



A child is a child

Protecting children on the move from violence, abuse and exploitation

Executive Summary

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Millions of children are on the move across international borders – fleeing violence and conflict, disaster or poverty, in pursuit of a better life. Hundreds of thousands move on their own. When they encounter few opportunities to move legally, children resort to dangerous routes and engage smugglers to help them cross borders. Serious gaps in the laws, policies and services meant to protect children on the move further leave refugee and migrant children bereft of protection and care. Deprived, unprotected, and often alone, children on the move can become easy prey for traffickers and others who abuse and exploit them.

Alarming numbers of children are moving alone

Many children move alone and face particularly grave risks. In parts of the world, the number of children moving on their own has skyrocketed. On the dangerous Central Mediterranean Sea passage from North Africa to Europe, 92 per cent of children who arrived in Italy in 2016 and the first two months of 2017 were unaccompanied, up from 75 per cent in 2015. At least 300,000 unaccompanied and separated children moving across borders were registered in 80 countries in 2015–2016 – a near fivefold increase from 66,000 in 2010–2011. The total number of unaccompanied and separated children on the move worldwide is likely much higher.

Specific reasons motivate children to undertake journeys alone. Many seek to reunite with family members already abroad. Others pursue their families' aspirations for this generation to have a better life. Perceptions of the potential benefits of children moving, especially to certain destinations, filter through social networks. Other factors include family breakdown, domestic violence, child marriage and forced conscription.

Without safe and legal pathways, children's journeys are rife with risk and exploitation

Whatever their motivation, children often find few opportunities to move legally. Family reunification, humanitarian visas and refugee resettlement spots, and work or study visas are out of reach for most. But barriers to legal migration do not stop people from moving, they only push them underground.

Wherever families and children desperate to move encounter barriers, smuggling in human beings thrives. Smugglers range from people helping others in need for a fee to organized criminal networks that traffick children into hazardous and exploitative situations.

Once children and families place their fates in the hands of smugglers, the transaction can readily take a turn towards abuse or exploitation – especially when children and families incur debts to pay smugglers' fees. Europol estimates that 20 per cent of suspected smugglers on their radar have ties to human trafficking – they help children cross borders, only to sell them into exploitation, sometimes akin to contemporary forms of slavery.

Some routes are particularly rife with risks. In a recent International Organization for Migration survey, over three-quarters of 1,600 children aged 14–17 who arrived in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route reported experiences such as being held against their will or being forced to work without pay at some point during their journeys – indications that they may have been trafficked or otherwise exploited. Traffickers and other exploiters thrive especially where state institutions are weak, where organized crime abounds, and also where migrants become stuck and desperate.

As States struggle to manage migration, children fall through the cracks

As large numbers of refugees and migrants arrive, children among them are routinely left in conditions that would be deemed unacceptable for native-born children. They languish in overcrowded shelters, end up in makeshift camps or are left exposed to the dangers of life on the streets. Sometimes, compatriots force them to work under exploitative conditions in exchange for shelter and food. Mistrust of authorities and fear of detention and deportation keep children from coming forward to seek protection and support.

Harsh border enforcement policies leave children in limbo and exacerbate their risk of exploitation

Border closures and aggressive pushback measures can leave children and their families stranded in countries where they do not want to stay, are not welcome, or have few prospects. Unable to move on or go back, they are trapped in prolonged limbo that feeds anxiety, despair and self-harm, as documented among children in Greece and in Australian processing facilities in Nauru.

Some children avoid authorities for fear of detention, living in the streets under abysmal conditions and sometimes selling sex or resorting to petty crime as they save up to pay smugglers to facilitate their onward journeys.

Children on the move are children, first and foremost – they need protection

The Convention on the Rights of the Child protects every child, everywhere. All children, regardless of legal status, nationality or statelessness, have the right to be protected from harm, obtain such essential services as health care and education, be with their families, and have their best interests guide decisions that affect them.

Yet in practice, children on the move often suffer violations of their rights because of their migrant status. The way children on the move are treated varies widely from State to State, and the responsibility to care for them often falls too heavily on poorer countries. Even children fleeing violence and conflict often do not get the protection they need, particularly when refugee protection is curtailed in law or practice.

Sharing, not shifting, the responsibility to protect children on the move

The current system is failing refugee and migrant children. States have a responsibility to uphold their rights and protect all children within their borders, without exception.

When world leaders adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016, they acknowledged the urgent and unmet needs of vulnerable child migrants – especially unaccompanied and separated children – who do not qualify for international protection as refugees and who may need assistance.

It is now time to act.

Children's rights are not confined by national borders. Where conflict or disaster, neglect, abuse and marginalization drive children to move, their rights move with them. Leadership is urgently required to forge global agreement on how to protect and guarantee the rights of children as they move, no matter who or where they are.

Alarming numbers of children are moving on their own

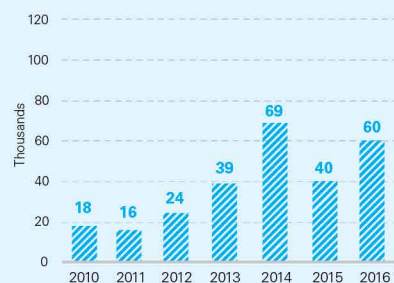
Selected numbers of unaccompanied and separated children in 2015 and 2016

Note: numbers of unaccompanied and separated children on this map cannot be combined to yield a global figure, as there may be some overlap between the groups depicted below

North America

100,000
unaccompanied and separated children were apprehended at the Mexico-U.S. border in 2015 and 2016

Number of unaccompanied and separated children apprehended by authorities at the southwest U.S. border, 2010–2016



Note: U.S. Customs and Border Protection data refer to fiscal years, running from October to September – and are denoted by the year it ends.
Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2016 and 2017.



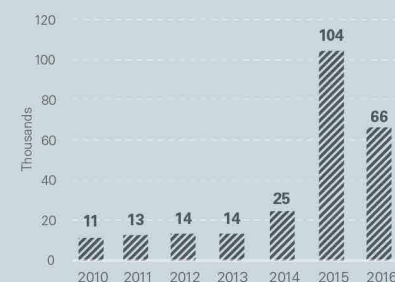
170,000
unaccompanied and separated children applied for asylum in Europe in 2015 and 2016

Europe

Asia

Africa

Number of unaccompanied and separated children applying for asylum, 2010–2016



Note: "Europe" refers to the 28 countries of the European Union and the four countries of the European Free Trade Association. Data include first-time applicants only.
Source: Eurostat, 2017.



19,000
unaccompanied and separated children applied for asylum in other countries in 2015

Number of unaccompanied and separated children applying for asylum in other countries, 2010–2015



Note: "Other" refers to non-European countries for which data are available depending on the year, the data refer to between 37 and 53 countries.
Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2017.



90,000
unaccompanied and separated children were displaced internally and across borders in the Horn of Africa in 2015

Note: Includes internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees within Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan.
Source: Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), 2016.

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area has not yet been determined.

More than 21,000 migrants have died along major mixed migration routes since 2014

Recorded deaths of migrants worldwide since 2014

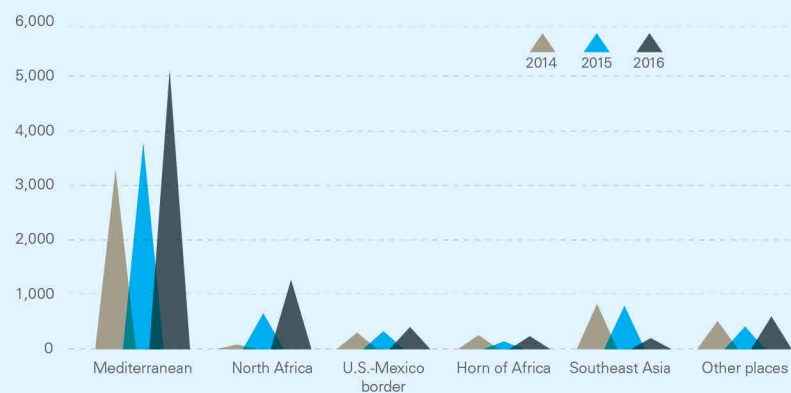
- 1–9 deaths
- 10–99 deaths
- 100–750 deaths

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area has not yet been determined.

Note: Every circle represents one incident, with a varying number of deaths: 1–9 deaths (n=1900), 10–99 deaths (n=262), 100–750 deaths (n=40), where n is the number of incidents.

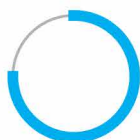
Source: International Organization for Migration, dataset with estimated coordinates, <<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>>, accessed 11 April 2017.

Recorded migrant deaths by year and region, 2014–2016



For children on the move, trafficking is a serious risk

Recent surveys indicate that:



75% of children aged 14–17 arriving in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route answered “yes”



Around **20%** of those arriving in Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean route answered “yes”

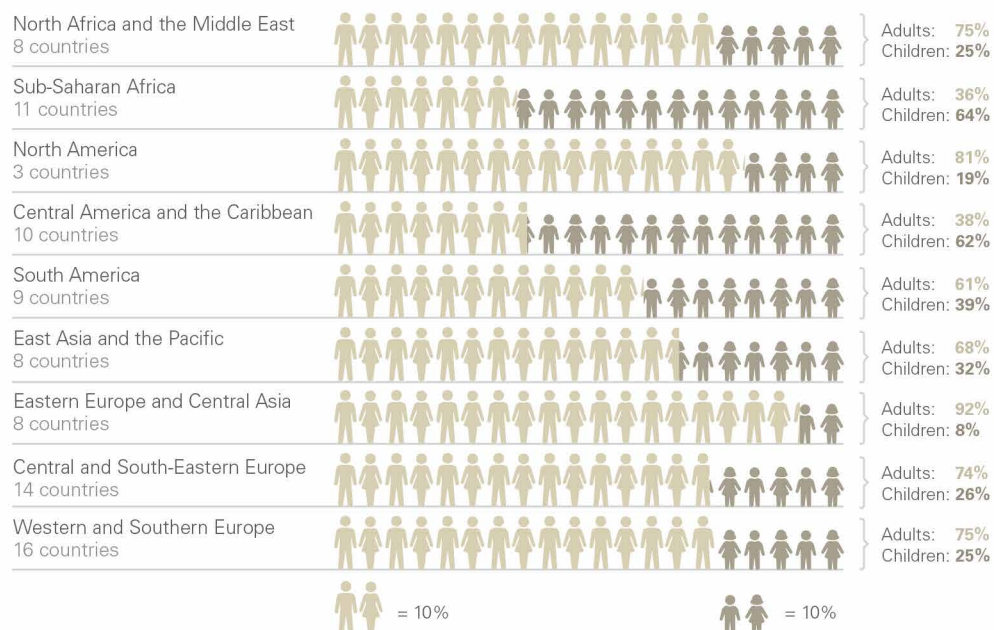
...to at least one of the five indicators associated with trafficking and other exploitative practices – like **being forced to work or being held against their will**.

Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix Flow Monitoring Surveys, 2016, IOM analysis



Children make up to two-thirds of detected trafficking victims in some regions

Shares of adults and children among detected trafficking victims, by region, 2014 (or most recent)



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2016.

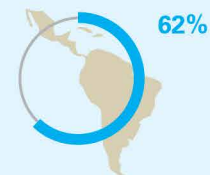
Children made up **over a quarter** of detected trafficking victims worldwide in 2014.



Countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Central America and the Caribbean detect, by far, **more child victims** than adult victims. In 2014, children accounted for:



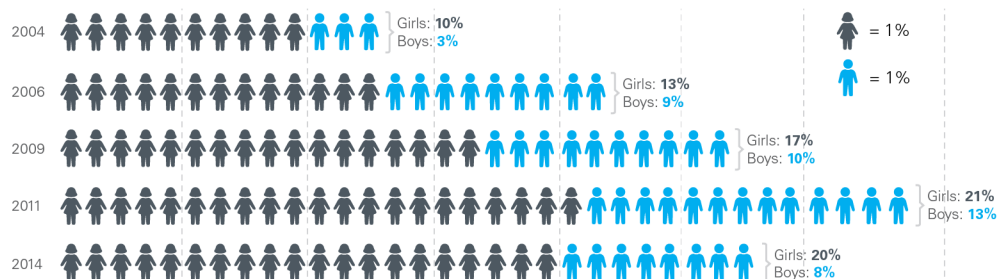
64% of detected trafficking victims in sub-Saharan Africa.



...and **62%** in Central America and the Caribbean.

Girls make up a larger proportion of detected trafficking victims than boys

Shares of children among detected trafficking victims, by gender, selected years



Girls made up **20%** of detected trafficking victims in 2014, while boys made up 8%.



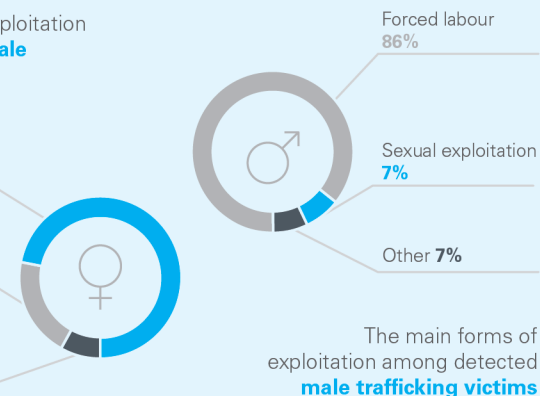
The main forms of exploitation among detected trafficking victims differ by gender

The main forms of exploitation among detected **female trafficking victims**

Sexual exploitation
72%

Forced labour
20%

Other **8%**



Forced labour
86%

Sexual exploitation
7%

Other **7%**

Trafficking victims are exploited in many ways; overall, the most commonly detected forms of exploitation are trafficking for:



Sexual exploitation
54%



Forced labour
38%

Other
8%



No country is immune from human trafficking

Victims are trafficked within countries, between neighbouring countries and across continents. In 2012–2014:



More than 500 different trafficking flows were detected.



Over **60,000 victims** were detected in more than **100 countries and territories**.² Countless others remain undetected.



A clear majority of victims – **57%** – are trafficked **across at least one international border**.³

2. The total number of victims of trafficking in persons remains unknown given the challenges in collecting data – particularly for 'hidden' populations not detected by government officials or relevant organizations. The latest available global data on detected trafficking cases refers to the period 2012–2014. The actual number can be assumed to be significantly higher.
3. Data from detected trafficking cases in 2012–2014.

Migrant smuggling thrives around the world, where border enforcement regimes are strict, opportunities for legal passage are few and families and children are eager, or desperate, to leave



It is estimated that **90%** of irregular migrants entering Europe in 2015 **used facilitation services** at some point during their journey. In most cases, these were provided by migrant smuggling networks¹



Europol has intelligence on nearly **40,000 suspected smugglers**²

Paid with cash **52%**

Other **13%**



Paid by family in Europe **16%**

Paid in *hawala*³ **20%**

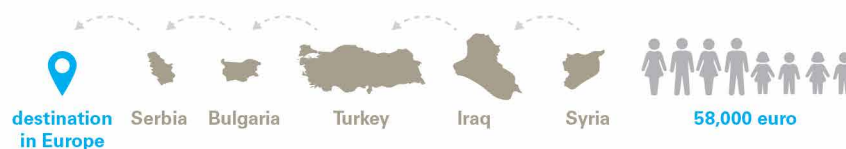
Preferred means of payment for facilitation services

Source: Europol, Migrant Smuggling in the EU, 2016; Joint Europol-INTEROL Report Migrant Smuggling Networks, 2016.



Migrant smugglers' fees vary tremendously, depending on the country of origin and the route to Europe

A family of five coming from Afghanistan might pay **8,000-11,000 euro...**



...while a family of eight from Syria might pay as much as **58,000 euro**⁴

^{1,2} Europol, 2016.

³ *Hawala* is a payment system where money is paid to an agent who then instructs another agent, located elsewhere, to pay the recipient.

⁴ Reuters, 2017.