

Refugee and Migrant Children via Mixed Migration Routes in Europe Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated

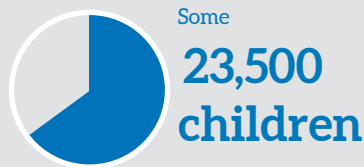
Overview of Trends
January to December 2022



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arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Cyprus and Malta in 2022 (**18% girls and 82% boys**) – **46%** higher than total number of arrivals in 2021 (24,147).



who arrived in Europe in 2022 were unaccompanied or separated (**67% of total**). 70% of children who arrived in Italy in 2022 were unaccompanied or separated



(52% of the total) were in resettlement procedures in Europe in 2022.



Of all the children who sought international protection in Europe in 2022, some 158,685 or 69% were registered in just four countries: **Germany (35%), France (15%), Austria (10%) and Spain (9%)**.

Arrivals to Europe in 2022¹

Some **35,170** children arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain. Of these, **23,514 (67%)** were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC).² Child arrivals increased by **46% in 2022** compared to **2021 (24,147)**.

Greece

In 2022, some 4,616³ children arrived by land and sea in Greece, including 2,231 UASC (48%). Due to the high number of people arriving in 2022, the number of children also increased – a two-fold increase compared to children arriving in 2021 (2,258). The number of children arriving unaccompanied or separated also increased – at three-fold increase compared to 2021 (638). Most of the children, including UASC, were from Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Spain

In 2022, some 4,369 children were estimated to have arrived by land and sea, a 5% increase compared to 2021 (4,173).⁴ Of these, 3,466 were UASC (79%), 21% more than in 2021 (2,856). According to estimates, most of the children, including UASC, originated from Morocco, Algeria, Senegal, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali.

Italy

Some 20,222 children arrived in 2022, a 53% increase compared to 2021 (13,203). Of these, 70% (14,071) were UASC, a proportion consistent with recent years. Most of the children, including UASC, originated from Egypt, Tunisia, Afghanistan, and Côte d'Ivoire.⁵

Bulgaria

Some 5,141 children lodged an asylum application in 2022, 65% of whom were UASC (3,348). Most of these asylum-seeking children originated from Afghanistan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Iraq.⁶

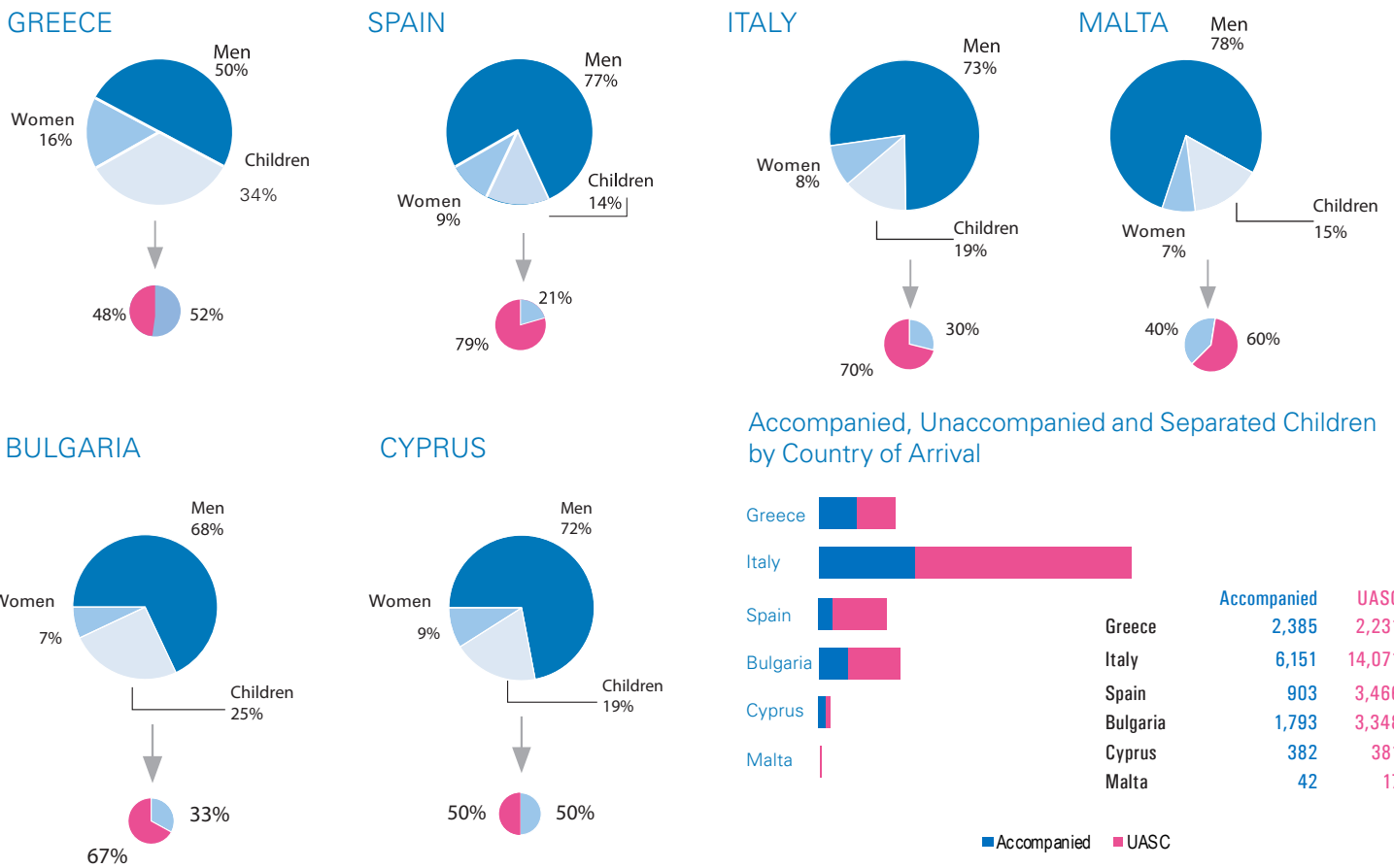
Malta

In 2022, some 59⁷ children, including 17 UASC (29%), arrived following search and rescue operations at sea. The number of child arrivals, including UASC, in 2022 was 76% lower compared to 2021 (248). Most of the children, including UASC, originated from Syrian Arab Republic and Bangladesh.

Cyprus

Some 763 children arrived by sea in 2022, including 381 UASC. All of the children, including UASC, who arrived by sea originated from the Syrian Arab Republic.

Demographic of arrivals, including accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children

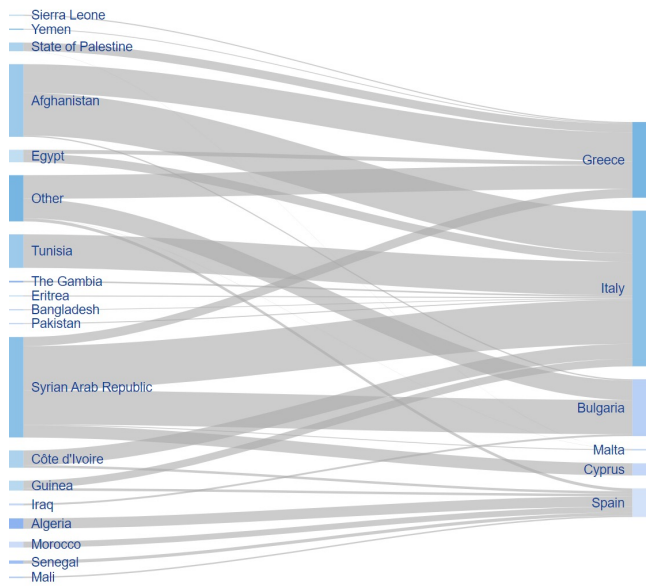


Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA; Italian Ministry of Interior; Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees; Spanish Ministry of Interior (MOI) and UNCHR estimates, Spanish Ombudsman; Maltese Immigration Police; and Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement, Malta (MHSE).

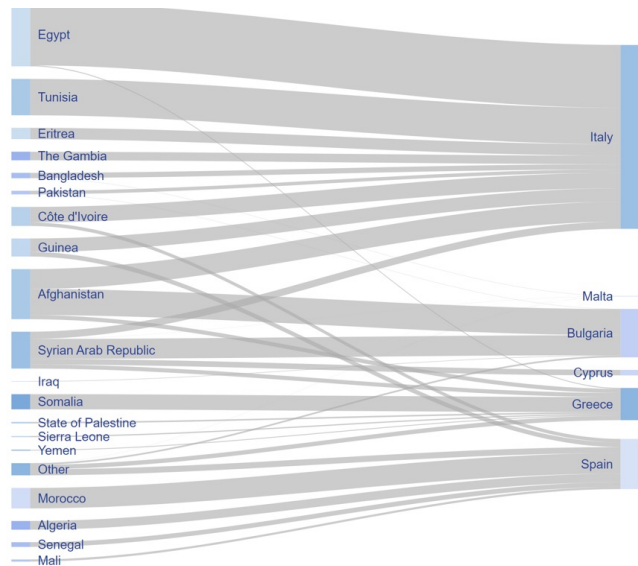


Nationality of accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children by country of arrival

Accompanied children by country of origin and arrival



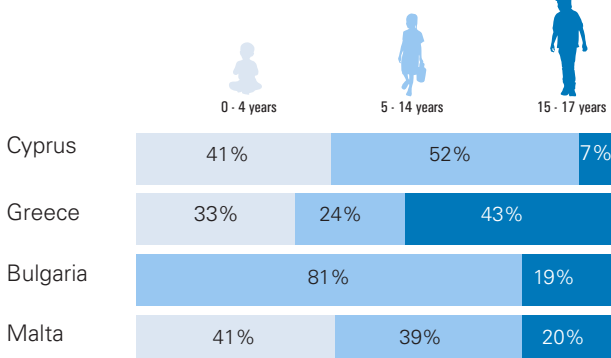
UASC by country of origin and arrival



Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA; Italian Ministry of Interior; Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees; Spanish Ministry of Interior (MOI) and UNCHR estimates, Spanish Ombudsman; Maltese Immigration Police; and Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement, Malta (MHSE).

Age and gender breakdown of all children by country of arrival

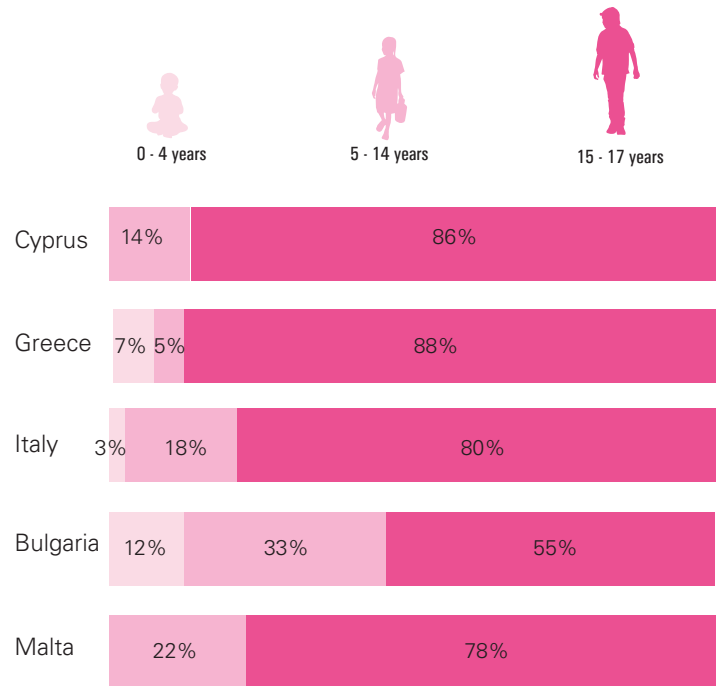
Accompanied children – Age breakdown



Among the 4,800 accompanied children who arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Malta in 2022, 21% were 0-4 years old, 48% were 5-14 years old and 31% were 15-17 years old. The age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy and Spain is not available.

Unaccompanied children – Age breakdown

Most UASC who arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta in 2022 were between 15 and 17 years old (76% overall). Age disaggregated data on children arriving in Spain is not available.

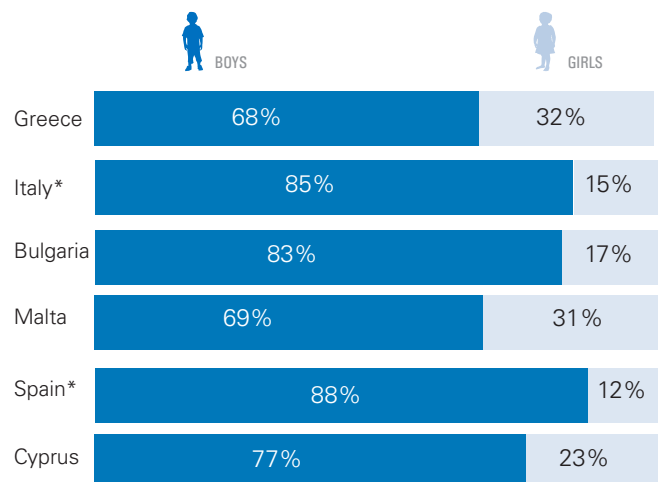


Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies on UASC in reception, Spanish Ministry of Interior (MOI), Spanish Ombudsman, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Maltese Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE).

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

Gender breakdown of children by country of arrival

Overall, the proportion of boys remains high, comprising 82% of all children who arrived via the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean and Northwest African maritime routes in 2022. The percentage of boys arriving in Bulgaria, Italy, Cyprus and Spain was significantly higher than average: 83% in Bulgaria, 85% in Italy, 77% in Cyprus, and 88% in Spain. Meanwhile, the percentage of girls arriving in Greece increased from 28% in 2021 to 32% in 2022.



* For Italy, the calculation is based on the estimated 20,089 UASC registered in the reception system in 2022, according to the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. These also include children who had not arrived by land or sea to Italy on the Central Mediterranean route, such as the 5,042 Ukrainian unaccompanied children arrived from Ukraine and reported to be in reception centres as of the end of 2022.

* Spain: The Committee on the Rights of the Child,⁸ the EUAA, the Spanish Ombudsman⁹ and other institutions have repeatedly questioned the reliability of the age tests used in Spain based on the existence of various violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular, the right to identity, the right to be heard, and the right to special protection of children deprived of their family environment. In response to this reality, the Government created an expert Commission to design a new procedure with more guarantees that prepared a draft Law regulating the age assessment procedure, which has not been approved by the General Courts at the reporting date.

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN'S JOURNEYS TO EUROPE

In 2022, IOM interviewed 2,374 refugees and migrants¹¹ who arrived by sea in Spain (landing on the Peninsular coasts or on the Canary Islands) and by land in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo¹². Out of the total surveys conducted, 1,021 were with adolescents and young adults between 14 and 24 years of age. Young adults represent about 42% of total respondents in Spain (377 interviews with respondents between 18 and 24 years old). Adolescents and young adults are also 44% of total respondents in the Western Balkans (WB): 616 respondents were aged 18 to 24 years old, and 28 were aged 14 to 17 years old.

Western Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic routes

Sociodemographic profile

In Spain, 81% of the young migrants and refugees surveyed were males, while 19% were females. Almost one third (31%) of them were below 20 years of age at the time of the survey. About 15% of them reported to have children with them or left behind in the country of origin. Female young adults more frequently were with children than their male counterparts (50% versus 7%, respectively). Almost one fifth of all young migrants and refugees interviewed left their origin country when they were below 18 years of age. Out of the total young adult respondents who arrived via the Western Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic route (377), 71% originated from countries in West and Central Africa, followed by 27% from North Africa and 2% from Syrian Arab Republic, Bangladesh and Sudan. Top nationalities were Guinea (18% - mostly from Conakry, Mamou, Kindia regions), Côte d'Ivoire (16% - from Abidjan District, Sassandra-Marahoue and Bas-Sassandra regions) and Morocco (15% - Grand Casablanca, Marrakech-Tensift-Al Haouz, Taza-Al Hoceima-Taoute), followed by Algeria, Senegal and Mali (11% each). While among men there were more Moroccans (17%), Guineans (16%), Senegalese and Malians (13% each), almost half of the women were from Côte d'Ivoire (44%), followed by those from Guinea (26%) and Morocco (10%).

Almost half (48%) of young adults who arrived to Spain in 2022 reported to have completed lower secondary education, 19% primary education, 20% no formal education, 4% religious or other types of non-formal education, and the remaining 9% higher secondary or tertiary education. Almost two thirds (65%) reported to be unemployed and looking for a job before leaving their origin country, followed by 24% who were employed, 6% self-employed, 4% studying, 1% unemployed and not looking for a job and 1% doing an apprentice.

Journey

Most respondents travelled alone (90%), while 6% travelled with at least one family member (siblings or children mainly) and 4% with a group of non-family members. About 14% (53) reported to have spent more than one year in a country different than that of origin before moving again toward Europe.

Reasons and intentions

More than half (53%) of young respondents in Spain cited economic reasons as the primary motivation for leaving their country of origin, followed by being subject to or threatened with personal violence (28%), by war and conflict (11%), and slow environmental changes (5%) and

reasons related to safety and security, domestic violence and abuses, and family disputes, lack of family at all, as well as the lack of freedom of expression or democracy were cited as the most common.

At the time of departing from country of origin, the most common intended destinations were Spain (59%), France (23%), Morocco (4%), followed by other European countries. At the time of the interview, the most common final intended destination remained mainly Spain (57%) and France (28%), while the rest of respondents mentioned the intention to reach other European countries (mainly Germany, Italy, Belgium, the UK and Sweden).

Among the main challenges and risks reported while travelling toward Spain were robbery (12%), hunger (13%), financial problems (16%), lack of shelter (10%), health problems and having their documents stolen (9% each). Among their most pressing needs, young migrants and refugees reported employment, accommodation, legal assistance, the possibility to contact family and the possibility to continue the journey.

Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes

Sociodemographic profile

Overall, 98% of adolescents and young migrants and refugees surveyed in the WB in 2022 were males (632) and 2% (12) were females. About 5% (28) were children between 14 and 17 years of age, 18% (117) were between 18 and 19 years old, and the remaining 77% (499) were between 20 and 24 years old at the time of the survey. Some 4% (4 females, 21 males) reported to have children.

Out of the surveyed adolescents and young adults along the WB route (644), more than half (56%) originated from South-West and South-Asia, 25% from the Middle East, 14% from North Africa and 5% from sub-Saharan Africa. Respondents from Afghanistan (26%) and Syrian Arab Republic (24%) made half of the sample, followed by those from Pakistan (16%), Morocco (12%), India (8%), Bangladesh (3%), Burundi (2%) and others (9%). Among Afghans, Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Ghazni were the main reported provinces of origin, most Syrians were from Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor, Dar'a, Homs, Idleb and among Pakistanis, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were the most common provinces of origin. Some 7% of children and young adults reported to have been internally displaced before departing abroad: 25 Afghans, nine Syrians, five Pakistani, one Cameroonian, one Burundian and one Moroccan.

Some 41% of adolescents and young adults surveyed in the WB have completed lower secondary education, followed by 37% who completed primary education, 9% upper secondary education, 9% no formal education and the remaining 4% other types of education. More than half (52%) reported to be unemployed and looking for a job before leaving their origin country, followed by 26% who were employed or self-employed, 11% who were students and the remaining who were unemployed but not looking for a job or preferred not to answer (11%).

Journey

About 35% of children and young adults reported to have travelled alone, while 55% travelled with a group of non-family members, 8% with at least one family member (siblings or spouse and children mainly) and 2% with facilitators. About 24% of respondents reported to have departed from a country different than that of origin before moving again toward Europe: most reported to have departed from Türkiye and Greece after having spent more than one year there.

Reasons and intentions

Almost half of the children and young adults (47%) reported war and conflict as the primary reason for leaving their country of origin, followed by economic motivations (31%), slow environmental changes (8%), being subject to or threatened with personal violence (4%), and others (10%). Among the reasons related to safety and security, violent family disputes, domestic violence, discrimination, religious, sexual, and gender were cited as the most common.

At the beginning of the journey, the most common intended destinations were Germany (30%), Italy (18%), France (16%), Greece (9%) Netherlands (5%), Austria (4%), the United Kingdom and Belgium (3% each) and other European countries. Similar shares of preferences for intended final destinations were reported at the moment of the interview.

Among the main challenges and risks reported by respondents while travelling toward Europe, there were lack of shelter (reported by 25% of the total), hunger (24%), financial problems (22%), robbery (16%), health problems (9%, mostly leg injuries, fever, stomach infections) and documents stolen (8%). Among their most pressing needs, young migrants and refugees reported food, accommodation/shelter, cash assistance, medical assistance, clothing and the possibility to continue the journey.

Overall, young migrant and refugee respondents were also asked about their experiences of violence, exploitation and abuse they may have lived during the journey¹³. About 18% reported to have suffered physical violence, while smaller shares reported to have worked without being paid (6%) or to have been forced to work (2%). Greece, Türkiye, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Serbia were the countries where most of the reported violence and abuses occurred.

Source: IOM's DTM Europe — Flow Monitoring Surveys in Spain, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo¹² (2022)

Asylum applications and decisions

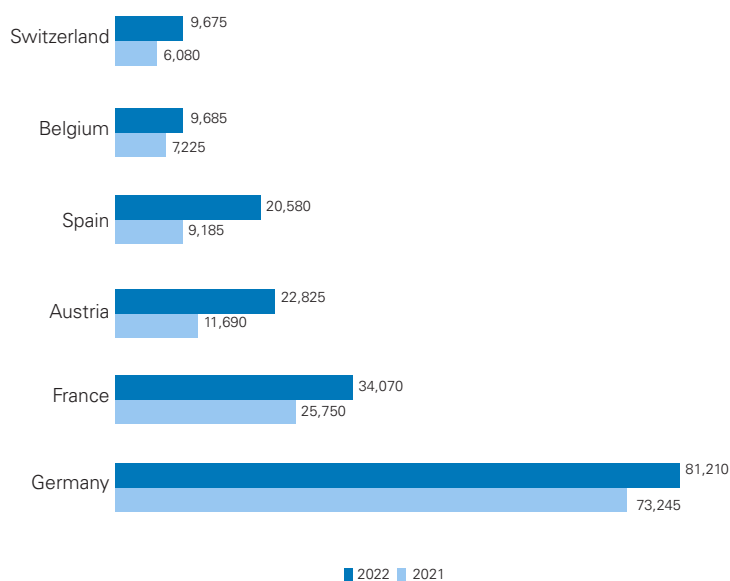
Asylum applicants

In 2022, European countries¹⁴ reported that 917,130¹⁵ new asylum-seekers (first-time applicants¹⁶) applied for international protection. This represents an increase by 363,725 (or 66%) from 2021 (553,405). About one-fourth of first-time asylum applicants were children (234,710), a 35% increase from 2021 (174,385). Some 94,000 (or 41%) of all new asylum-seeking children were girls.

Germany, France, Austria, Spain, Belgium and Switzerland recorded the largest numbers of new asylum applications from children, receiving more than three-fourths of all first-time child asylum applicants in Europe.

The five main citizenships were Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, Turkish, and Venezuelans, who accounted to 49% of the total first-time asylum applicant children in 2022.

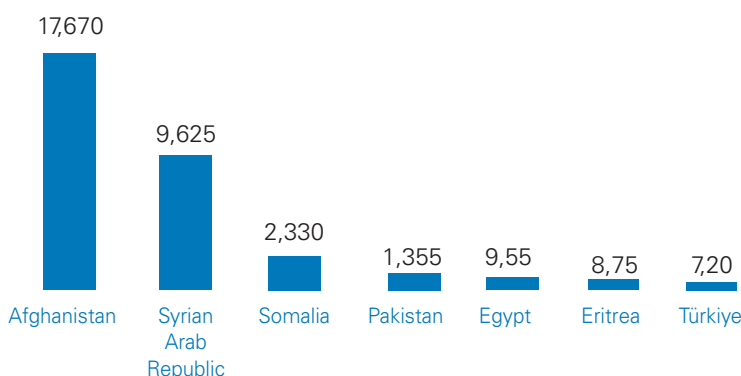
Top six countries received new asylum applications from children



Asylum applicants as unaccompanied children

In 2022, 42,280 unaccompanied children applied for asylum, which is 60% more than in 2021 (26,395) and 197% more than in 2020 (14,225). Some 7% were girls, while 93% were boys. Again, Afghanistan (45%) stood as the leading country of origin of asylum-seeking children who are considered to be unaccompanied followed by the Syrian Arab Republic (24%) and Somalia (6%). These three countries accounted for 75% of the total in 2022.

Top countries of origin of unaccompanied children applying for asylum



First-instance decisions on child asylum applications

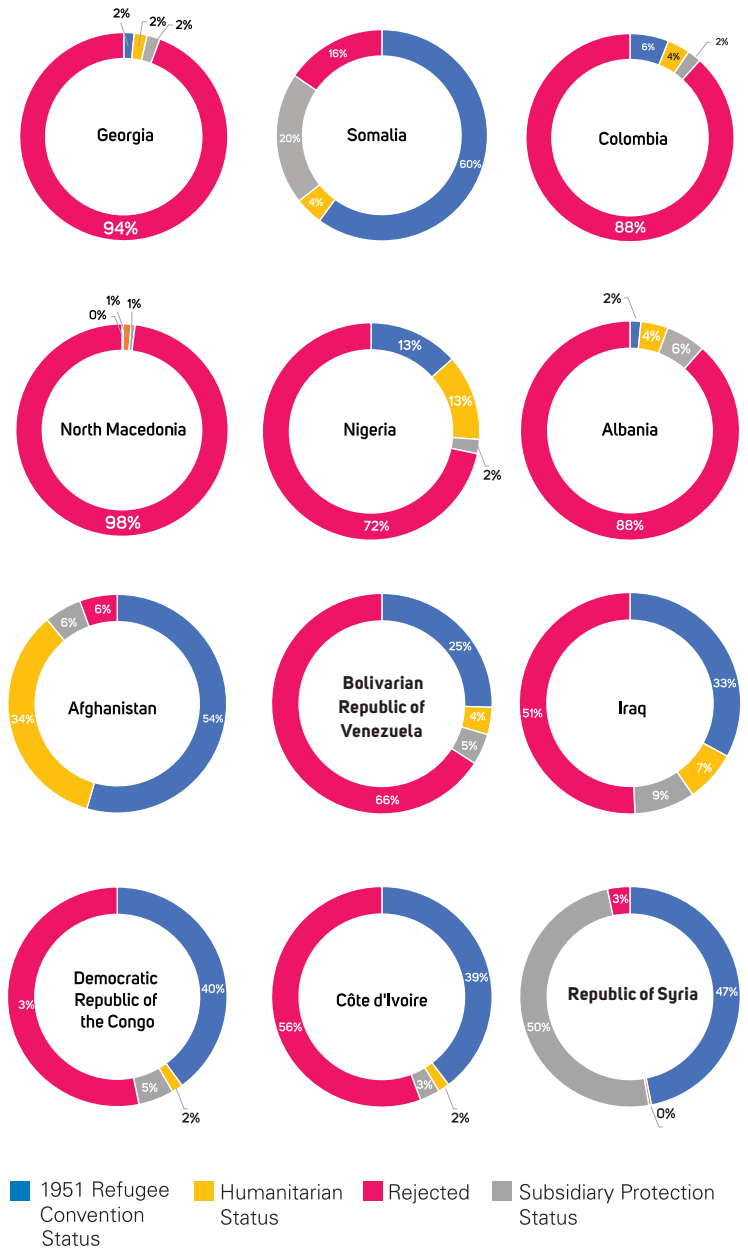
In 2022, national authorities across the European countries issued 184,040 first-instance decisions on child asylum applications, a 24% increase from 2021 (148,700). Of these, 124,195, or 67% were positive decisions, a seven percent points increase from 2021. Germany (47%), France (17%), Greece (8%) and Spain (6%) contributed three-fourth of the first-instance total decisions on children's asylum applications.

In absolute numbers, Germany issued the most positive decisions (63,730) granting refugee status, humanitarian status and subsidiary protection to Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi children, followed by France who issued the second most positive decisions (13,800) granting refugee status to Afghan, Ivorian and Guinean asylum-seeking children. Meanwhile, Spain issued the third most positive decisions (7,255) granting humanitarian status to the Republic of Venezuela children.

Though refugee and subsidiary protection status are defined by EU law, humanitarian reasons are specific to national legislation and not applicable in all Member States. Out of 124,195 children who received a positive decision in the first instance, 56% were granted refugee status (67% in 2021), 27% subsidiary protection (22% in 2021) and 18% humanitarian status (11% in 2021).

About 33% of all first-time asylum-seeking children who applied for international protection were rejected - seven percent less than in 2021. Among the top countries of origin, the adverse first-instance decisions on their applications were notably higher for children from the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova (98% each), Georgia (94%), Albania (89%), Colombia (88%), Nigeria (72%), Côte d'Ivoire (56%) and Iraq (51%).

Decisions on child asylum applications in 2022, by country of origin

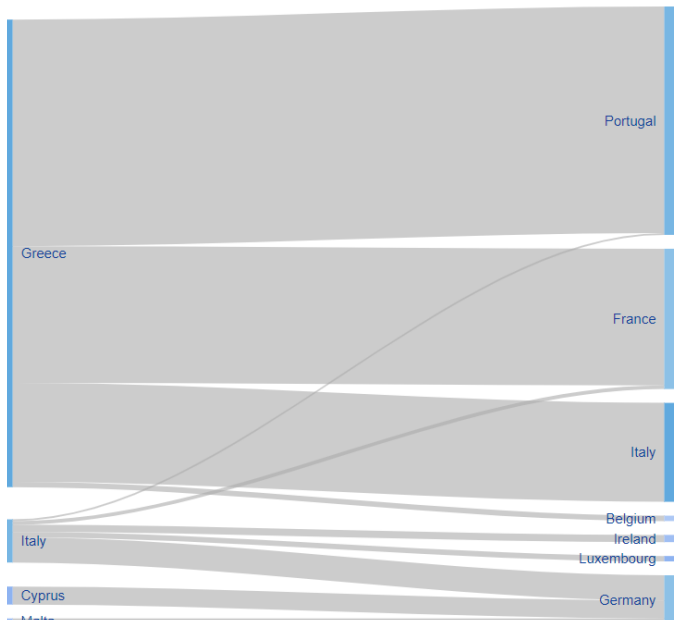


Relocation

Relocation has remained an important means of supporting vulnerable migrants and refugees in Europe, including UASC, and enhancing solidarity among States.

In 2022, IOM continued its support to relocation under existing schemes in Greece, Malta and Italy and – as a follow up to the adoption of the Solidarity Declaration in June 2022 – under the newly adopted Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism. In close cooperation with involved governments and partner agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF and EUAA, and under overall coordination by DG HOME a total of 710 individuals were assisted with voluntary relocation from Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Italy to 8 European countries. This is four times less than the 2,853 beneficiaries relocated in 2021.

Some 297 children (42% of the 710 in total) were relocated from Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Malta to other European countries in 2022. Of them, 210 were boys and 87 girls. This included 60 cases relocated from Greece who aged-out during the process. Among all the relocated children, 134 were UASC (47% of the total) and were relocated from Greece to Portugal (126), France (7) and Italy (1).



Note: Note: Among the children relocated from Greece in 2022, there were 60 cases who aged-out during the process.

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) for Children and UASC

In 2022, IOM provided voluntary return support to 19,550 migrants from European Economic Area (EEA) countries, the United Kingdom and Switzerland (28% of all migrants assisted globally, who were almost 70 thousand) to their origin countries. Of these, 40% (7,874) were assisted in returning from Germany alone, and about 22% (4,302) were children, including 33 UASC.

Of all AVRR beneficiaries assisted in returning from the EEA region, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, around 48% (9,401) returned to countries in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; 15% (3,023) to Asia and the Pacific, 13% (2,623) to the Middle East and North Africa, 11% (2,210) to South America and the rest, 12% (2,293), to other regions.

Among the 4,302 children assisted in returning from the EEA region, their main countries of nationality were North Macedonia, Georgia, Albania, Iraq, Brazil, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Russian Federation and Mongolia.

Children resettled in Europe

Of the 23,900 people in resettlement procedures in Europe in 2022, 52% were children (28% boys and 24% girls). Germany, Sweden, France, Norway, and the Netherlands were the main countries in Europe considering children's resettlement cases. Syrians, Congolese (Democratic Republic of Congo), Afghans, and Sudanese were the most common nationalities of children whose cases were being considered for resettlement by European States.



Definitions:

"A **child** means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." [\[source\]](#)

"Separated children are **children** (...) who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members." [\[source\]](#)

"Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) are children (...) who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so." [\[source\]](#)

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

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

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

About the factsheet

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

The document provides an overview of the situation in Europe with regards to refugee and migrant children (accompanied and UASC). It compiles key child-related data based on available official sources: arrival, asylum applications, asylum decisions, profiling of arrivals, as well as relocation from Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Malta to other EU Member States.

The present factsheet covers the period January to December 2022, which provide up-to-date information on migrant and refugee children, including unaccompanied and separated children, who arrived via Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic routes in Europe.

Limitation of available data on children and UASC:

There is no comprehensive data on arrivals (both adults and children) in Europe, especially by land and air, as such movements are largely irregular and involve smuggling networks, which are difficult to track. If collected, data is rarely disaggregated by nationality, risk category, gender or age. Reliable data on the number of UASC either arriving or currently residing in different European countries is often unavailable. The number of asylum applications filed by UASC is used to provide an indication of trends but does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the caseload due to backlogs in national asylum systems, onward irregular movements or children not applying for asylum at all. In addition, due to different definitions and national procedures and practices, collecting accurate data on separated children specifically is very challenging (e.g. separated children being registered as either accompanied or unaccompanied). Eurostat data on asylum applications and decisions on children and UASC have been downloaded on 15 July 2023, and may be subject to consolidation.

Endnotes

1. Data on arrivals is partial due to the large scale of irregular movements. The data reflects both sea and land arrivals in Greece, land arrivals in Bulgaria, and sea arrivals in Cyprus, Italy, Malta and Spain. Data for Spain is based on the Ministry of Interior's statistics and UNHCR's estimates.
2. Separated children are children separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. Unaccompanied children are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so (IASC).
3. Arrival figures for Greece are collected in the framework of UNHCR's border activities and National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum (ESKESMA).
4. Data for Spain is based on the Ministry of Interior's statistics and UNHCR's estimates.
5. Data on sea arrivals to Italy is based on information received from the Italian Ministry of Interior.
6. Statistics for Bulgaria are collected by the State Agency for Refugees. Observations on data and trends that are not typically compiled by government institutions are collected by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.
7. Estimate on data provided by the Immigration Police and the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE), Malta. UASC figures are based on age declared by the refugees and migrants upon arrival. Not all persons who make such a declaration are recognized to be UASC by the authorities after the age assessment is completed.
8. Decisions adopted by the Committee in relation to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure regarding communications núm. 4/2016, núm. 11/2017, núm. 15/2017, núm. 16/2017, núm. 17/2017, núm. 21/2017, núm. 22/2017, núm. 24/2017, núm. 25/2017, núm. 27/2017, núm. 28/2017, núm. 37/2017, núm. 38/2017, núm. 40/2018, núm. 63/2018 y núm. 73/2019. In all of them, the Committee considers that the rights recognized by the Convention for children have been violated.
9. Ombudsman, "Los niños y los adolescentes en el informe del Defensor del Pueblo de 2021", available in Spanish at: <https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Ni-%C3%B1os-y-adolescentes-en-el-IA-2021.pdf>
10. Draft Law regulating the age assessment procedure, available in Spanish at: <https://www.mjusticia.gob.es/es/AreaTematica/ActividadLegislativa/Documents/APL%20procedimiento%20evaluacion%20de%20la%20edad.pdf>
11. IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring Surveys were carried out with migrants and refugees travelling to Europe through a network of data collectors deployed more than 50 flow monitoring points located on entry, transit and exit locations in Spain and the Western Balkan region. In Spain, only adults were interviewed. For more information and country-level reports, please see here.
12. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).
13. The list of indicators considered included is: Having worked without getting the expected payment; Being forced to work; Offers of an arranged marriage; Being kept at a certain location against their will; Experienced some form of physical violence; Observed threats with sexual violence.
14. European Union Member States + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
15. Data extracted on 11 July 2023.
16. A first-time applicant is a person who lodge an application for asylum for the first time in a given European country.

Maps in this file are for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM.

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