



## European Refugee Crisis – Children on the Move

### Questions & Answers



#### Why are so many people on the move? What is the situation of refugees?

There have never been so many displaced people in the world as there are today. Worldwide, nearly 232 million people have made homes in countries beyond the borders of their native lands, according to the most recent figures. Nearly 60 million are fleeing war, persecution and extreme poverty – and half of them are children. One of the countless refugee tragedies around the world can be seen right before our eyes – on the Mediterranean Sea and in the Balkan region.

In Syria, nearly five years of conflict have reduced infrastructure to rubble, depriving many millions of children of education, health care and basic services including water and electricity. One of four schools and two of three hospitals in the country have been destroyed. Over 5,6 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria.

The conflict in Syria alone has seen more than four million people flee the country since the conflict began in March 2011, 2,2 million are children. Neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq are struggling to cope with the large numbers of refugees, many of whom are children, some alone. Refugees in these countries are losing hope of being able to return home and they are faced with desperate choices, and many are risking the perilous journey to Europe to try to find a safer future for their children.

### **What is the current situation in Europe? How many refugees are children?**

Refugee flows in Europe are at an unprecedented high. The arrivals to Europe by sea approached 870'000 by the end of November - nearly four times the total of all 2014. Of these, more than 700'000 arrived through Greece and travelled onwards through the Western Balkans route through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia. The average number of refugees who have crossed into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is estimated at 6'800 per day by UNHCR, with a peak of over 10'000 arrivals in one day on 18 October. The majority of the refugees arriving in Greece come from Syria.

Last year, more than 50% of refugees in the world were children – the highest figure for child refugees in more than a decade. Of refugees currently arriving in Europe, up to 23% are children – some of whom are fleeing all alone. **The Refugee Crisis in Europe is a crisis for children:** The number of refugees in Europe is not decreasing while the relative proportion of children on the move is increasing. A total 27 percent of all asylum seekers are children. A total of 214,355 children sought asylum in the European Union between January and September 2015, according to the latest Eurostat data.

### **What are the key challenges for children on the move?**

Children and their families often face long, uncertain and hazardous journeys when they leave. To reach Europe, many people, including children, are risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea - and over land - the West Balkan route, the main route into Europe. The Mediterranean route (from Turkey to Greece, North Africa to Italy and Malta) is currently the world's deadliest refugee route. According to the International Organization of Migration (IOM), more than 3'500 people are believed to have perished in the Mediterranean since the beginning of this year, including many children.

For those who survive the journey, many have endured terrible conditions and are frightened and exhausted. Others are at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and harm including from traffickers. The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has collected credible reports of abuse and sexual violence against women and children in locations where people on the move gather, including at reception sites, parks, roadsides and train and bus stations. Testimonies have included incidences of children engaging in 'survival sex' with smugglers to continue their journey. Unaccompanied children – traveling without the care of an adult, mostly adolescent boys – are among the most vulnerable groups on the move and their ranks are growing. They are at particular risk of sexual abuse and violence.

As much harsher weather conditions arrive in Europe, refugee families are now battling rain and colder weather, many walking in the only shoes and clothes they have. There are signs that the refugees are abandoning the water route in favour of the land route through Bulgaria. But they still face snow, rain and freezing weather, many walking in the only shoes and clothes they have. Each day 700 children arrive in Europe, many of them exhausted, distressed and some in need of medical assistance. They need a safe place to rest as well as food and water, warm clothes, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

Due to the terrible experiences most of the families on the move have encountered on their journeys, children will need very specialized care and support – most notably safeguarding their rights, support and protection for unaccompanied and separated children and provision of services including shelter, healthcare and counselling, opportunities for children to continue learning and play.

### **How is Save the Children responding to the humanitarian needs of refugee children in Europe? What is Save the Children doing to help children on the move through Europe?**

Children and families are on the move at unprecedented numbers, creating the highest level of refugee children since World War II. Nearly 60 million are fleeing war, persecution and extreme poverty – half of them are children who remain the most vulnerable. They are homeless, frightened and have witnessed unspeakable horrors. Transit countries are overwhelmed by the arrival of thousands of refugees.

With the experience of almost hundred years, Save the Children quickly moved to meet the growing needs of children and families on the moves and responds to the child refugee crisis along the route that refugees take. Save the Children provides families in Europe, countries of origin and transit countries with life-saving assistance and protection.

Save the Children's response towards the current European refugee crisis includes:

- **Child protection:** Children on the move are at great risk of being exploited and abused, especially separated children who are fleeing all alone. They urgently require specialised care and protection to help them recover from the extreme psychological and emotional distress they have been through. Save the Children establishes child friendly spaces in refugee camps and reception facilities (e.g. in Italy, Greece and Croatia), where children receive specialised psychological support and are protected from exploitation and abuse. We identify and care for unaccompanied children and where possible reunite them with their families.
- **Education:** Children fleeing conflict, persecution and poverty have in many cases never seen the inside of a classroom. They urgently need the safety, stability and structure a positive learning environment can bring. In our child friendly spaces and temporary learning centres, we give children access to non-formal education, even in times of crisis. For example, we provide refugee children with recreational and learning activities in Italy, Norway, Sweden and other Northern and Western European countries.
- **Health & Nutrition:** We distribute drinking water, food parcels and daily hot meals to thousands of refugees across several countries in Europe. We are also supporting refugee families with medical assistance (including through our mobile health team).
- **Shelter & Non Food Items:** As temperatures drop, children and their families on the move are in urgent need of winterized shelters as well as warm clothes and blankets. Save the Children distributes winterized shelters, winter clothes and blankets in Greece, Serbia, Macedonia and other countries.

- **Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH):** The sanitary conditions in refugee camps, informal settlements and reception facilities are often precarious, which puts children and pregnant women at risk of potentially fatal diseases such as diarrhoea. Save the Children hands out hygiene kits (including soap, toothpaste and diapers, amongst other things). In our mother-and-baby-areas, which we establish in refugee camps and informal settlements, we provide pregnant and lactating women with a safe, clean and warm place to breastfeed, where they also receive information around nutrition and hygiene. In collaboration with the authorities (e.g. in Greece), we work towards improving sanitary infrastructure (showers, hot water, water pipes, sewage drains etc.) in reception facilities.

### About Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's largest independent children's rights organisation, working in more than 120 countries. Since 1919, Save the Children provides medical care, food, education and protection for children, regardless of their background, gender or religious beliefs. Save the Children is politically, ideologically, economically and religiously independent, so that they can permanently improve the living conditions of children and provide efficient and effective aid in war and conflict zones. Save the Children Switzerland is Zewo-certified.

### How is UNICEF responding to the humanitarian needs of refugee children in Europe? What is UNICEF doing to help children on the move through Europe?

The scale and complexity of the crisis is a unique challenge to governments and humanitarian agencies. With refugees transiting through countries in short periods of time, it has proven difficult to monitor and register them. In addition, there is a gulf between the number of people in need and the resources available to assist them.

UNICEF is focusing on the four most vulnerable categories of children – babies and small children, children separated from their parents or caregivers, unaccompanied children and adolescents, and those left behind because they do not have the means to seek refuge elsewhere. UNICEF's immediate appeal focuses on countries with the greatest number of children on the move, with scaled up interventions in Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and identifying entry points for support in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria.

UNICEF continues to step up its response to the refugee crisis in Europe.

In countries where children are **passing through**:

- UNICEF has established child friendly spaces and 'mother and baby' spaces in the FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia where children and their families can access psycho-social support, nutrition advice and support. They are also provided with hygiene and baby kits, blankets and winter clothes.

- UNICEF established child-friendly facilities for unaccompanied and separated children.
- UNICEF provides water and sanitation in reception centers or holding areas and public health information.
- UNICEF provides dignity and baby kits, supplementary feeding and other supplies for populations on the move.
- UNICEF mobile teams are screening, identifying and referring children in need of specialized child protection services.
- UNICEF is helping to train frontline workers, including social workers and NGO staff and assisting the tracing and reunification of children separated from their families or caregivers during the journey.
- UNICEF provides technical assistance to strengthen family tracing and reunification efforts and implementation of best interest determinations.
- UNICEF is procuring supplies and equipment for its winterization programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, focusing on the procurement of winter clothing and footwear for children and adolescents, blankets, as well as equipment including heating devices to improve conditions in all UNICEF supported child-friendly spaces.

In **industrialized countries** such as Greece, Italy and Germany, UNICEF stands ready to provide assistance requested by governments and has already undertaken a number of assessments to support local authorities facing unprecedented numbers of refugees. As these assessments are concluded, UNICEF is ready to provide further assistance as required, in line with its expertise. UNICEF response aims also to include support in countries of eventual destination where there may be significant relocation and resettlement of refugees, and countries where new refugee movements could appear.

#### **About UNICEF**

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. UNICEF is financed solely through voluntary contributions. The Swiss Committee for UNICEF is UNICEF's representation in Switzerland. UNICEF Switzerland has been working for children for over 50 years, at home and abroad.