UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM

MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN VIA MIXED MIGRATION ROUTES IN EUROPE

Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated

OVERVIEW OF TRENDS – 2025

A child and his father in a reception center on the island of Lampedusa, Italy. © UNICEF 2023

Highlights

31,100 children

31,100 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, and Malta in 2025 (22% girls and 78% boys).[1] This was 25 per cent less than the total number of child arrivals in 2024 (41,700).

20,800 unaccompanied children

More than two thirds of all children who arrived in Europe in 2025 – 20,800 (67%) – were recorded as unaccompanied children (UAC). The highest proportion of UAC arrived in Italy and Spain, where 86 per cent of child arrivals were UAC.

3,400 children in resettlement

In 2025, children made up half of the 6,800 people undergoing resettlement procedures in Europe (3,400), compared with 8,900 children among 17,800 people in 2024. Of them, 51 per cent were girls and 49 per cent were boys.

214,600 children sought international protection in Europe in 2025

Some 79 per cent were registered as first-time applicants. Out of the total, around 71 per cent were first-time asylum applicants in just four countries: Germany (30%), France (19%), Spain (15%), and Greece (7%).[2]

Arrivals in Europe in 2025[3]

Some 31,103 children arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain by sea and by land in 2025. Of these, 20,777 (67%) were UAC.[4] Overall, child arrivals decreased by 25 per cent compared to 2024 (41,779) but the share of UAC increased (51% in 2024).

Italy

In 2025, 14,083 children arrived in Italy by sea.[5] Out of all children registered at arrival, 86 per cent (12,177) were UAC. While overall arrivals to Italy remained stable between 2024 and 2025 (-0.5%), the number of children who arrived increased by 12 per cent compared to 2024 (12,594). Moreover, the share of UAC among children has also increased from 69 per cent in 2024 to 86 per cent in 2025. Most children, including UAC, were from Egypt, Eritrea, Somalia, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia.

Greece

In 2025, some 9,978 children arrived by sea and by land in Greece. About 30 per cent of these were UAC (3,007 children).[6] As overall arrivals in Greece decreased, the total number of child arrivals registered by Hellenic authorities also decreased by 41 per cent compared to 2024 (16,820 child arrivals). At the same time, the number of UAC arrivals decreased less than the total average compared to 2024 (3,834, or -22%). Most children, including UAC, were from Afghanistan, Egypt, Syrian Arab Republic, Sudan, and Iraq.

Spain

Some 5,543 children arrived in Spain by sea and by land in 2025, which represents a 19 per cent decrease compared to 2024 (6,760).[7] Out of the total, 4,702 children were UAC (86%), 14 per cent less than in 2024 (5,458). According to the available data, most children including UAC were from Algeria, Morocco, Mali, Senegal and the Gambia.

Bulgaria

Some 1,023 children lodged an asylum application in Bulgaria in 2025, 56 per cent of whom were UAC (575). Most of these asylum-seeking children were from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Iraq.[8]

Cyprus

Some 527 children arrived in 2025, including 280 UAC. Most of the children, including UAC, were from the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia and Afghanistan.[9]

Malta

In 2025, 39 children, almost all UAC, arrived in Malta following search and rescue operations at sea.[10] The number of child arrivals in 2025 was 13 per cent lower compared to 2024 (45 children). Most of the children were from Bangladesh, Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic.

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Demographics by country of arrival

Figure 1: Total arrivals by sea and by land, by gender, age, status, and country of arrival in 2025 (%)

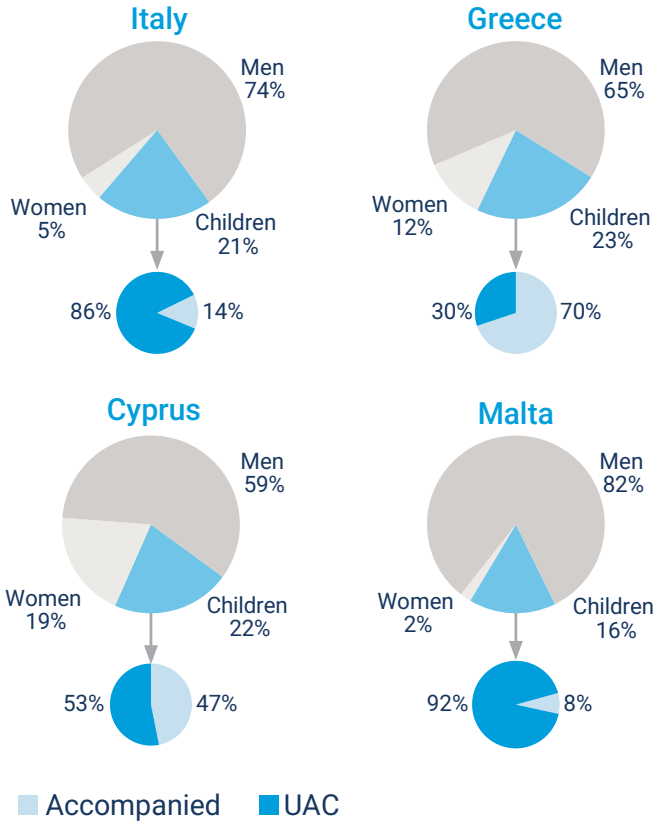
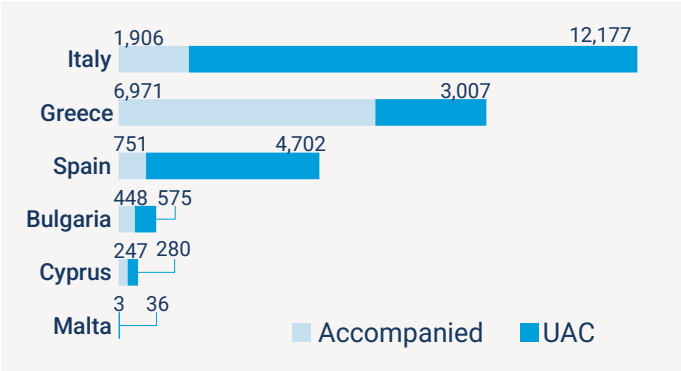


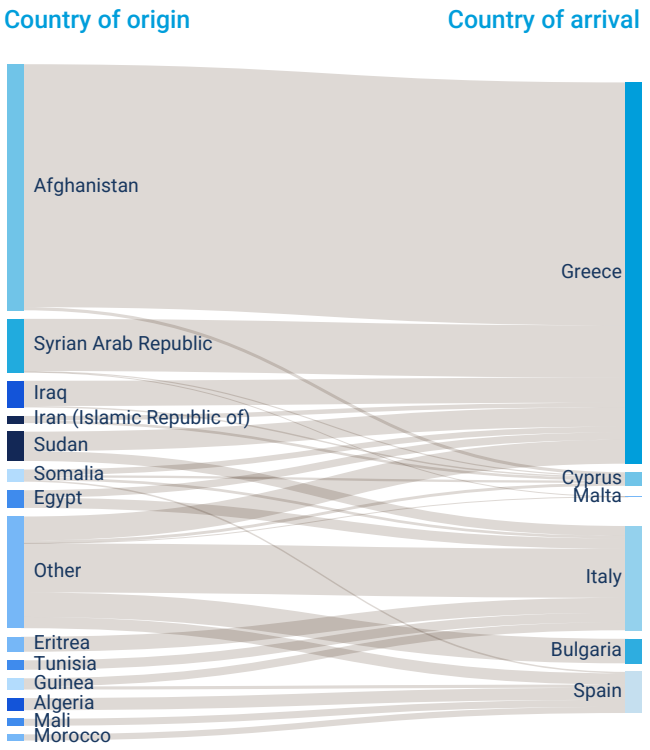
Figure 2: Number of children arriving by sea and by land, by status and by country of arrival, in 2025



Nationality by country of arrival

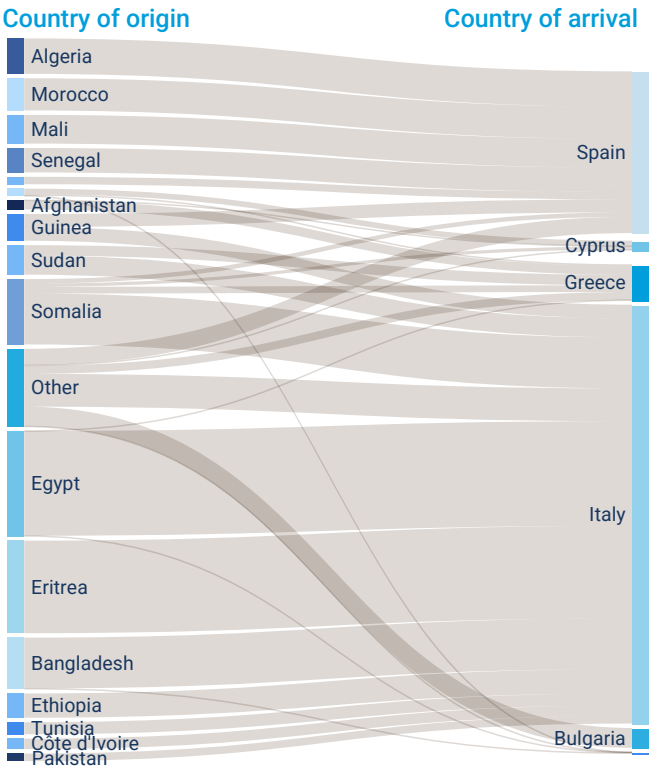
Accompanied Children

Figure 3: Accompanied children arrived in Europe, main countries of origin by country of arrival in 2025



Unaccompanied children

Figure 4: Unaccompanied children arrived in Europe, main countries of origin by country of arrival in 2025



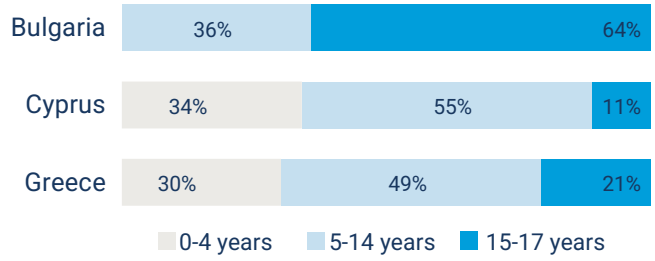
Source: Hellenic Police, EKKA; Cyprus Asylum Service; Italian Ministry of Interior; Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees; Maltese Immigration Police under the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE); Spanish Ministry of Interior's statistics and UNHCR's estimates.

Age and gender breakdown by country of arrival[11]

Accompanied children

Among the 10,326 accompanied children who arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece in 2025, 23 per cent were 0-4 years old, 46 per cent were 5-14 years old and 31 per cent were 15-17 years old. The age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy, Malta, and Spain is not available.

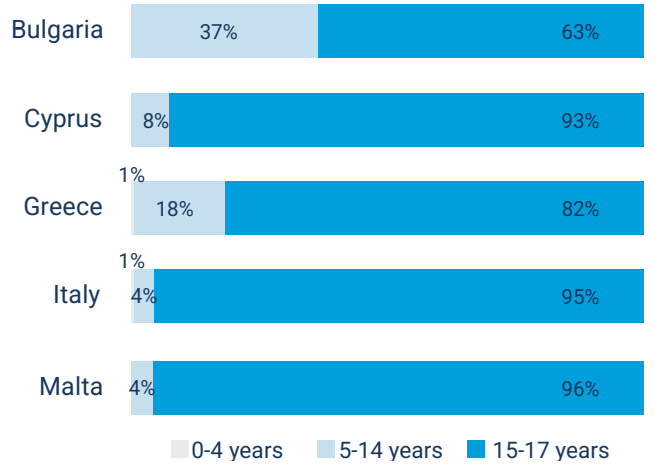
Figure 5: Age breakdown of accompanied children by country of arrival in 2025 (%)



Unaccompanied children

Most UAC who arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta in 2025 were between 15 and 17 years old (89% of UAC). Age-disaggregated data on UAC arriving in Spain are not available.

Figure 6: Age breakdown of UAC, by country of arrival (%)



Sources: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Cyprus Asylum Service; Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies on UAC in reception; Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees; Maltese Immigration Police under the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE).

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

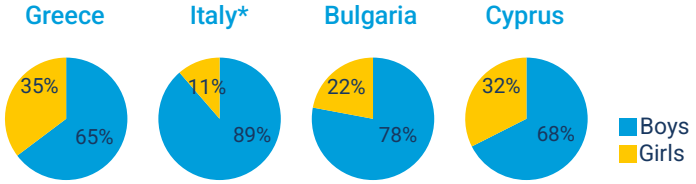
Gender breakdown by country of arrival

Overall, the proportion of boys remains high, comprising 78 per cent of all children who arrived in Europe in 2025. The percentage of boys arriving in Italy was significantly higher than the average (89%).

Meanwhile, the percentage of girls arriving is higher than the average in Greece and in Cyprus. In Greece, the share remained as high as in 2024, at 35 per cent. In Cyprus, girls represented 32 per cent of children arriving in 2025, slightly less from 33 per cent in 2024.[12]

The gender breakdown of children arriving by sea and by land is not available for Malta and Spain.

Figure 7: Gender breakdown of children arrived in Europe by sea and by land in 2025, by country of arrival (%)



* For Italy, the calculation is based on the 14,048 UAC registered in the reception system as of December 2025, according to the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The data do not include the 2,963 Ukrainian UAC who were in reception as of December 2025.

The journey of children migrating or seeking refuge in Europe

In 2025, IOM interviewed 12,416 migrants and refugees arriving by sea or by land in nine countries of Europe and the Western Balkans.[13] This section focuses on the profiles, needs, intentions and vulnerabilities of the young people arriving, based on 4,671 interviews conducted with adolescents and young adults between 15 and 24 years of age.[14] Responses have been grouped by route. A total of 383 respondents were interviewed in Italy after having travelled via the Central Mediterranean route (CMR), and 72 respondents after entering by land into northeast Italy, many following journeys through the Western Balkans. Another 207 interviews were conducted with respondents travelling to Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean route (EMR); 3,345 interviews with respondents who were surveyed in different countries along the Western Balkans route (WBR); 492 interviews took place with respondents who arrived in the Canary Islands (Western African Atlantic Route – WAAR); and 172 interviews with respondents reaching mainland Spain or the Balearic Islands via the Western Mediterranean route (WMR).

Key routes

- Central Mediterranean route (CMR)
- Eastern Mediterranean route (EMR)
- Western African Atlantic route (WAAR)
- Western Mediterranean route (WMR)
- Western Balkans route (WBR)

Sociodemographic profile

Most adolescents and young people across all routes were male (92%). The share of girls and young women surveyed was the highest on the WAAR (20%), and it was also higher than average on the EMR (17%). Out of a total of 54 different nationalities in the sample, the most common ones matched well with those observed at entry in the main arrival countries in 2025: Bangladesh, Egypt and Eritrea on the CMR; Afghanistan, Egypt and Sudan on the EMR and WBR; Algeria, Morocco and Somalia on the WMR; and Senegal, Mali and Guinea on the WAAR. The highest shares of girls and young women were among respondents from West and Central African countries, while adolescents and young people from Bangladesh and Egypt were almost exclusively male.

Overall, about one-third of respondents had completed lower secondary education, while 32 per cent had primary education, 15 per cent did not have formal education, and about 17 per cent reported upper secondary education or higher. Overall, female respondents reported having no formal education more frequently than males (23% versus 15%). Differences in education level by route were also significant: for example, young people on the WMR reported the highest education level on average (41% with lower secondary, 22% with upper secondary or higher), while those reaching the Canary Islands reported the lowest education level (16% with no formal education, 29% with primary education).

Journeys and reasons for leaving

Young people travelling on the WAAR reported having left their countries of origin alone (93%), along with more than three-quarters of those on the WMR (83%) and just under two-thirds on the CMR (63%). Those travelling via the Western Balkans reported to be travelling alone in about 21 per cent of cases, and with either family or non-family groups in the rest of the cases. Reported drivers of migration were diverse and often overlapped, with the decision-making process shaped by a combination of economic, social, political, environmental, security, and personal factors. Economic reasons were the most frequently mentioned reasons for leaving one's location of origin overall (given by 46% of respondents), followed by reasons connected to war and conflict at home (38%), and interpersonal or collective violence (25%). Other mentioned reasons were limited access to basic services (7%), environmental changes and hazards impacting livelihood at origin (4%) and avoiding compulsory military service (2%). Driving factors seemed to differ quite substantially across routes, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Top three drivers of migration among adolescents and young adults surveyed in 2025, by route (%)

More than one answer possible, total can be higher than 100%.
Source: IOM's DTM surveys in 2024.

> I attended school in Türkiye for 3 years, then we moved to Greece with my family. I want to return to school and continue my study.
>
> Boy from Afghanistan (15 years old), interviewed in Samos, Greece.

On average, young women and girls reported economic drivers less frequently than their male counterparts (30% versus 48%), while they mentioned interpersonal or collective violence as a reason for leaving (29% versus 24%) more frequently. In particular, young women who travelled on WAAR and CMR disclosed instances of violence within the family, threats and violence related to forced or arranged marriages, and instances of female genital mutilation.

Intentions and needs

Germany, Italy, Spain and France were the top countries of intended destination for most respondents along all routes to Europe. Young people on the CMR intended to primarily reach Italy (90%), followed by the United Kingdom (UK, 2%), the Netherlands (2%), and France (2%). Those on the WMR mentioned almost exclusively Spain (80%) and France (18%) as the intended destinations. Similarly, those arriving to the Canary Islands also referred to Spain (87%) and France (9%). On the WBR, Italy (46%), Germany (23%), France (13%), Spain (5%) and other European countries were mentioned.

The main needs reported at the time of the survey reflect the fact that most respondents wished to remain in the country where they were surveyed. More than half mentioned the need of support to find a job (56%), followed by those who expressed the need of assistance with documentation (26%), with language courses (19%) and with education or training courses (15%). Young women mentioned the need for personal safety and security more frequently than the average (16%, compared to 6% overall). Along the EMR, respondents most frequently cited the need for legal assistance (16%, compared with 7% overall) and financial support (14%, compared with 8% overall). Respondents who were interviewed while in transit, such as those in the Northeast of Italy arriving from the WBR also mentioned the need for accommodation.

An unaccompanied migrant adolescent sits at the hotspot in Lampedusa, Italy © UNICEF 2023

Challenges and risks during the journey[15]

Young people travelling by sea and by land frequently recounted journeys filled with challenges and risks. Financial difficulties were reported by approximately half of respondents (48%), with especially high rates among adolescents and young people on the Western Balkan route to Italy (86%) and the EMR (79%). Those travelling along the EMR reported the highest incidence of problems during the journey, while those on the WMR and on the WAAR reported fewer, though increasing, difficulties. About 52 per cent of those on the EMR reported being robbed at some point during their journey. Other commonly reported issues included lack of food, health problems, and lack of shelter. Nearly all of those (96%) entering Northeast Italy from Slovenia and the WBR also reported insufficient shelter during their journey.

The survey also includes various protection indicators through eight questions covering experiences such as unpaid labour, forced work, arranged marriage proposals, being kept against their will, physical violence, forced travel, being deceived into travel, and access to travel documents.[16] Physical violence was a frequent experience, reported by nearly half (47%) of adolescents and young people in the sample and by more than half of those travelling on the EMR (58 per cent) and on the CMR (52%). Those reaching Italy via the WBR reported these instances in more than a third of all cases (35%), similarly to those who travelled along the WMR (38%). Most accounts involved multiple forms of physical and psychological violence, including instances of abuse, torture, extortion and kidnapping, in transit and at border crossings. Perpetrators varied by a great deal, including armed groups, facilitators, and employers.

> **When I arrived in Libya my boss took away my passport. I was forced to work and carried out all sorts of tasks for him, primarily laying bricks. He would hit me when he was not happy with my performance. I was a worker who turned slave.**
>
> Young man (19 years old) from Bangladesh, interviewed after having travelled along the CMR

Moreover, some 17 per cent of respondents on the CMR reported experiences of unpaid labour during the journey, an incident that was also reported on the other routes although in lower shares (from 5% of adolescent and young adult migrants travelling along the EMR to about 1% of those on the WAAR and WMR). Responding to open-ended questions, survey participants mentioned engaging in various areas of unpaid work, most commonly in construction and bricklaying, agriculture, cleaning and domestic work, factory labour, food service, and fishing-related jobs. This work was often arranged through casual day labour or multiple informal roles, rather than through a single clearly defined occupation.

Further relevant reports included experiences that may be associated with trafficking and exploitation such as movement restrictions and forced labour. Being held against their will or being forced to work were common among adolescents and young people travelling on the CMR (28% and 17%, respectively), with similar shares along the EMR and lower incidences on the other routes. Most cases where respondents had been held against their will involved arbitrary detention, arrest, or kidnapping, often by armed groups, militias, or criminal networks, while the areas in which they had been forced to work in resemble those listed by individuals who reported unpaid labour.

> **As I arrived in Algeria, I lived with a man who began to abuse me. I became pregnant and was forced to work as a cleaner. In my 7th month of pregnancy, I was able to leave with the help of a friend of the abuser and travelled to Spain in a boat.**
>
> Young woman (20 years old) from Liberia, interviewed after having travelled along the WMR

About a tenth of those on the EMR (11%) and on the CMR (7%) reported having been misled with false information or promises of well-paid jobs, safe journeys, or legal travel documents. In some cases, they were detained unexpectedly or abandoned by smugglers, while in other cases they were requested by smugglers at different stages of the journey to pay additional money. Only about one third of young people in the sample stated that they have travel documents and that they had control over them during the journey. More than half (61%) reported that they did not have their documents during the journey. Other respondents reported that someone else has control over their documents, particularly on the CMR (17%), while 10 per cent of those travelling on this route departed with their documents, but they were stolen during the journey.

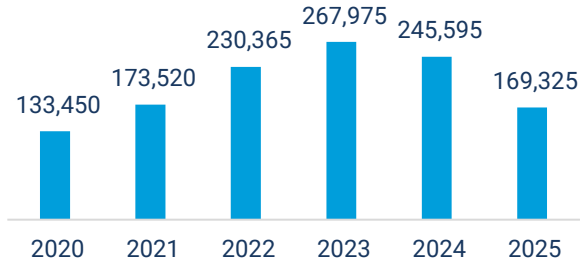
Overall, young people on mixed migration routes to Europe continued to face significant protection risks in 2025. Libya remained the country most frequently cited as the location of reported incidents, consistent with previous data collection rounds. However, young people also faced protection risks in other transit countries in North Africa before crossing the Mediterranean, and in remote land border areas of Türkiye, and transit countries in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans (for example, Croatia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Hungary). Comparing findings from 2025 with evidence emerged in previous years, evidence suggests that more stringent border management measures along the concerned routes may lead to riskier migration pathways, with an increasing reliance on smuggling networks and growing exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse for those trying to reach Europe by sea and by land.[17]

Asylum applications and decisions

Asylum applicants

In 2025, European countries reported a total of 700,080 new asylum-seekers (first-time applicants), a notable decrease of 241,740 (about -26%) from the previous year.[18] Among these applicants, slightly less than one-fourth (169,325) were children, indicating a 31 per cent decrease from 2024 (245,595). Girls represented around 44 per cent of all new children seeking asylum (74,450). [19]

Figure 9: First-time asylum applications lodged by children in Europe, 2020-2025



Source: Eurostat, Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data [migr_asyappctza], last update 09/07/2026

The countries with the highest number of new asylum applications from children were Germany, France, Spain, Greece, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria and Italy, collectively receiving 93 per cent of all first-time child asylum applicants in Europe. Germany led with the highest number of child asylum applications (50,835 or 30% of the total), followed by France (32,410, or 19%), Spain (24,855, or 15%), Greece (11,850 or 7%), Switzerland (9,500 or 6%), Belgium (8,330 or 5%), the Netherlands (7,265 or 4%), Austria (7,110 or 4%) and Italy (4,880 or 3%).[20]

Asylum applications by and on behalf of unaccompanied children

In 2025, European countries recorded 21,525 new asylum applications from unaccompanied children, marking a 38 per cent decrease from 2024 (34,560). Of these applicants, 14 per cent were girls and 86 per cent were boys. Around 86 per cent of these unaccompanied children seeking asylum were registered in only seven out of 31 countries, including Germany (4,925 or 23%), the Netherlands (3,510 or 16%), Greece (2,945 or 14%), Switzerland (2,745 or 13%), Spain (1,560 or 7%), Italy (985 or 5%) and Belgium (920 or 4%). Afghanistan led as the primary country of origin for asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied children, comprising around 17 per cent of the total, followed by Somalia (14%), Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt (11% each) and Eritrea (10%). Together, these origin countries contributed about 62 per cent of the total asylum applications by unaccompanied children in 2025. [22]

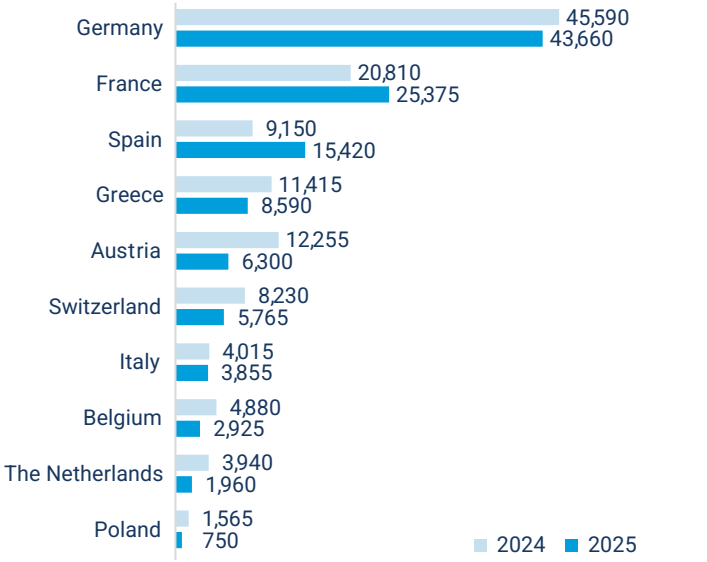
First-instance decisions on child asylum applications

In 2025, European national authorities processed 210,900 first-instance decisions on child asylum applications.[23] Among these, 118,870, accounting for 56 per cent, were positive decisions, marking an around 8 per cent decrease from positive decisions issued in 2024. The bulk of these positive decisions, comprising around 88 per cent of the total, were issued by Germany (37%), France (21%), Spain (13%), Greece (7%), Austria and Switzerland (5% each) and Italy (3%).

While refugee and subsidiary protection statuses adhere to EU regulations, humanitarian status is determined by specific national legislation and may not be uniformly applicable across the EU Member States. Out of the 118,870 children who received a positive decision in the first instance, 79,035 or 66 per cent were granted refugee status (compared to 74,490 or 58% in 2024); 19,325 or 16 per cent subsidiary protection (38,100 or 30% in 2024), and 20,510 or 17 per cent were granted humanitarian status (15,975 or 12% in 2024).

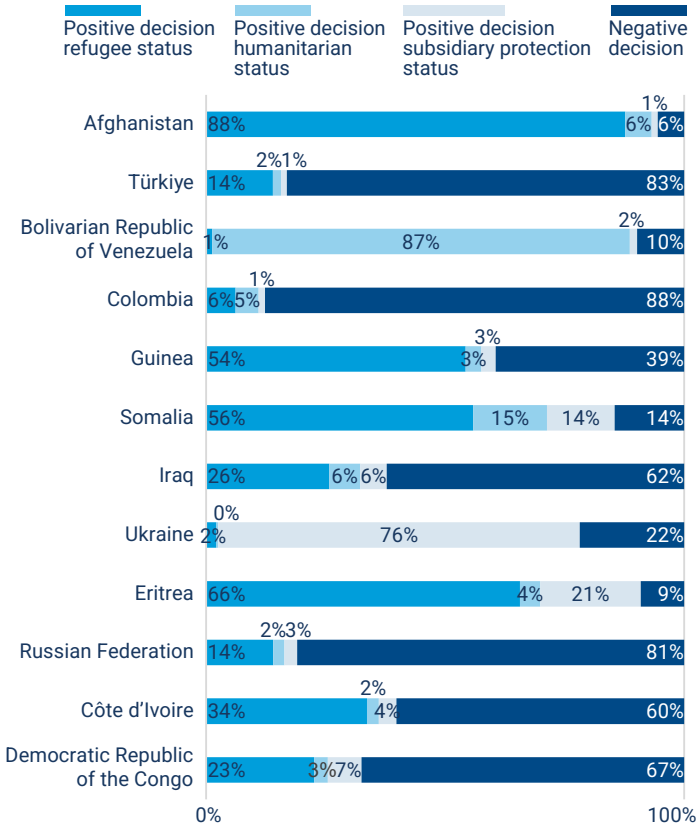
In absolute numbers, Germany led in issuing the highest number of positive decisions granting refugee status (37,525) mainly to children from Afghanistan, while France reported the highest number of positive decisions granting subsidiary protection (9,805) mainly to children from Ukraine and Haiti. Conversely, Spain issued the most decisions granting humanitarian status (11,855), especially to children from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Figure 10: Top ten countries of asylum by number of first-instance positive decisions issued on child asylum applications in Europe in 2024 and 2025



Source: Eurostat, Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data [migr_asyappctza], last update 09/07/2026

Figure 11: First-instance decisions on child asylum applications in Europe in 2025, top 12 countries of origin by number of decisions (%)



Source: Eurostat, First instance decisions on applications - annual aggregated data [migr_asydcfsta__custom_17595280], last update on 02/06/2026

Note: Shares do not always add up to 100% due to rounding.

Of all first instance decisions issued on child asylum applications, approximately 92,035 or 44 per cent were denied international protection, which is an increase of 25 per cent from 2024. Notably, among top countries of origin by the number of decisions issued for children in 2025, there is a great variability in the share of positive and negative decisions.

A higher proportion of negative decisions is found, for instance, among applications lodged by children from Colombia (88%; 6,970 rejected children), Türkiye (83%; 17,220), the Russian Federation (81%; 4,455), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (67%; 3,425), Iraq (62%; 4,025) and Côte d'Ivoire (60%; 3,280).

On the other side, the share of positive decisions overall is higher than the average, for example, for children from Afghanistan (94%; 47,310), Eritrea (91%; 5,335), the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (90%; 11,505), Somalia (86%; 5,720), Ukraine (78%; 4,645), and Guinea (61%; 4,265).

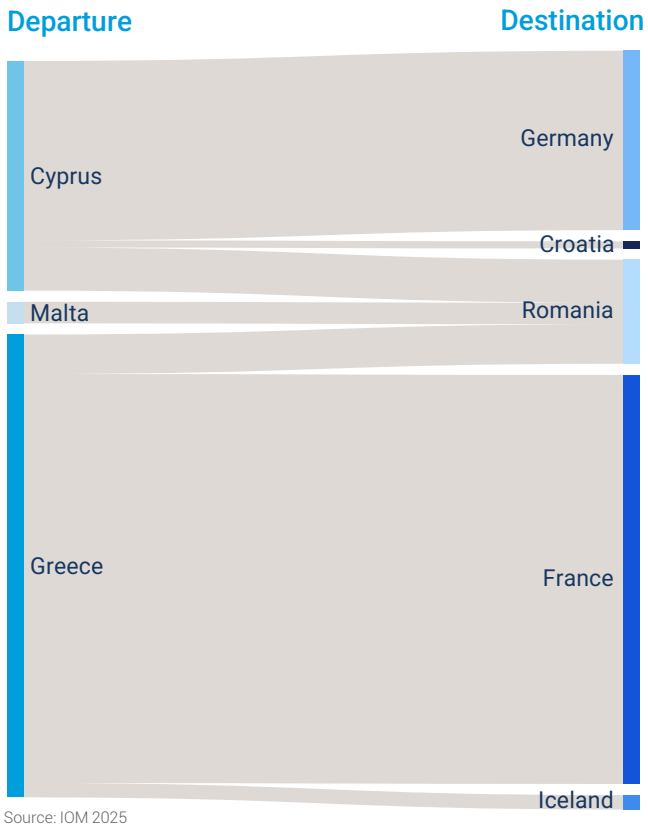
Relocation in Europe

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

In 2025, IOM continued its support to relocation under the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism from Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Malta. In close cooperation with involved governments and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), and under overall coordination by the European Commission - DG HOME, a total of 199 children were assisted with voluntary relocation from Cyprus, Greece, and Malta to five European countries. This is a 67 per cent decrease compared to the 608 children relocated in 2024.

Out of the 199 children relocated in 2025, 133 were boys and 86 girls. Among all the relocated children, there were no UAC.

Figure 12: Children relocated in Europe, by country of departure and country of relocation, in 2025



Source: IOM 2025

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) for children, including unaccompanied children

In 2025, IOM provided voluntary return support to 11,185 migrants from European Economic Area (EEA) countries, the UK and Switzerland (14% of all 81,785 migrants assisted globally) to their countries of origin. Almost 20 per cent (2,020) of them were children, including 67 UAC, and 200 were victims of trafficking. Around 27 per cent of migrants were assisted in returning from the Netherlands alone, followed by Greece (18%) and Belgium (11%).

Of all AVRR beneficiaries assisted in returning from the EEA region, the UK and Switzerland in 2025, approximately 39 per cent (4,317) returned to countries in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; 19 per cent (2,157) to Asia and the Pacific; 25 per cent (960) to the Americas and the Caribbean; 9 per cent to the Middle East and North Africa (1,039), and 24 per cent (2,705) to other regions, including West and Central Africa, and East, Horn and Southern Africa and other destination regions.

The main countries of origin and return for children assisted with AVVR in 2025 were Georgia, Brazil, Mongolia, the Republic of Türkiye, and Colombia. Similarly, the 76 unaccompanied children were assisted in returning to countries mostly in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Children resettled in Europe

In 2025, 6,796 people were in resettlement procedures in Europe (-62% compared to 2024).[24] Out of the total, 50 per cent were children (25% boys and 25% girls). France, Sweden, Germany, Norway, and Finland were the main countries in Europe considering children's resettlement cases (80% of the total). Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, and South Sudan were the most common countries of origin of children whose cases were being considered for resettlement by European countries in 2025.

Protecting Children on the Move in Europe Joint Advocacy by IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF

IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF welcomed the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and its potential to strengthen protection for migrant, refugee and stateless children. As Member States implement these measures, the agencies stress the need to uphold the best interests of the child in all decisions; ensure timely access to services; and never detain children for immigration purposes. Unaccompanied and separated children should have immediate access to legal representation and age assessments should be rare, multidisciplinary, child-sensitive, and open to appeal. Please read here for more: https://www.unicef.org/eca/documents/implementation-eu-asylum-and-migration-pact.

UNHCR Greece's Annual Student Contest themed "Family Means Together"
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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 caregiver, 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 migrant and refugee children.

The document provides an overview of the situation in Europe with regards to migrant and refugee children (accompanied and unaccompanied). It compiles key child-related data based on available official sources: arrivals by sea and by land, asylum applications, asylum decisions, profiles of child and youth arrivals, relocation, assisted voluntary returns and resettlement to Europe.

The present factsheet covers the period January to December 2025 and provides up-to-date information on migrant and refugee children, including unaccompanied children, who arrived via the Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic routes in Europe.

Limitations of available data on children and UAC

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, gender or age. Reliable data on the number of unaccompanied and of separated children either arriving or currently residing in different European countries is often unavailable. The number of asylum applications filed by UAC 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 and onward secondary 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, separated children not defined in EU law). For the EU context, Eurostat data on asylum applications and decisions on children and UAC have been downloaded on 05 August 2026, and may be subject to consolidation.

Endnotes

1. Age and gender disaggregated data on children arriving in Spain in 2025 are not available.
2. Eurostat, [migr_asyappctza] Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data, data extracted on 05/08/2026. The data for Spain are provisional.
3. Data on arrivals are partial. The data reflects both sea and land arrivals in Greece and Spain, land arrivals in Bulgaria, and sea arrivals in Italy and Malta.
4. Please check the definitions of unaccompanied children here.
5. Data for Italy are based on the Ministry of Interior's statistics.
6. Arrivals figures for Greece are compiled by UNHCR from the Hellenic Police and Hellenic Coast Guard (based on registration data).
7. Data for Spain are based on the Ministry of Interior's statistics and UNHCR's estimates. Data updates should not be considered final and may be subject to change, including on a retroactive basis.
8. Statistics for Bulgaria are based on Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees (SAR) - new asylum applications.
9. Data based on the Cyprus Asylum Service statistics.
10. Estimate on data provided by the Immigration Police under the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE), Malta. UAC 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 UAC by the authorities after the age assessment is completed. Moreover, not all UAC declare themselves as such upon arrival. Thus, there are UAC who declare to be adults at disembarkation and are age assessed as children after they change their date of birth before the authorities.
11. See Footnote 1.
12. See Footnote 1.
13. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Spain, and Kosovo*. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). Please see the full methodology and analysis of 2025 on DTM Europe (2026): Migrants Travelling to Europe by Land and by Sea in 2025. Journeys, vulnerabilities and needs of migrants along the Mediterranean, African Atlantic and Western Balkan routes.
14. Adolescents between 15 and 17 years old were addressed by DTM enumerators only after having obtained written consent from the parent or the assigned legal guardian.
15. This section is based on a sub-sample of 1,326 respondents between 15 and 24 years old, who were asked the problems, violence, abuse and exploitation module.
16. While these questions are not meant to identify potential victims of trafficking or abuse and exploitation, they provide indications about recurrent instances and risks to which adolescent and young adult migrants are exposed during their journeys. Please refer to the 2024 edition of this Factsheet.
17. Data includes EU 27 member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
18. The source of all data in this section is the Eurostat Children in Migration database including the indicators on asylum, available at: Database - Migration and asylum - Eurostat.
19. 2025 data for Spain are provisional.
20. Data includes EU 27 member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
21. Eurostat, Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex - annual data [migr_asyunaa], last update on 22/05/2026, accessed on 30/07/2026. 2025 data for Spain are provisional.
22. Data includes EU 27 member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
23. UNHCR Resettlement statistics.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

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.

Jointly compiled and produced by:

For further information or questions on this factsheet, please contact:

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency
Jad Ghosn
ghosn@unhcr.org

unicef
Anja Teltschik
ateltschik@unicef.org

IOM UN MIGRATION
Laura Bartolini
lbartolini@iom.int