Education Working group, children in Greece have missed 2.5 years of education. In 2016, one study found that refugee and migrant children in Greece have been out of education

[155] EKKA, Situation update: Unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, May 2017.
[156] UNHCR, Pre-registration data analysis 9 June – 30 July 2016, July 2016.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.

for between one month and seven years.[159] Afghan children were found to have been out of school for an average of nearly 11 months, while Syrian children had spent an average of over two years out of school.[160]

Some of the refugee and migrant children in Greece have never even started their education; one study found that one in five school-aged refugee and migrant children assessed in Greece have never been to school.[161] Of the Syrian population who arrived on the Greek islands in March 2016, 39 per cent of Syrian children over four years old had never attended school.[162] Reasons for this included conflict, which often disrupted children's access to education, as well as prolonged displacement in countries other than their own, such as Turkey, during which access to education was more difficult.[163]

Work Experience

No comprehensive information on refugee and migrant children's work experience prior to reaching Greece exists. Research carried out on refugee and migrant child labour in Turkey suggests that many children who have spent time in Turkey before arriving in Greece are likely to have spent time working rather than studying; research shows that young refugees and migrants in Turkey often work in the informal sector, rather than studying.[164] Children from Afghanistan interviewed in Greece in 2016 reported that fees for education and residency permits in countries to which they were displaced were too expensive. Consequently, children worked, often for long hours with low wages on construction sites, in agriculture or in factories.[165] The most common types of work reported amongst UASC, as well as adults, from Afghanistan interviewed by UNHCR in 2016 were agriculture, construction and food services.[166] Some children from Syria have reportedly been recruited by armed forces and groups, from as young as eight years old, sometimes working as guards or at checkpoints.[167]

Decision Making and Drivers of Migration

Key Findings

- The majority of children arriving in Greece have left countries with active and protracted conflicts or generalised violence.
- Reasons for migrating included seeking safety, access to education and fear of forced recruitment.
- Most children who arrived in Greece did not have Greece as their final destination, planning to travel to Northern European countries.

Drivers of Migration

The majority of children arriving in Greece since 2014 have come from countries with active and protracted conflicts, including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. One study found that of those interviewed on the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2016, 91 per cent left their country of origin due to conflict, persecution, violence, human rights abuses and death threats.[168] Children also may continue onto other countries because of the situation in countries en route; lack of documentation can be an important reason for leaving a transit country, as was reported by 65 per cent of UASC from Afghanistan.[169]

[159] Save the Children, Education Needs Assessment Greece, May 2016.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[163] Refugee Studies Centre, Policy Brief: Ensuring Quality Education for Young Refugees from Syria (12-25 years), October 2014.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Human Rights Watch, EU: Abuses against children fuel migration, June 2015.
[166] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.
[167] UNICEF and Save the Children, Small hands heavy burden: How the Syria conflict is driving more children into the workforce, July 2015.
[168] Medmig, Destination Europe? Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015, November 2016.
[169] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.

Conflict

The majority of refugee and migrant children (84 per cent) on the Eastern Mediterranean route reported having left their countries of origin due to war, conflict or political reasons.[170] Indeed, the majority of people arriving through the Eastern Mediterranean route in the past few years have consistently come from countries with active and protracted conflicts, with 87 per cent of arrivals in 2017 coming from the ten countries currently producing the most refugees globally.[171] In a recent study on women and girls in Greece, all families and individuals interviewed reported significant protection concerns related to war, armed conflict, persecution or other harmful practices in their country of origin.[172] Of those interviewed on the Greek islands in early 2016, 94 per cent of Syrians[173] and 75 per cent of Afghans[174] reported conflict or violence as the main reason for leaving their country of origin. More than a quarter of people (28 per cent) interviewed on the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2016 reported that armed groups were one of the reasons that they decided to leave their country.[175]

Access to Education prior to arriving in Greece

Especially for families with children, access to education is often a key determinant in shaping the decision to leave one's country of origin. In one study conducted in Greece in 2016, one in three parents or caregivers reported that education was their main reason for leaving to Europe.[176] This was also reported by children themselves. In a study with adolescents and youth conducted in Greece in 2016, education was reported as youths' top priority, and for many, the desire to receive an education was one of their main reasons for migrating.[177]

For many children, conflict has had an impact on their access to education in their country of origin. Ninety-nine percent of parents interviewed by Save the Children in Greece in 2016 reported that conflict and displacement have been the main barriers to education for their children.[178] A study conducted in Greece in 2016 reported that children had faced difficulties in attending formal education in their country of origin due to displacement, military attacks on schools, forced conscription and high education costs.[179] Attacks on schools and hospitals also resulted in the disruption of education and health services for children.[180] In addition, half of the children interviewed by Save the Children in Syria reported that they never or rarely felt safe at school (50 per cent).[181]

Persecution and Discrimination faced by Minorities

Children arriving in Greece include minority groups who are particularly vulnerable and at risk of persecution in their countries of origin. One such group is the Hazara ethnic group, who have been consistently persecuted and remain the targets of massacres and human rights violations in Afghanistan.[182] UNHCR suggests that many of those who reach Europe as unaccompanied and separated children are Hazara.[183] Many of the Afghans (38 per cent) who arrived in Greece in March 2016 reported that they are from the Hazara ethnic group.[184] Children from groups such as the Yezidi ethno-religious minority in Iraq also face discrimination and violence, and many have been forced to flee for these reasons.[185]

Children from Afghanistan have often spent years of their life in Iran, and faced particular difficulties because of discrimination or their lack of documents. Unaccompanied Afghan children who had left Iran in 2016 reported discrimination, lack of access to rights and lack of official documentation as their reasons for leaving.[186] Many children from Afghanistan interviewed by Human Rights Watch on Greek islands in May 2015

[170] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[171] UNHCR, Desperate Journeys, February 2017.
[172] UNFPA, Protection Risks, January 2016.
[173] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[174] UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[175] Medmig, Destination Europe? Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015, November 2016.
[176] Save the Children, Education Needs Assessment Greece, May 2016.
[177] Mercy Corps, Don't forget us: Voices of young migrants and refugees in Greece, January 2017.
[178] Save the Children, Education Needs Assessment Greece, May 2016.
[179] Mercy Corps, Don't forget us: Voices of young migrants and refugees in Greece, January 2017.
[180] UNICEF, Children and Armed Conflict: Afghanistan, May 2016.
[181] Save the Children, Invisible Wounds: The impact of six years of war on the mental health of Syria's children, March 2017.
[182] International Rescue Committee, Afghan Refugees and the European Refugee Crisis, June 2016.
[183] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.
[184] UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[185] Minority Voices Newsroom, 15,000 displaced Yezidis in Turkey seek mass exodus to EU through Bulgaria, June 2015.
[186] UNHCR, Briefing Note: Unaccompanied and separated children in Europe, June 2016.

reported having experienced arbitrary arrest, extortion, and forced labour by the Iranian police when they lived in Iran, and were constantly in danger of being deported.[187]

Fear of forced Recruitment

Children arriving in Greece have sometimes fled their country due to the risk of forced recruitment by armed groups. Some children and parents interviewed by Human Rights Watch in Greece in 2015 reported that possible recruitment by armed groups was the reason they left Afghanistan.[188] Unaccompanied Afghan children interviewed in 2016 reported fear of forced recruitment in Iran, Syria and Afghanistan as a reason for seeking safety in Europe.[189] In Syria, children are also at risk of forced recruitment, with children as young as seven reportedly being recruited by armed forces and groups.[190]

Choosing a Destination

Many children and their families who arrived in Greece were likely not to have chosen the country as their final destination. Rather, with the closure of the borders and the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016, refugees and migrants found themselves inadvertently unable to continue their journey to other EU countries.

Indeed, many refugee and migrant children in Greece already have close or extended family in other European countries, a major factor shaping refugee and migrants, including children's, intentions where to go. In 2015, Human Rights Watch found that reunification with family members already in Europe was a major reason for people arriving in the EU, including for UASC.[191] For Syrians interviewed in Greece in 2016, the most common reason for choosing the planned destination was family in the country of destination.[192] In 2016 alone, 4,886 applications for family reunification were filed by asylum seekers in Greece.[193]

Decision making

A recent study on migration from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq found that for the large majority of families deciding to migrate via the Eastern Mediterranean route, the decision to migrate was a joint decision.[194] In contrast, unaccompanied children may be more likely to have decided on their own to migrate; for instance, 91 per cent of unaccompanied and separated Egyptian children interviewed by IOM in Greece reported that they decided themselves to leave Egypt.[195] Half of Afghan UASC (52 per cent) interviewed by UNHCR in Sweden also reported to have decided on the country of destination on their own.[196]

The most common reason among Afghan and Syrian UASC for traveling alone in a study administered by UNHCR was because their **family did not have enough money to accompany them**.[197] For Afghans, this was by far the most common reason, with 75 per cent[198] reporting lack of financial resources as the reason. Among Syrian UASC, 52 per cent (February 2016[199]) and 29 per cent (March 2016)[200] reported this being a primary reason why they left without their parent or caretaker. The majority of Syrians and Afghans reportedly planned to bring their family members to their country of destination once settled.[201]

[187] Human Rights Watch, EU: Abuses against children fuel migration, June 2015.
[188] Ibid.
[189] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.
[190] UNICEF, Child Alert: Danger every step of the way, June 2016.
[191] Human Rights Watch, The Mediterranean migration crisis: Why people flee, what the EU should do, June 2015.
[192] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[193] Greek Asylum Service, Press Release: Asylum service work for 2016, January 2017
[194] REACH for Mixed Migration Platform, Separated Families: Who stays, who goes and why?, April 2017.
[195] IOM, Egyptian Unaccompanied and separated Migrant Children, January 2016.
[196] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.
[197] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.
[198] UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[199] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in February 2016, February 2016.
[200] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[201] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016; UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.

The Journey

Key Findings

- The majority of children in Greece have arrived via the sea route.
- Average length of journey from the country of origin until Greece could last between one and three months; in some instance, the trip could last much longer.
- Children were exposed to a number of risks along the journey, including violence, exploitation and family separation.

Routes

There are two main gateways into Greece: via sea, reaching one of the Aegean islands or Crete, or via land along the 182 km land border with Turkey. Yet, since the Greek government built a fence along the land border between Turkey and Greece in 2012,[202] the majority of arrivals have been through the sea crossing between Turkey and Greece. In 2015, the sea crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands was the main migration route for all nationalities, and was generally arranged through smugglers in Izmir.[203] The crossing was reportedly expensive and dangerous, although relatively quick, lasting only a couple of hours at most, and even small children would be taken on this journey.[204]

Since early 2017 there has been a return to the use of the land border between Turkey and Greece, with 439 arrivals by land registered for 2017 as of 12 April 2017.[205] However, land arrivals remain a relatively small number of overall arrivals; as May 2017, **arrivals by land represented nine per cent of irregular arrivals in Greece**.[206]

Length of journey

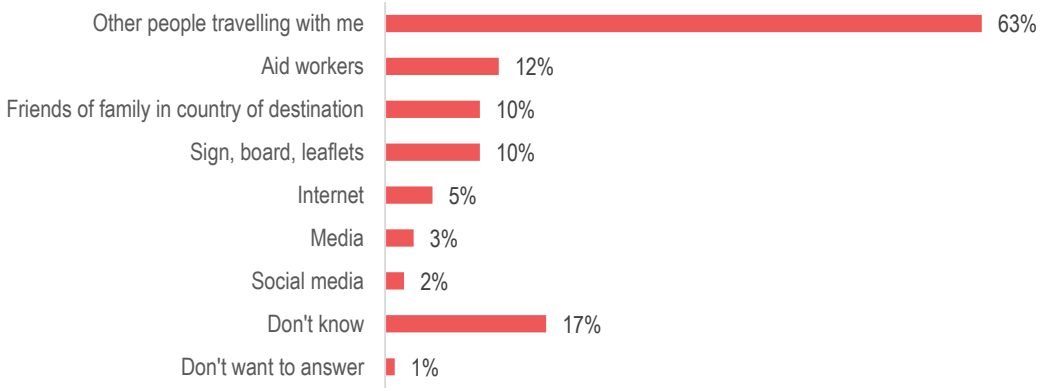
The length of children's journey to Greece can have an impact on their vulnerability, as longer journeys mean that children and their family's resources are stretched and their capacity to cope diminishes.[207] **Overall, the length of the journey until refugee and migrant children reach Greece differs widely, not due to the distance of the journey but due to the various obstacles and difficulties faced along the way that can determine its length**. In February 2016, Afghan unaccompanied children who travelled through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey were found to spend an average of seven months on their journey.[208] The average journey from Syria to Greece of those who arrived in February 2016 was 58 days,[209] and from Afghanistan, the average length was 48 days.[210] In March 2016, the average journey from both Syria and from Afghanistan to Greece was even lower at 37 days.[211] This suggests that the length of travel varies, but overall tends to be between one to three months.

Sources of Information

Children who travel on the Eastern Mediterranean route may be particularly vulnerable because, even though there are lot of information sources available, the information may not necessarily be reliable or easily verified. Most of the refugees and migrants, including children, interviewed on the Eastern Mediterranean route in June 2016 reported that word of mouth was the most common way of gathering information about the journey.[212] Unaccompanied and separated children from Afghanistan reportedly relied mainly on travel companions for information.[213] This was also the case for around half of Syrians interviewed in 2016.[214]

[202] Migration and Detention Assessment Report, Assessing the cost-effectiveness of irregular migration in Greece, October 2014.
[203] REACH, Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans, July 2016.
[204] Ibid.
[205] IOM, Migration Flows-Europe, accessed 22 April 2017.
[206] Ibid.
[207] REACH, Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans, July 2016.
[208] UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM, Refugee and migrant children – including unaccompanied and separated children – in Europe, April 2017.
[209] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in February 2016, March 2016.
[210] UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in February 2016, March 2016.
[211] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016; UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[212] REACH, Profile of migrants in the Western Balkans, June 2016.
[213] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.
[214] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.

Figure 24: Information sources used during the journey by UASC from Afghanistan interviewed in 2015[215]



UASC may find it particularly difficult to know what information to trust regarding their journey. In August 2015, IOM interviewed 132 unaccompanied and separated children from Egypt who had arrived in Crete; all 132 children reported that they had received inconsistent information and fake promises during their journey.[216]

Children and their families travelling through the Eastern Mediterranean route often have smartphones, and use mobile applications to navigate their journey.[217] The use of social media on this route has been widespread, and many refugees and migrants use online platforms to find smugglers, as well as to avoid using smugglers by sharing information between each other online.[218] Many Syrians and Afghans interviewed in Greece in 2016 reported that they did not have problems accessing information.[219] Some groups discussing the journey through Greece on social media have up to 100,000 members[220], and the proliferation of these groups, as well as information provided by NGOs and volunteers, mean that there is a diversity of information about the journey, as long as children and their families have access to internet. However, there is little refugees and migrants can do to verify the trustworthiness of information online, which may leave them vulnerable to manipulation.[221]

Indeed, in FGDs with UASC conducted by REACH in April 2017, children repeatedly said they do not trust social media anymore because of previously wrong information received. This illustrates how in some instances **social media, whilst making information publicly accessible, also may run the risk of spreading misinformation and, thereby, risk more widely.**

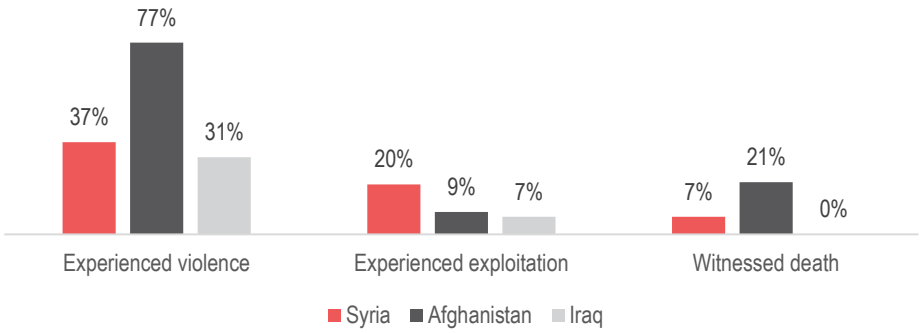
Protection Issues during the Journey

Dangers en Route

Children are particularly vulnerable on the journey to Greece. The lack of legal pathways for children and their families mean that many resort to crossing borders unofficially, often using smugglers. Children therefore have walked for days, and are often detained by smugglers or police en route, or left without food and water for days.[222] One study found that 30 per cent of children aged 14-17 reported having directly experienced trafficking or other exploitative practices on the Eastern Mediterranean Route, compared to 16 per cent of adults.[223]

Figure 25: Protection concerns experienced en route in 2015 by country of origin[224]

[215] UNHCR, This is who we are: A study of the profile, experiences and reasons for flight of unaccompanied or separated children from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden in 2015, October 2016.
[216] IOM, Egyptian Unaccompanied and separated Migrant Children, January 2016.
[217] Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, Getting to Europe the 'WhatsApp' way – The use of ICT in contemporary mixed migration flows to Europe, June 2016.
[218] Political and social research institute of Europe, Social media and migration, 2015, accessed 20 April 2017.
[219] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016; UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016.
[220] Political and social research institute of Europe, Social media and migration, 2015, accessed 20 April 2017.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Save the Children, A Tide of Self-Harm and Depression, March 2017.
[223] IOM, Analysis Flow Monitoring Surveys: Human Trafficking and other Exploitative Practices, November 2016.
[224] Medmig, Destination Europe? Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015, November 2016.



Separation en Route

Many children have been separated from their families on the journey to Greece, leaving them more vulnerable and at greater risk of exploitation.[225] There have been reported cases of children losing their parents, often because of hectic situations. For example, when people get on boats to Greece, smugglers reportedly do not think of keeping families together but put as many people as possible into a boat, often leaving a parent or child behind.[226] Many Syrians and Afghans interviewed in Greece in 2016 reported having been separated from a family member during the journey, mostly in Turkey.[227] For Iraqis, family separation was also common along the route, for example at border crossings, where women and children were given priority crossing, when boarding trains with large crowds attempting to enter the train, and at registration where families in some cases were not registered together.[228]

Life in Greece and Aspirations for the Future

Key Findings

- Many refugee and migrant children who are in Greece as of 2017 had not planned to stay in the country when they first arrived; one year later, many children and their parents are still determined to reach their original destination
- Legal pathways for onward travel and access to international protection are inherently slow, making irregular travel increasingly appealing to children
- Children are exposed to a range of protection risks in different accommodation types, often also suffering from anxiety and other forms of mental health problems
- All children face challenges in accessing education they deem appropriate to their needs

With the closure of the Western Balkans route in March 2016, many children and their families found themselves unintentionally staying in Greece; most had intended to continue their journey onto other European countries and did not envisage staying in Greece for long. However, **one year later, 19,000 children,[229] including 2,150 unaccompanied and separated children,[230] are still in the country**.

Overall, children and families who had a clear destination, other than Greece, in mind when they arrived in country were found to be still determined to reach there. All unaccompanied and separated children interviewed who had arrived in Greece with a clear destination in mind still considered their stay in Greece as temporary, and thought they would stay in the country only until they could continue their journey. Similarly, the majority of parents interviewed (30 out of 40) reported that they had not changed their mind about their final destination since arriving in Greece, and reported that they were still determined to eventually reach their destination with their children. The most cited reasons for children's and parents' determination to continue their journey was having family in other EU

[225] European Network of Ombudspersons for Children, Safety and fundamental rights at stake for children on the move, January 2016.
[226] Ibid.
[227] UNHCR, Profiling of Syrian arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016; UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan arrivals on Greek islands in March 2016, March 2016
[228] IOM, Assessing the risks of Migration Along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes: Iraq and Nigeria as Case Study Countries, November 2016.
[229] UNICEF, Refugee and migrant children in Greece, April 2017.
[230] EKKA, Situation update: Unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, May 2017.

countries or the hope for better opportunities, including access to better services and facilities, education and work. Most were hoping to reach Germany, Sweden or Switzerland.

Unaccompanied and separated children and families who arrived in Greece with no set destination in mind were more likely to stay in the country. In these cases, children reported that they had aimed to reach 'Europe' with no clear destination in mind, and, once arrived in Greece, decided to stay. This was often when children did not have close family in other European countries, such as children from Pakistan and some Afghan children. However, children also highlighted that access to education in Greece, as well as adequate shelter and being cared for, were key factors shaping their decision on whether to stay in Greece.[231] Seven out of 40 parents (from Afghanistan and Pakistan) reported that they would like to stay in Greece as long as possible. The parents who reported wanting to stay in Greece as long as possible also mostly reported that they had changed their mind about staying in Greece since the borders had closed and they had no other choice than to remain in Greece.

Life in Greece

Whether children aimed to travel onwards or wanted to stay in the country, once in Greece, children experienced similar problems and challenges. However, children often had different needs, depending on whether they hoped to remain in Greece or to transit to other European countries.

Although finding safety in Greece, the vast majority of unaccompanied and separated children assessed (29 out of 31) reported that their life in Greece was not at all how they expected it when they left their home. The majority of parents interviewed (26 out of 40) expected Greece to be different from how they found it. Parents who found Greece to differ from their expectations reported that procedures were slower and access to services such as education, healthcare and shelter was worse than they had expected.

Access to International Protection

The majority of children in FGDs were worried about the progress of their claim for asylum, and most did not understand the procedures or did not know how much longer they would have to wait. This was reported by accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children. As the Greek asylum service is still examining claims from previous years, access to asylum is slow. Only 25 per cent of asylum applications submitted by children from 2013 to February 2017 have been considered, meaning that the majority of children who claimed asylum during that period are still waiting for a decision on their asylum application.[232] **This meant that, after more than one year in the country, children still felt in a state of limbo and unable to settle in Greece.**

Access to Legal Pathways for onward Travel

The vast majority of children interviewed who wanted to travel to other EU countries reported that it was important for them to travel legally if it was possible. Children in all FGDs repeatedly reported that they were 'tired of trying the 'illegal' way'. Yet, legal pathways, such as family reunification or relocation remain slow and are often not transparent for refugee and migrant children in the country. According to NGOs in Greece, procedures for family reunification last one year on average, but it may often take 15-18 months for children to be reunited with family members.[233]

However, not all children have family members in other European countries, and many are not among the nationalities which qualify for relocation. Furthermore, unaccompanied and separated children in five out of seven FGDs reported that they were tired of waiting, and that if procedures took too long they would resort to crossing irregularly to other EU countries. **Because of the long waiting times, even children who have access to legal pathways are at risk of finding irregular ways to reach their destination more quickly.**[234]

[231] For an analysis of the perception of UASC on services outside temporary accommodation sites in Greece: Situation overview: Access to basic services outside temporary accommodation sites (camps); REACH/UNICEF, forthcoming.
[232] Greek Asylum Service, Asylum service statistical data, February 2017.
[233] ECRE, With Greece: Recommendations for refugee protection, July 2016.
[234] Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Emergency within an emergency: Exploitation of migrant children in Greece, April 2017.

FOCUS 6: REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF ACCESS TO RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OUTSIDE ACCOMMODATION SITES

Methodology

Between February and April 2017, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted an assessment of children living outside accommodation sites' knowledge and perception of their access to rights in their respective locations. It also provides an overview of protection concerns in assessed locations, as reported by children and service providers working in the assessed locations.

A total of 35 key infromant interviews with service providers were conducted, as well as 15 focus group discussions with 81 children aged 15 to 17 in 10 locations, including 50 unaccompanied and separated children. The types of locations assessed were as follows: six shelters for unaccompanied and separated children, two shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, one apartment building and one hotel. Six of these locations were in or near Thessaloniki, and four were in Athens.

Further findings from this assessment are presented in a Factsheet, accessible here. *(hyperlink will be added once the final product is published)*

Children's Voices

"It's like running in an empty circle, we're not adults so we can't work, but they also don't give us money."

M17, Iraq, unaccompanied

"We don't have enough information and we don't know what will happen."

M16, Pakistan, unaccompanied

"Money and work are the main reasons children are abused, because they need money they go into drug dealing."

M17, Syria, unaccompanied

"Since the war started I have this problem with memory loss, and they said they cannot pay for this. I also started smoking here since we came here and maybe it makes it worse. Since I came here I have nothing to do. I feel trapped and I think it gets worse. I feel very stressed."

M17, Syria, unaccompanied

Children's Knowledge of Rights

When children were asked to list their rights in Greece, the following categories of rights were the most commonly reported:

1.	Education	10/10
2.	Financial support/money	6/10
3.	Home/shelter	6/10
4.	Safety and security	6/10
5.	Care and support	5/10
6.	Food	5/10
7.	Healthcare	5/10

The **right to asylum** was named by children as a right in one location assessed.

Protection concerns

Drug use

2/10 Drug use and/or selling close to the location.

5/10 At least one child in location uses drugs.

Work and petty trade

6/10 At least one child in location engages in exploitative work.

6/10 At least one child in location engages in petty trade.

Transactional sex

6/10 At least one child in location engages in transactional sex.

Relations in Locations assessed

Relations between residents and among residents and service providers were rated:[5]

6/10 very good

4/10 neutral

In 5/10 assessed locations, children reported tensions between different nationalities.

Who children go to for help

According to key informants on site, when children have a problem they ask for help from:

1. Officials running the site
2. Interpreters or cultural mediators
3. Parents and family on the site

At Risk of Abuse in Greece

Children who aim to reach family elsewhere are losing trust in legal pathways and, as a result, become at acute risk of exploitation in Greece. As children grow increasingly desparate to reach their intended destination, they become all the more vulnerable to abuse. There have been several reports of UASC engaging in transactional sex in urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki[235] and, indeed, in some instances, children reported in FGDs that they had been approached by unknown men for transactional sex close to their shelter.

Children in Greece are also exposed to protection risks, both in accommodation (open) sites and in urban areas. While in most locations assessed by REACH in urban areas children reported to feel physically safe, half of the children assessed reported not feeling safe when they left their location to urban areas nearby, mostly due to a fear of racism, drug use or selling, or theft. In accommodation (open) sites, children reported frequent fights in the site which made them feel unsafe; parents further reported they feared children were at risk of sexual exploitation in accommodation (open) sites.

Psycho-social Support Needs

The state of limbo refugee and migrant children find themselves in has led to a concerning deterioration of mental health of children who have now been in Greece for over one year.[236] While people transiting through Greece initially needed healthcare for injuries they had sustained on the journey and anxiety about their current situation, one NGO reports that the main problem is no longer anxiety, but depression, which is aggravated by poor living conditions, lack of information and uncertainty for the future.[237] Save the Children reported that children in hotspots on the islands have been self-harming and using drugs and alcohol in order to cope with the situation they find themselves in.[238] Indeed, in FGDs in Athens and Thessaloniki children across different types of locations reportedly needed someone to talk to, such as a social worker, to help them cope with their experiences prior to arriving in Greece and the incertitude experienced once in the country.

Access to Education

Children's uncertainty about their legal status and future in Europe has heavily impacted their access to and investment in education in Greece. All parents and unaccompanied and separated children said that education was of prime importance to them, as for many this had been an important reason for coming to Europe in the first place. The vast majority of unaccompanied and separated children interviewed (28 out of 31) reported that the ability to go to school was an important factor for whether they would stay in the site.

However, access to both formal and non-formal education remains challenging for many. According to an assessment in March 2017 by the Greece Education Sector Working Group in mainland Greece, 59 per cent of children assessed attended education activities, but **only 22 per cent of these activities were formal education**.[239] In March 2017, the EU started a special education programme that has helped 2,500 refugee and migrant children get back to school in Greece with IOM offering transportation support from accommodation (open) sites to the nearest Greek schools.[240] But **practical barriers for not attending school remain,** including missing the deadline to register for the academic year, or the school being too far away.[241] Access to formal education is also delayed as children and their families often move within the country, from an accommodation (open) site to urban areas and vice versa. In some cases, children are in locations where no school is found closeby. Children on the Aegean islands are unable to attend formal education altogether, as formal education on the islands has not been made available to refugee and migrant children.[242] At the same time, children who did attend school often reported that the education system did not provide enough classes adapted to their knowledge in terms of language or level.[243]

---

[235] Ibid.
[236] MSF, Vulnerable people get left behind, October 2016; Government of the United Kingdom, Children in crisis: Unaccompanied migrant children in the EU, July 2016; Save the Children, A tide of self-harm and depression: The EU-Turkey deal's devastating impact on child refugees and migrants, March 2017; Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Emergency within an emergency: Exploitation of migrant children in Greece, April 2017.
[237] News Deeply, Greece: Between deterrence and integration, May 2017.
[238] Save the Children, A tide of self-harm and depression: The EU-Turkey deal's devastating impact on child refugees and migrants, March 2017.
[239] For more on access to education for refugee and migrant children in Greece, see REACH/UNICEF, Access to education of refugee and migrant children in accommodation sites, March 2017.
[240] European Commission, 2500 Refugee and Migrant Children Now Attending Greek Schools, March 2017.
[241] REACH/UNICEF, Access to education of refugee and migrant children in accommodation sites, March 2017.
[242] Greek Ministry of Education Scientific Committee (SC) for the Support of Refugee Children, Assessment Report, April 2017.
[243] REACH/UNICEF, Access to services and children's perceptions of rights outside accommodation sites, April 2017.

FOCUS 7: PERCEPTION OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION BY REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN OUTSIDE ACCOMMODATION SITES

Methodology

In February and March 2017, REACH, in the framework of a partnership with UNICEF, conducted an assessment on the perception of access to services by accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) living outside accommodation sites (camps) in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece.

A mixed method approach was used, combining key informants interviews (KIIs) with service providers and focus group discussions (FGDs) with children. In total, ten locations were assessed. The types of locations were as follows: six shelters for unaccompanied children, two shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, one apartment building and one hotel. Six were in or near Thessaoloniki and four in Athens. In total, 35 KIIs and 15 FGDs with 81 children (21 accompanied and 60 unaccompanied) were conducted.

This focus presents findings relating to access to education. Further findings from this assessment are presented in a Situation Overview, accessible here. *(hyperlink will be added once the final product is published)*

Access to Education

In all locations assessed, education was the most reported concern for children. All of them, whether accompanied or not, and irrespective of legal status or nationality, reported wanting to go to school.

All children who had been able to access some form of education (non-formal or formal) reported that they felt better in Greece since they started going to school. Still, the perception among children of the appropriateness and accessibility of education available differed widely. The most reported challenges in relation to education were (1) the quality of education received and (2) children's perception that classes were not suited to their needs due to language, school level and access barriers. Children's perceptions were also influenced by whether or not they planned to remain in Greece in the longer term.

Key informants confirmed that where children did not attend school, this was mostly due to language barriers, or because classes were not tailored to children's learning needs and abilities.

Quality Education

Whilst the majority of children accessed some form of education (formal or non-formal), their perception of the education received differed by type of education provided. Children who received non-formal education (often delivered by NGOs or volunteer groups in the location or in places nearby) were generally satisfied with the quality of the service provided, although they wished to go to formal schools, as they felt that non-formal education could not replace formal education. In contrast, children's expectations with regard to formal education were often not met.

Formal Education

In one third of the locations assessed, children indicated that the education received was not satisfactory to them. They reported that classes were not structured or that little actual teaching was taking place. In one site, unaccompanied children mentioned that teachers told them to play card games; thus, they used applications on their phones to learn. Some children also perceived that teachers did not care whether they attended school at all. As a result, many children were disappointed by the long awaited formal education services. One child, who waited for four months to attend formal education, reported dropping out due to the poor quality of teaching.

Non-formal Education

Overall, children who received non-formal education positively assessed these classes, which were taught in a mix of languages, including Greek, English, Arabic and Farsi. They enjoyed the varied content of the classes and the routine that the set activities provided to their daily life. Children said that these classes gave them a reason to wake up in the morning and allowed them to spend the day doing something 'meaningful' to them. Still, most of them reported that non-formal classes could not replace formal ones, adding that they would like to access formal education.

Language of Formal Education

Many children perceived that formal education classes were not suited to their needs. Some children, mostly Syrian, did not see any reason to learn Greek or have lessons only in Greek, as they did not intend to stay in Greece. On the other side of the spectrum, most Pakistani children said that they did want to learn Greek, but that the teaching technique, whereby all classes were delivered in Greek irrespective of the children's knowledge of the language, did not allow them to do so. Afghan children tended to fall in either category.

Indeed, the most reported reason for dropping out or not attending school by both key informants and children was the language barrier. In four such cases, children said they did want to learn Greek, however, they had never been to school in their country of origin and felt the classes were too advanced for them; this prevented them from continuing.

Children's Voices on Accessing Education

"*Sometimes I feel I don't have a reason to wake up. It's not that I don't like to wake up, but there is not something to make me leave the bed. It's better since we started having classes, this is a reason.*"

F16, Syria, accompanied

"*I want to learn, because if you don't learn Greek you cannot study, you cannot improve yourself.*"

M16, Pakistan, UASC

"*I like in general to go to school and I want to have an education. But I don't go because I don't know the alphabet, and the lessons were a high level so I left. When I started I told them that I can't read and write. Since then nobody showed me how to write. The teachers were speaking only in Greek to me.*"

M17, Afghanistan, UASC

"*I came here to continue studying but it's not good, because it is all in Greek and most of it we don't understand. For three months I used to go – they registered me – but nothing changed in those three months and I quit, because I went to school, I woke up at seven a.m. and I just came back. I learnt nothing there.*"

M16, Iraq, UASC

Non-formal education is more widely available, and children largely enjoy it. Yet, children in FGDs reported that, while they appreciated and enjoyed the activities, which brought routine into their daily lives, non-formal educational activities could not replace formal education.[244]

Finally, limited information on the length of stay in Greece has lead to unaccompanied and separated children and children with their families who intend to leave Greece often missing out on years of education because they stay in Greece longer than anticipated. **The majority of parents interviewed (32 out of 40) reported that their children did not attend school in Greece, including all ten of the parents who had applied for relocation**. Parents interviewed had been in Greece on average for one year, and, because of slow progress with relocation and family reunification, children were still in the country and had lost one year of education. Children who did attend school but did not plan to stay in Greece found classes taught in Greek inappropriate for their needs.[245] Not knowing how much longer it would take to reach another EU country, both children and parents remained anxious about the lost schooling and the foreseeable future.

Lack of appropriate Shelter

Refugee and migrant children in Greece are being hosted in accommodation (open) sites (camps), apartments, hotels and shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers across the country. In March 2017, the majority (57 per cent) of children were hosted in hotels, apartments, buildings, were self-hosted or lived in squats. According to a REACH/UNICEF urban mapping of the refugee and migrant population in squats (abandoned buildings), **in the city of Athens alone 645 refugee and migrant children, including UASC, lived in squats as of January 2017.[246]** In contrast, 34 per cent were in accommodation (open) sites (camps), six per cent were in shelters for unaccompanied and separated children, and three per cent were in reception and identification centres.[247]

There is currently a shortage of appropriate accommodation for unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, with a total of 52 dedicated shelters and 1,282 places for an estimated 2,150 unaccompanied and separated children in the country.[248] As of 15 May 2017, **1,013 unaccompanied and separated children remained on the waiting list for appropriate shelter; of these, 173 are in Reception and Identification Centres, and 53 are in protective custody in police stations**.[249] Unaccompanied and separated children in all FGDs reported that they intended to stay in the dedicated shelter for as long as they stayed in Greece; although for many, this was because they felt they had no other choice, and they did not intend to stay in Greece for long. All six of the parents who intended to stay in Greece wanted to stay in an apartment, while none intended to stay in an accommodation (open) site (camp) or shelter for vulnerable asylum seekers.

Access to Information

Access to reliable and accurate information, in a form that is understandable for children, was cited by most as part of the reason for children's distress and difficulties to cope in their situation. Whether children had applied for asylum in Greece or were waiting for family reunification or relocation, all reported that not understanding how long it would take was one of the most difficult issues to deal with. Parents repeatedly reported that, even though information was available in their languages, they felt unable to make informed decisions on their families' life in Europe on the basis of the information provided.

Aspirations for the Future

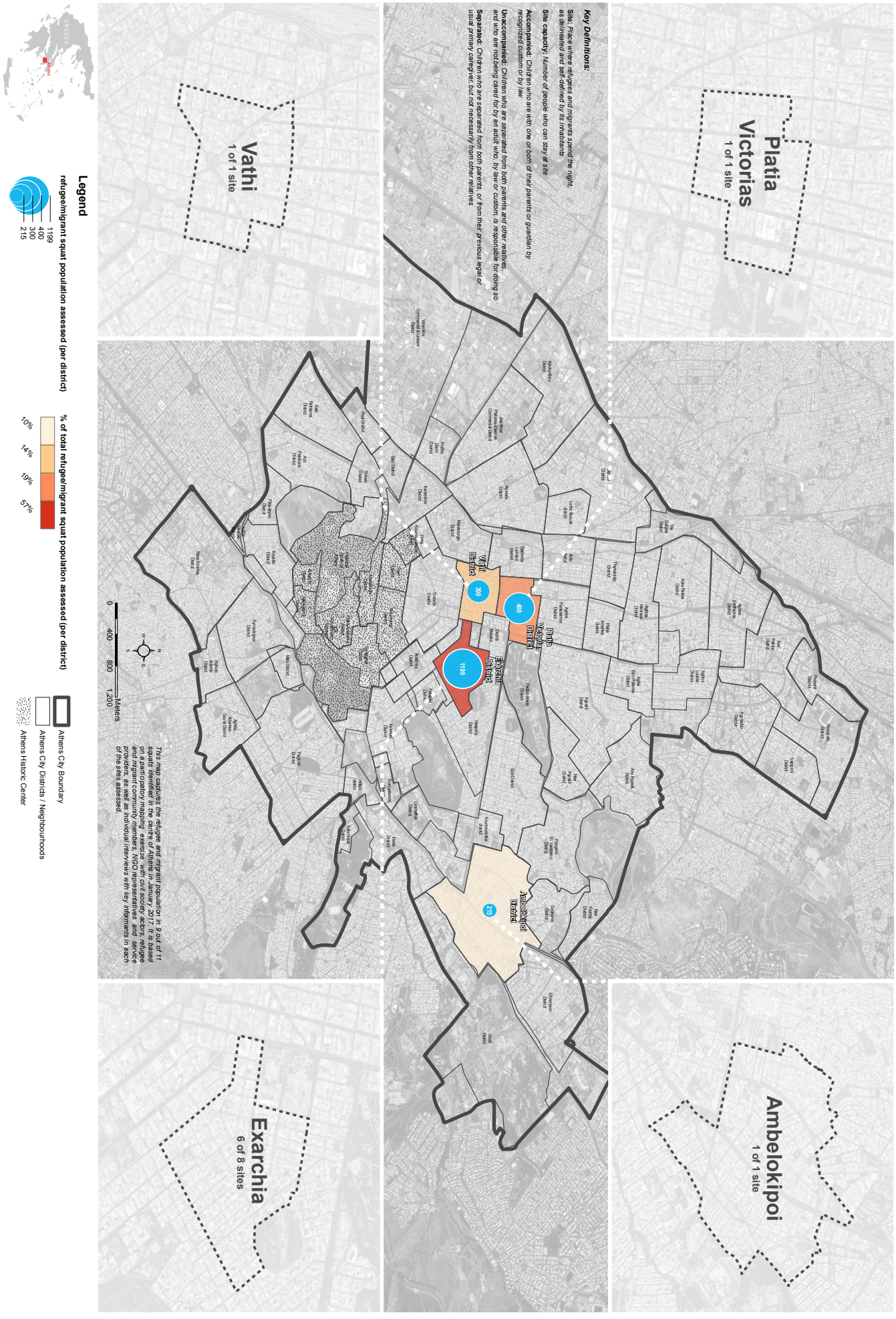
Children in Greece reported that they want to build a future in Europe, which meant going to school, having a home and being able to continue their life. Yet, many are still caught in limbo due to lengthy procedures, education that children deem inappropriate to their needs, and accommodation that is still only temporary. This means that many children have been in the EU for over one year and are still mostly in a position where they are unable to move on with their lives.

[244] Ibid.
[245] REACH/UNICEF, Access to education of refugee and migrant children in accommodation sites, March 2017.
[246] REACH/UNICEF, Refugee and Migrant Squat population in Athens, January 2017; internal document.
[247] UNICEF, Refugee and migrant children in Greece, April 2017.
[248] EKKA, Situation update: Unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, May 2017.
[249] Ibid.

For children who aim to reach other EU countries, legal pathways have become both unappealing and not transparent, as most have been waiting for over one year to access legal pathways, such as family reunification and relocation, but to no avail. In this context, irregular travel becomes all the more appealing. However, as many do not have the necessary resources to finance their journey, children in Greece are extremely vulnerable to exploitation; there have been reports of sexual exploitation of children and other forms of violence, as children become increasingly desperate to leave Greece.[250]

[250] Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Emergency within an emergency: Exploitation of migrant children in Greece, April 2017.

FOCUS 8: REFUGEE AND MIGRANT SQUAT POPULATION IN ATHENS



CONCLUSION

The aim of this assessment was to increase understanding about refugee and migrant children who migrated to Europe in 2016 and 2017, and to shed light on their stories, the reasons why they left their homes, children's experiences of the journey and their lives and hopes for the future once in Europe. Focusing on children's experiences in the two main gateways to the continent, Italy and Greece, the study is based on 720 interviews with unaccompanied and separated children in Italy, and a consolidated secondary data analysis complemented by 130 interactions with children and 70 key informant interviews with parents and service providers in Greece.

In Italy, the study is statistically representative at 95 per cent confidence level and 5 per cent margin of error of the UASC population in reception facilities in Sicily, where 41 per cent of all UASC across the country are hosted.[251] To include children living outside Italy's child reception system, rapid assessments were conducted in the key transit sites of Rome, Milan, Como and Ventimiglia. Yet, certain groups, notably Eritrean children and girls, may be underrepresented in this study. In Greece, accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children were interviewed in a selected number of accommodation (open) sites (camps), shelters for UASC, shelters for vulnerable asylum seekers, apartments and hotels. As such, findings are indicative only and not statistically representative of the entire refugee and migrant child population in Greece. Particularly the views of children living in informal gathering sites, including squats, may be underrepresented.

The study finds that refugee and migrant children in Italy and Greece come from conflict-ridden countries and areas with poverty; all leave behind a situation where they feel they have no access to their basic rights as a child, and do not see any prospects for themselves in the foreseeable future. For many children who have arrived in Italy or Greece the journey is not yet over, as they often aim to join family elsewhere. Others would like to stay in Italy or Greece to continue their education and build a life in the country.

All face challenges in realising their objectives, as access to documentation, including asylum and residency, and legal pathways are inherently slow. Often, children do not understand why they need to wait and lose out on education. As a result, children lose their trust in the child reception system and attempt to reach their goals through irregular means, at risk of abuse and exploitation.

Key Findings

Leaving Home

For all children who wanted to reach Europe, safety, education and the ability to build a future for themselves were the key reasons for leaving home. Among children who reached Italy, domestic violence at home was one of the key drivers which made children leave their country of origin (31 per cent); almost one in five children in Italy (18 per cent) left their country of origin due to fear of persecution. Refugee and migrant children arriving in Greece come from conflict-ridden countries, such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and left behind conflict and violence.

Nine out of ten children arriving in Italy embarked on the journey to Europe alone (87 per cent), making them more vulnerable and prone to exploitation. Most reported that they had taken the decision to leave without family, by themselves. In contrast, children who arrived in Greece tended to have taken a joint decision within their family and often left with at least some members of their family.

While children traveling with their families from the Middle East to Greece were often aware of the risks the journey to Europe could entail, less than half of children assessed in Italy reported to have thought about the risks of the journey prior to leaving home (43 per cent). This suggests that in many cases, children left their country of origin with little preparation and knowledge of what lay ahead. At the same time, when children had thought about the risks of the journey before leaving (47 per cent), children were well-informed of the level of risk, reportedly knowing that they could be killed on the way (42 per cent) or drown at sea (30 per cent).

[251] Ministry of Labour, Monitoring Report on UASC, December 2016.

The Journey

The length of the journey was often tied to children's need to work to finance their journey and, thereby, their exposure to exploitation. On average, children who arrived in Italy travelled for one year and two months between leaving home and reaching Italy. Among children in Greece, the length of travel varied significantly, but was overall shorter than for children arriving in Italy.

Less than half of children who arrived in Italy reported that they had left home with the aim of reaching Europe (46 per cent). This illustrates that children's journey were often fragmented and not linear, as they tried to find better opportunities for themselves or for their families in the neighbouring regions of West and North Africa, before continuing the journey to Italy.

Children in Italy unanimously spoke of their stay in Libya as the most traumatising part of their journey, except for the sea crossing. Almost half of them (47 per cent) reported to have been kidnapped for ransom in Libya, and one in four children (23 per cent) reported to have been arbitrarily arrested and held in prison without charges. Most children who had aimed to go to Libya for work reportedly left for Italy, due to the violence witnessed in the country (68 per cent). Children in Greece were exposed to a number of risks along the journey, including violence and exploitation.

Once in Europe

Once in Europe, children remain in precarious conditions, with limited access to international protection, legal pathways and services such as education. In this situation, in Italy and Greece, children may be further exposed to risks of abuse and exploitation.

1. Access to International Protection

Children who want to stay in Italy or Greece and build a life there wait for months or even years to receive a legal status in country. In Italy, the lack of legal status means that children aged 16 or 17 are not allowed to work and risk to become increasingly disenfranchised and isolated in reception facilities. In Greece, incertitude over children's legal stay increasingly leads to children suffering from anxiety and mental health disorders, as many do not know the status of their claim.

2. Legal Pathways for onward Travel

Children who arrived in Italy or Greece and decide to travel onward through legal pathways find themselves stuck in transit for months or even years while waiting for their family reunification or relocation claim to be processed. This means that children lose a lot of time in a state of limbo and, as result, become all the more likely to attempt to leave the country irregularly. This may put children at acute risk of exploitation, as they search for ways to pay for the journey northwards.

3. At Risk of Explotiation and Abuse in Italy and Greece

Both children in Italy and Greece are at significant risk of abuse once in Europe. In Italy, children who drop out of reception facilities are particularly at risk of abuse, living in informal gathering sites with limited access to shelter, often trying to earn money to travel onwards irregularly to other EU countries. In Greece, protection risks and abuse reportedly occur both inside accommodation (open) sites (camps), and in urban areas, where reports of children at risk of sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse are increasing.

4. Psycho-social Support Needs

In both Italy and Greece children were found in need of dedicated psycho-social support to help them deal with their experiences prior to arriving in Europe, as well as with the situation once in Italy and Greece. In Italy, children arrive with traumatising experiences from their time in Libya and are often unable to process these once in the country. At the same time, children's experiences once in Italy, notably in informal gathering sites, can lead to their mental health deteriorating once in the country. In Greece, with most children arriving from conflict-ridden countries, reports of children suffering from mental health problems are growing, further exacerbated by the long waiting times in country.

5. Access to Education

Once children arrive in Italy and Greece, they face challenges to access education, which affect both children who want to stay in Italy or Greece in the longer term and those who plan to continue their journey through legal pathways. For children who want to stay in Italy or Greece, limited education means that they have difficulties in integrating into society. For children who want to travel onwards, the ability to go to school is important both to bring a routine to their daily lives, as well as to ensure that children are not missing out on education as they wait for legal pathways for onward travel.

6. Access to Information

The lack of understandable and actionable information that children retain in both countries was a cross cutting concern which impacted all aspects of children's lives. Children in Italy repeatedly reported that not understanding relevant procedures in relation to accessing international protection, as well as education, was a key reason why they dropped out of reception facilities. Children in Greece were often unsure of the status of their asylum clam and had missed out on school because they had not known how long they would be staying in Greece.

Overall, a lack of clarity about the procedures to be followed and the timeframes expected mean that refugee and migrant children in Italy and Greece lose their trust in the child reception system and increasingly do not believe that these services can respond to their needs. As a result, children often follow hearsay, anecdotal advice and embark on irregular routes to reach their objectives.

While this report provides a first comprehensive overview of the profile, decision making factors, drivers of migration and lives of refugee and migrant children once in Italy and Greece, **crucial information gaps remain**, in particular in relation to:

- **Children's level of preparation of the journey to both Italy and Greece**: this study finds that many children leave home with an only limited degree of preparation and knowledge of the journey ahead. Yet, the level of preparation, including the financial resources at children's disposal and the level of information gathered, impacts children's experiences during the journey to Europe, as well as their life once in Europe. A better understanding of the level of preparation prior to departure would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the exposure to risk of children in transit and potential areas for intervention to minise such risk.

- **The experiences of children on the move in key transit countries, including Libya, Niger and Iran**: this study finds that children travelling along the Central Mediterranean Route spend years in transit, often staying for extensive periods of time in Libya or Niger to work. Indeed, many unaccompanied and separated children may stay in these transit sites, and not come to Europe or even return home. At the same time, many children travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean Route to Europe, notably Afghan children, transit through Iran. Yet, little is known about the situation of refugee and migrant children there. A more nuanced understanding of the situation of children in key transit sites along both routes would allow for a more targeted response to the needs of children who aim to go to Italy or Greece, but crucially also to the needs of children who stay in the wider African and Asian region and do not reach Europe.

- **Accounting system of refugee and migrant children outside the official child reception system in Italy and Greece**: this study finds that many children drop out of the child reception system in Italy and Greece and find themselves in an irregular situation. Yet, the scale remains underexplored, as accounts of drop outs are anecdotal and, in both countries, not systematically recorded. A better understanding of the scale of children dropping out of reception centres, their subsequent exposure to protection risks outside the reception system and the irregular movement of children within Europe would allow for a more targeted response to the needs of children once in the continent.

- **Effective communication with refugee and migrant children in Europe:** this study finds that, once in Europe, children have limited access to information that they understand and, as a result, make important decisions on the basis of rumours and hearsay. While in some cases official information may be provided in reception sites, children often do not comprehend or retain the information to use it to make an informed decision about their life in Italy or Greece. Effective information provision is an important measure to

protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation in Europe. As such, effective ways of communicating with children, to build a meaningful dialogue based on trust, must be further explored.