

# Children and unsafe migration in Europe: Data and policy, understanding the evidence base

## INTRODUCTION

This briefing focuses on data on the rising number of migrant and refugee children arriving in Europe by sea.<sup>1</sup> It highlights the gaps and limitations in data collection, inconsistencies in terminology, and the most significant findings for policy. Mapping the definitions and data sources used in the context of migrant children in Europe reveals a complex and diverse picture that leaves many opportunities for improving coherence and comparability.

Child migration encompasses many different categories including dependent (i.e. travelling with family members) and child migrants who arrive without parents or guardians. The latter can be legally defined as “unaccompanied”<sup>2</sup> or “separated”. Unaccompanied children may also declare themselves as adults in order to continue their journeys.

There is also concern about children who arrive with an adult but the relationship to that adult is uncertain, such as in cases of teenage or child marriage. These children have been described as “accompanied non-accompanied”.<sup>3</sup> Entry routes vary as well as legal pathways.

Child migration into Europe is diverse and often invisible in data and policy. Entry routes, legal statutes, rights and entitlements of child migrants vary across European States. While some segments of this population are visible in public debate and data sets, especially unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), others are hardly visible, particularly dependent children and undocumented children. Getting a fuller picture of this population requires extensive work that is beyond the scope of this data briefing. The focus here, on data for irregular entries at Europe’s external sea borders in 2015, will help to clarify the gap between available data and public debate.

More than 250,000 child migrants crossed irregularly into Italy and Greece in 2015. For Italy, out of 16,500 child migrants, over 12,000 (72%) were unaccompanied. For Greece, no official distinction between accompanied and unaccompanied is made at entry for the purposes of data collection, although the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that at least 10 per cent arrived without parents or guardians. Therefore, there is a large difference in the proportion of UASC among children in Italy and Greece. The main origin countries of arrivals in Greece are the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In contrast, the main origin countries of arrivals to Italy are Nigeria, Eritrea, Gambia, Côte d’Ivoire and Sudan. The number of first-time asylum applicants in the European Union reached 1.26 million in 2015; of them, 365,000 (29%) are under 18, and about 90,000 were recorded as unaccompanied. No consistent data are available on the number of dependent children in asylum-seeking families.

1 The authors would like to thank Ann Singleton (University of Bristol and IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (IOM GMDAC)), Tsvetomira Bidart (UNICEF) and Lilana Keith (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)), and Frank Laczko (IOM GMDAC), for their constructive comments and valuable feedback on the paper.

2 In the context of migration to the European Union, an unaccompanied minor, as defined by Directive 2011/95/UE, refers to a minor who arrives on the territory of a European Union Member State unaccompanied by an adult responsible or who is left unaccompanied after he or she has entered the territory of the Member States (See Annex 1 for list of definitions).

3 U. Schwarz, Minor refugees and the German system protection and best interest determination. B-UMF (Federal Association for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees), Presentation at IOM Nuremberg, 22 June 2016. It should be noted that this is a specific example from Germany and may not be the case across Europe.

## DATA COLLECTED AT ARRIVAL IN EUROPE

Data sources at arrival at Europe's external borders count "irregular sea entries". The southern sea borders of Europe are currently receiving more attention than irregular entries by land, which are likely to be unreported and overall, receive much less visibility. However, as research on undocumented migration shows, it might be that there is little correspondence between legal status at entry and subsequent migration status in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Several agencies record sea and land arrivals in Europe; however, the frequency and detail of published results vary widely (see Annex 2). Data on irregular entries are also limited mostly to Greece and Italy, with other border points likely to be underrepresented as they are less monitored (see Frontex reports below). In addition, concerns about the reliability of data on irregular entries in Greece and Italy should also be raised, as the ability to count irregular entries is closely linked to border control practices in the Mediterranean, which have changed significantly since the beginning of the "refugee crisis" – for example, the launch of the Italian Navy's search-and-rescue operation *Mare Nostrum* in 2013 led to spontaneous, and arguably often undetected, arrivals on Italian shores of migrants arriving by boat.<sup>5</sup>

UNHCR reports daily, with estimates of the stocks and flows of migrants arriving by sea in eight countries (Turkey, Greek Islands, Greece Mainland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia and Austria). Data are also provided for arrivals and transfers at six points on the Greek Islands and Turkey. Figures from national authorities

broken down by age, gender or nationality are not made publicly available or shared among agencies.<sup>6</sup>

UNHCR provides a monthly demographic breakdown of the number of arrivals in the Mediterranean as part of the Migrants Emergency Response.<sup>7</sup> Monthly reports disaggregate nationality<sup>8</sup> and gender (men, women and children).<sup>9</sup> Sporadic statistics are published that break down gender and age.<sup>10</sup> The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR include important caveats to their data sources, noting that the figures are based on partial analysis. Arrival figures for Greece are collected in the framework of IOM and UNHCR border activities and are provided by Hellenic Coast Guard and Hellenic Police; arrival figures for Italy are provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior, Italian Police and IOM and UNHCR estimates. Arrival figures for Spain are provided by the Spanish Ministry of Interior, Spanish Police and IOM. Arrival figures for Malta are provided by the Malta Police. In addition, how "accompanied" or "unaccompanied" are defined at arrival may vary across the data. (This is discussed further in the next section, under *Definitions*). UNHCR also publishes monthly statistics reviewing arrivals by sea to Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain. These data are disaggregated to show men, women, children and unaccompanied minors (UAMs). The data are published from 2015, and UNHCR has published sporadic fact sheets and snapshots with age, gender and nationality breakdown between November 2015 and January 2016. However, the data collected on UAMs are not updated as regularly as on other categories.<sup>11</sup>

4 See N. Sigona and V. Hughes, *No Way Out, No Way In: Irregular migrant children and families in the UK* (ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Oxford, 2012); A. Triandafyllidou, *Clandestino Project, Final Report. Counting the Uncountable. Data and Trends Across Europe* (European Commission, Athens, 2009). Available from [www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_147171\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_147171_en.pdf); A. Bloch, N. Sigona and R. Zetter, *Sans Papiers: The economic and social lives of young undocumented migrants* (Pluto Press, London, 2014).

5 H. Crawley et al. (2016), *Unpacking a rapidly changing scenario: migration flows, routes and trajectories across the Mediterranean*, MEDMIG Research Brief no.1 Available from [www.medmig.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/MEDMIG-Briefing-01-March-2016-FINAL-1.pdf](http://www.medmig.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/MEDMIG-Briefing-01-March-2016-FINAL-1.pdf); S. McMahon and N. Sigona, *Boat migration across the Central Mediterranean*, MEDMIG Research Brief no.3 (forthcoming).

6 UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean Regional Data. Available from [www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php](http://www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php)

7 Ibid.

8 UNHCR, Europe Refugees & Migrants Emergency Response: Nationality of arrivals to Greece, Italy and Spain January 2015–March 2016. Available from [www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=1111](http://www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=1111)

9 UNHCR, Europe Refugees & Migrants Emergency Response. Gender breakdown of arrivals to Greece and Italy June 2015–March 2016. Available from [www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=1101](http://www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=1101)

10 Age categories are 0–4, 5–17, 18–59 and 60+. Hellenic Police and analysis is based on partial data (UNHCR, Age/Gender breakdown of arrivals (20 February–17 March). Available from [www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=960](http://www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=960)).

11 UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean Regional Data. Available from [www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php](http://www.data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php)

IOM's Migration Portal ([migration.iom.int/europe/](http://migration.iom.int/europe/)) and Missing Migrants Project ([missingmigrants.iom.int](http://missingmigrants.iom.int)) provide a compilation of data and information including a data briefing reviewing key trends in child migration to Europe.<sup>12</sup> Biweekly reports publish data of arrivals by country of transit, providing information on nationalities, routes, as well as locations and numbers of stranded migrants by nationality, flows and stranded migrants.<sup>13</sup> Cumulative data and biweekly overviews are available for Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. However, only Italy and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia disaggregate between unaccompanied and accompanied children in their data. Although the Hellenic Police in Greece register unaccompanied children, these data are not considered accurate, as unaccompanied children may declare themselves to be older than 18 years, in order to avoid detention and move towards Western Europe as soon as possible. Quarterly statistical reports are disaggregated by nationality, sea arrival or land arrival. Cumulative data on arrivals and stranded migrants are published for Greece, Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary. Detailed data including arrivals by land or sea are available for Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia. Only the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia provides daily arrival data for male adults, female adults and un/accompanied children for operational purposes. Data on country of origin are published for Italy, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) provides a monthly overview (weekly, until November 2015) of new arrivals and other notable legal, social and policy responses, including a specific focus on child protection concerns.<sup>14</sup> Data collection includes a discursive review of the situation for new migrants in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and Sweden. Although these country profiles provide significant information, statistics are not comprehensively or consistently provided across these countries.

12 IOM and UNICEF, Data Brief: Migration of Children to Europe (GMDAC, Berlin, 2015). Available from [www.iomgmdac.org/iom-unicef-data-brief-migration-of-children-to-europe/](http://www.iomgmdac.org/iom-unicef-data-brief-migration-of-children-to-europe/)

13 See <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>

14 Fundamental Rights Agency, Regular overviews of migration-related fundamental rights concerns. Available from [www.fra.europa.eu/en/theme/asylum-migration-borders/overviews](http://www.fra.europa.eu/en/theme/asylum-migration-borders/overviews)

Frontex states that their border guards do not “usually detect [UAMs] at the European Union external border but rather they are discovered to be unaccompanied at their final destination when they apply for asylum”.<sup>15</sup> This report was based on an assessment of migration across Europe from a survey that covered the year 2008 and the first half of 2009, and may not be fully applicable to the current situation. The agency also concluded from the basis of information provided by Member States that most UAMs have been accompanied by facilitators or relatives along their journey to and in the European Union.<sup>16</sup> Frontex has developed good practice guidelines (the VEGA Handbook) for identifying unaccompanied and separated children at airports, but not at land or sea borders.<sup>17</sup> Data are not published on UAMs who are detected at airports through these guidelines.

Frontex publishes quarterly *Risk Analysis* (FRAN) reports based on operational data for eight main sea and land migratory routes.<sup>18</sup> The quarterly figures provide information on recorded “illegal border crossing, illegal stay, refusals of entry, applications for asylum, and document fraud”.<sup>19</sup> These figures are disaggregated by border type (land, air or sea) and top 10 nationalities. There are different methodologies for data collection at the border crossing points (BCPs) and the “green” borders (between BCPs). Although age and gender may be recorded, neither are reported in published statistics.<sup>20</sup>

15 Frontex, *Unaccompanied Minors in the Migration Process* (Frontex, Warsaw, December 2010). Available from [www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Attachments\\_News/unaccompanied\\_minors\\_public\\_5\\_dec.pdf](http://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Attachments_News/unaccompanied_minors_public_5_dec.pdf)

16 Ibid.

17 Frontex, *VEGA Handbook: Children at airports* (FRONTEx, Warsaw, August 2015). Available from [www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Operations/VEGA\\_Children\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Operations/VEGA_Children_Handbook.pdf)

18 Frontex, Migratory routes map, July 2016. Available from [www.frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/migratory-routes-map/](http://www.frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/migratory-routes-map/)

19 Frontex, *Risk Analysis for 2016* (Frontex, Warsaw, 2016). Available from [www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Annula\\_Risk\\_Analysis\\_2016.pdf](http://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf)

20 Promising practices have been identified but these are sporadic. (PICUM, *Protecting undocumented children: Promising policies and practices from governments* (PICUM, Brussels, 2015). Available from [www.picum.org/picum.org/uploads/publication/Protecting%20undocumented%20children-Promising%20policies%20and%20practices%20from%20governments.pdf](http://www.picum.org/picum.org/uploads/publication/Protecting%20undocumented%20children-Promising%20policies%20and%20practices%20from%20governments.pdf)

## UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES

### Definitions

There are broad differences in international, European and national definitions of children travelling alone (see Annex 1). The challenges of compiling comparative data across European Union Member States have been identified by the European Migration Network (EMN), which produced a glossary to define terms.<sup>21</sup> While this provides some coherence at the European Union level, large discrepancies emerge at the national level.

The most comprehensive source of comparable data on UAMs in European Member States is the reports resulting from the EMN focused study, *Policies, practices and data on unaccompanied minors in the EU Member States and Norway* (2015).<sup>22</sup> The synthesis report highlights the gap in data regarding asylum-seeking UAMs and non-asylum seeking UAMs. In particular, the study found a lack of data on the numbers of, and outcomes for non-asylum seeking UAMs. Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia record these data. The figures may include those who are victims of trafficking (as included in Italy's data). This is significant because UAMs do not benefit from the same level of protection in law or in practice. In some Member States, all third-country national UAMs apply for asylum (Finland and Sweden).

In addition, we found that the definitions of unaccompanied minor and accompanied minor need further clarification as different Member States recognize a minor as (un)accompanied in various ways. This fundamental distinction has consequences for the comparability of statistics regarding the total numbers of UAMs in the European Union. It also has practical implications regarding the protections afforded to children dependent on whether they are deemed to be

alone or with an adult. For example, Poland stated that "true" UAMs are only those who arrive alone, and this is less than 30 minors yearly. Only this group can make use of the procedural and reception arrangements in place for minors.

### Data collection

For those who are recognized as UAMs, there are significant differences in the way data are collected and identification occurs. In Austria, only UAMs who receive basic welfare support are recorded. In Croatia only UAMs in children's homes are included in national statistics. In Spain, different regional authorities do not provide data in the same format, and therefore they may be incomplete. In the United Kingdom, each of the four nations differs in the way they collect and publish their statistics.

In addition, there are no centralized published statistics on the flow and stock of UAMs. The United Kingdom has begun to publish statistics on asylum decisions by cohort. However, there are not comparable data on UAMs across Europe.<sup>23</sup> Eurostat provides data on the stock of pending cases.<sup>24</sup> The stock of pending cases indicator gives a snapshot of the number of persons who lodged an application for international protection, which is still under consideration by the responsible national authority at the end of the reference period. However, data since the beginning of 2014 in Austria were not available. Also, no data have been available for pending cases for an extended period from Cyprus from May 2011 to 2014 (excluding December 2012) and the Netherlands for the entire period 2012–2014.<sup>25</sup>

### AGE ASSESSMENT

Use of age assessment varies across European Union Member States and may affect the data collected about UAMs. Eighteen (18) Member States conduct age assessments at some stage of the asylum process. Border authorities in some States immediately refer

21 EMN, *EMN Glossary and Thesaurus 3.0* (EMN, Brussels, 2014). Available from [www.ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/glossary/index\\_en.htm](http://www.ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary/index_en.htm)

22 EMN, *Policies, practices and data on unaccompanied minors in the EU Member States and Norway*, Synthesis Report: May 2015. Available from [www.ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn\\_study\\_policies\\_practices\\_and\\_data\\_on\\_unaccompanied\\_minors\\_in\\_the\\_eu\\_member\\_states\\_and\\_norway\\_synthesis\\_report\\_final\\_eu\\_2015.pdf](http://www.ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/emn_study_policies_practices_and_data_on_unaccompanied_minors_in_the_eu_member_states_and_norway_synthesis_report_final_eu_2015.pdf)

23 Government of the United Kingdom, Home Office, National Statistics: Asylum (updated 26 May 2016). Available from [www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2016/asylum](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2016/asylum)

24 Eurostat, Persons subject of asylum applications pending at the end of the month – monthly data. Available from [www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/TPS00190](http://www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/TPS00190)

25 European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *EASO Quarterly Asylum Report* Quarter 3, 2015. Available from [www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Quarterly-Asylum-Report-2015-Q3.pdf](http://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Quarterly-Asylum-Report-2015-Q3.pdf)

UAMs to childcare authorities without confirmation of their age (Austria, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Norway). Nine Member States conduct age assessments on arrival. Six ask for age assessments before referring UAMs to child protection authorities where there is doubt about authenticity of documents about declared age (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Malta, Slovakia and Spain). No official age assessment procedure exists in Bulgaria.

Methods for determining age also differ across European Union Member States. For example, in Austria, age assessment leads to a defined minimum age, while in Belgium, a standard deviation is used. In Norway, the age assessment determines the likelihood in percentages that the person is claiming the correct age. There are no comparable data published on different European Member States' age assessment results.

## MISSING AND DOUBLE COUNTING

### Double counting

Data on UAMs are aggregated at the European Union level from national statistics and lack overall coherence. This process inevitably produces double counting and "missing" children. In Italy, double counting of UAMs by local authorities is far from rare. There is no automatic access to the police ID database, and therefore a young person may be on the records of more than one authority at the same time.<sup>26</sup>

Frontex also stated that double counting occurs in its published statistics: "Frontex provides monthly data on the number of people detected at the external borders of the European Union. Irregular border crossings may be attempted by the same person several times in different locations at the external border. This means that a large number of the people who were counted when they arrived in Greece were again counted when entering the EU for the second time through Hungary or Croatia."<sup>27</sup>

26 N. Sigona and J. Allsopp, "Mind the gap: why are unaccompanied children disappearing in their thousands?" OpenDemocracy, 22 February 2016. Available from [www.opendemocracy.net/5050/nando-sigona-and-jennifer-allsopp/mind-gap-why-are-unaccompanied-children-disappearing-in-thous](http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/nando-sigona-and-jennifer-allsopp/mind-gap-why-are-unaccompanied-children-disappearing-in-thous)

27 Amendment to Frontex press statement following social media mobilization, see N. Sigona, "Seeing double? How the EU miscounts migrants arriving at its borders", The Conversation, 16 October 2015. Available from <https://theconversation.com/seeing-double-how-the-eu-miscounts-migrants-arriving-at-its-borders-49242>

### Definitions of missing UAMs

In general, across European Member States, there is no consistency in the definition of "missing children". Only half of the European Member States hold statistics on UAMs who went missing or absconded; where statistics are available, these are often not comparable or not systematically collected. Only a minority of countries report to have specific legal or procedural regulations on missing migrant children (Austria, Finland, Ireland and Romania).<sup>28</sup> For example, Slovakia does not collect or monitor data on missing UAMs. In Finland, all figures concern UAMs who abscond prior to first decision. The age was disputed in some cases, and therefore the figures do not represent those who were confirmed to be under the age of 18 before the disappearance. In contrast, the United Kingdom records as missing those who absconded before their first interview, and their age were assessed and confirmed. The United Kingdom also records data for all missing episodes, and some may not have stayed missing.<sup>29</sup> In Ireland, missing children data refer to the total number of missing children and are not disaggregated by those UAMs seeking asylum and those that are not.<sup>30</sup>

Many variations also exist in terms of how the different "types" of missing children are recorded and traced in Europe. In several countries, no specific categorization is used. Figures are available on the numbers of missing unaccompanied migrant children for 12 Member States, and are mainly from specialized institutional sources.<sup>31</sup>

Children who are "missing" may have remained unregistered, or have left to join family members in other countries. While social workers in national child welfare systems may attempt to trace UAMs, there is no cross-border system with this mandate. Reporting arrangements for such cases differ substantially. Whereas in Estonia, these cases are investigated immediately by local police (which issues a search

28 European Commission, *Missing children in the European Union: Mapping, data collection and statistics* (Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2013). Available from [www.ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/missing\\_children\\_study\\_2013\\_en.pdf](http://www.ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/missing_children_study_2013_en.pdf)

29 R. Humphris and N. Sigona (2016), *Mapping unaccompanied asylum seeking children in England*, Becoming Adult Research Brief no. 1 (UCL, London).

30 EMN, 2015.

31 12 is based on the number of open cases of missing migrant children at the end of 2015.

alert), they receive a lower priority than general cases in Denmark, and Belgium, where there is a fixed “no action” period before the start of local police investigations.

### Data availability on missing UAM

In the case of Italy, the gap between the number of minors registered at arrival and those who subsequently apply for asylum is substantial, at around 40 per cent in 2015. Among the latter, not all wait for a decision on their case, and many are reported “missing” from their legal guardians and the centres in which they reside.<sup>32</sup>

Reflecting on the fact that many migrant children who are registered are institutionalized into the care of national child protection services, the data specifically deal with those who were missing from a care institution (or a detention centre). There is no single type of data source for missing UAMs in European Member States, including police, interior ministries or immigration services. In many countries, data are simply not available for this type of missing child, while in the United Kingdom, the issue is that data exist but are not collated at a national level.

In Denmark, it is the work of the Danish Red Cross to maintain these records on behalf of individual asylum centres. In the Netherlands, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) holds computerized data on “incidents or crisis situations” in asylum centres, which includes cases of disappearances. In Slovenia, Centres for Social Services record numbers of incidences of children going missing from asylum homes, where these incidents are reported by individual centres.

European Union data have struggled to adjust to the rapid movement of people across European Union borders during the refugee crisis, and data or estimates on missing unaccompanied children may not take into consideration children who have “reappeared” elsewhere in Europe.

### Gaps

In most countries, UAMs are taken into the protective care of the State, and therefore missing children are only identified when they disappear from their residential placement. In Belgium, the disappearance

from the “observation and research centre” is only reported to the police when it is considered alarming. In Denmark, missing migrant children have to be reported immediately if they are younger than 15 years, while for those older than 15, authorities wait for 24 hours. Finland also sets a 24-hour waiting period before declaring a child missing.

Hungary makes a distinction between children that do and do not seek asylum. It is noted that, while asylum-seeking children rarely go missing, non-asylum seeking children often disappear within the first 24–48 hours, so they are not usually recorded until after this time has elapsed. In Slovenia, the police will work with the asylum home to establish the circumstances of any unaccompanied migrant children who have disappeared. However, if the child has not returned in three days, their application for asylum is considered as “withdrawn”. No further investigative action is taken in this situation. The result is a limited comparability between data sets due to operational and definitional differences that could be reflected in the figures.

Only Swedish figures disaggregate by gender for missing UAM children. Italy and Spain produce annual statistics of unaccompanied migrant children who are still missing at the end of each year. Even less is known about UAMs as they have reached 18 years of age, at which point they become adults.

## IMMIGRATION DETENTION

Immigration detention refers to a government practice that detains refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants in institutional facilities for administrative purposes, typically to establish their identity, facilitate immigration or other protection claim, or before their removal from the country.<sup>33</sup> Detention statistics are subject to a huge range of different legislation across European Union Member States.<sup>34</sup> Fourteen (14) Member States adopt detention measures for UAMs or for those whose age is disputed (Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, United

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33 PICUM, 2015.

34 Access Info and Global Detention Project, *The Uncounted: Detention of Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Europe* (Access Info Europe/Global Detention Project, Geneva, 2015). Available from [www.globaldetentionproject.org/the-uncounted-the-detention-of-migrants-and-asylum-seekers-in-europe](http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/the-uncounted-the-detention-of-migrants-and-asylum-seekers-in-europe)

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32 See Sigona and Allsopp, 2016.

Kingdom and Norway). Where there is the possibility of detention, very different caveats are implemented in different Member States. Belgium can detain an age-disputed young person at the border for three days. In France, a UAM who was refused entry can be detained for 20 days. In Germany, policies differ across Federal Länder. Different age and time limits (ranging from 24 hours to three months) on detention operate across Member States.

## RETURN

There is a wide range of differing approaches to recording the voluntary and forced return of UAMs.<sup>35</sup> In the United Kingdom, these data include those who are former UASCs, but who may be more than 18 years old when returned. In Norway, forced return data includes those returned to other Member States under the European Union's Dublin Regulation. There is a lack of data on voluntary and forced returns of UAMs, and no consistent data is collected regarding the outcomes of children who have been returned by European Member States. On 20 March 2016, the Treaty between Greece and the European Union–Turkey (along with a statement of agreement between the European Union and Turkey)<sup>36</sup> came into force, allowing all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek Islands to be returned to Turkey.<sup>37</sup> However, under newly adopted Greek legislation, children and vulnerable groups cannot be returned. In 2015, IOM facilitated the voluntary return of more than 14,500 children, including 212 UAMs (of whom 84% were boys and 16% were girls),<sup>38</sup> from European Union Member States (and Switzerland) to their countries of origin.

35 General data are available from Frontex but do not disaggregate for children (Frontex, *Risk Analysis for 2016*).

36 European Council (2016), Statement of the EU Heads of State or Government, 07/03/2016. Available from [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/07-eu-turkey-meeting-statement/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/07-eu-turkey-meeting-statement/)

37 Official Journal of the European Union, *Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation*. Available from [www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:22014A0507\(01\)](http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:22014A0507(01))

38 IOM, *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration – 2015 Key Highlights* (Department of Migration Management, Migrant Assistance Division, IOM, Geneva, 2015). Available from [http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/DMM/AVRR/AVRR\\_2015\\_Key\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/AVRR_2015_Key_Highlights.pdf), p. 38.

## CONCLUSIONS

This briefing has highlighted the gaps and inconsistencies in data about children migrating to and through the European Union. Although in some cases, data are collected daily on arrival in Greece and Italy, there is a lack of detail. Age and gender should be disaggregated for children arriving at the European Union's southern borders, in all transit countries, and for all dependents in asylum claims. This would reveal the hitherto invisible children in Europe who are identified as "accompanied". This is crucial because the majority of migrant and refugee children who reached Europe by sea are accompanied.

The systematic collection and availability of statistics on age and gender may contribute to a better understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of migrant and refugee children and inform more tailored and targeted policy responses that reflect more accurately the diverse, complex and rapidly changing nature of migrant flows.

This briefing also highlights the absence of data on children with disabilities on the move and family reunification, as well as deficiencies in data on detention and return (particularly on those who were unaccompanied minors but have reached 18 years of age). Moreover, not only are there gaps in data coverage but also children are "double-counted". This occurs when disjointed recording mechanisms aggregate, rather than consolidate their data. Double counting is exacerbated when data are aggregated at local, national and European levels. Most attention has focused on numbers of "missing" children. As this briefing has shown, children can be counted in more than one jurisdiction and may be recorded as "missing" at various points throughout their journey. The double-counting of missing children is an important consideration when mapping child migration. More comparable and consistent data would provide the basis for greater understanding of the complexities of children's safe migration in Europe.

## ANNEX 1

## Terminology and definitions

Definitions	CRC	Schengen Borders Code (Regulation 562/2006)	Recast Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU)	Recast Asylum Procedures Directive (Directive 2013/32/EU)	Recast Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU)	Recast Dublin Regulation (Regulation 604/2013)	Recast Eurodac Regulation (Regulation 603/2013)	Anti-trafficking Directive (Directive 2011/36/EU)	Directive on Residence permits for victims of human trafficking (Directive 2004/81/EC)	Family reunification Directive (Directive 2003/86/EC)	Return Directive (Directive 2008/115/EC)
Unaccompanied minor			Art. 2(e)	Art. 2 (m)	Art. 2 (l)	Art. 2 (j)			Art. 2 (f)	Art. 2 (f)	
Family members			Art. 2 (c)		Art. 2 (j)	Art. 2 (k)					
Relative						Art. 2(h)					
Guardian / representative			Art. 2 (i)	Art. 2 (n)		Art. 2 (g)					
Applicant with reception needs			Arts. 2 (k), 21, 22								
Vulnerable person / vulnerability								Art. 2.2			Art. 3.9



Term	Legislation	Definition
Child	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	“For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years.”
Minor	European Union asylum instruments	“a third-country national or stateless person below the age of 18 years old”
Unaccompanied children	General Comment No. 6 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin.	“Unaccompanied children” (also called UAMs) are children, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention, 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.
Unaccompanied migrant minors	Council of Europe	Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors. The recommendation does not distinguish between regular or irregular migrants, asylum-seekers or others in need of protection.
Unaccompanied minor	European Migration Network Glossary	<p>A minor who arrives on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by the adult responsible for them by law or by the practice of the Member State concerned, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person. It includes a minor who is left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the Member States.</p> <p>Note:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There are significant differences between Member States with respect to national definitions and recording practices, for instance with regard to the age limit to be considered and whether or not they are unaccompanied.</li> <li>2. In some Member States, statistics include all those who claim they are UAMs (i.e. before an age assessment has confirmed this), whereas other Member States only count those recognized as such by a competent authority (i.e. following an age assessment).</li> </ol> <p>Source: Art. 2(l) of Directive 2011/95/EU (Recast Qualification Directive)</p>

## ANNEX 2

## Data sources

Name	Data on UAMs	Limitations	Updated
European Migration Network	Data compiled from national reports on applications for international protection; type of protection granted; those not applying for asylum; residence permits; missing; numbers in public care; detention pending return; forced return; voluntary return; assisted voluntary return programme; border controls for UAMs; types of residence permit granted; reception arrangements and integration measures; material and non-material conditions; return and reintegration	Compiled from national reports through special EMN project. Last updated 2013.	2013
Fundamental Rights Agency	Addresses child protection/UAMs.  Overview of arrivals at border/ apprehended within country/detained in: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and Sweden.	Some statistical data but not comparable or comprehensive.  Discursive overview of situation from State institutions and non-governmental organizations including some general information about age assessments/missing	Monthly (weekly until November 2015)
IOM	Migration Portal and Missing Migrants Project  Compilation of data and information  Statistical reports	Cumulative and biweekly arrivals by country of destination; nationality; flows; stranded migrants. (Italy and former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia breaks down un/accompanied children in data)  Broken down by nationality, accompanied minor (AM) or unaccompanied minor (UAM), arrival point (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia provides daily arrival data for AM/UAM)	Weekly, Monthly  Quarterly
UNICEF	Situation reports	Using data from Eurostat and UNHCR. Provides specific data about the number of children who received services from UNICEF.	Monthly

Name	Data on UAMs	Limitations	Updated
Eurostat data	Nationality, age and sex	Removals and detentions	2015
UNHCR	Information portal for the Mediterranean. Data snapshots	No demographic breakdown	Weekly
	Monthly combined data reports	Arrivals by destination and group (men, women, children, UAM)	Monthly
	Sporadic reports on trends of nationalities and arrivals	Nationality and group (men, women, children)	6 months
Asylum Information Database (ECRE)	Arrivals per year	No demographic breakdown	2015
Separated Children in Europe	Not data on numbers but comprehensive data on the policy changes in each EUMS	Not statistical data	6 months
European Asylum Support Office (EASO)	Asylum trends with specific focus on numbers of UAMs	No demographic breakdown (gender/nationality/age)	Monthly
	Trends in application for international protection by nationality, gender, age (0–15; 16–17; 18–34; 35–64; 65+); trends in decision at first instance; recognition rates; stock of pending cases; withdrawn applications; rejected cases	Uses Eurostat data. Doesn't break down asylum decision by cohort	Quarterly
Frontex	No disaggregated data available by age. Only disaggregated by nationality, route, type of border crossing and asylum applications	Not disaggregated by age	Quarterly
European Commission	Missing children across the EU27 also addressing UAMs	Commissioned study	2013

## About

### GMDAC

In response to growing calls for better data on migration, and better use and presentation of migration data, IOM has created a Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC). Located in the heart of Berlin, Germany, the Centre aims to provide authoritative and timely analysis of data on global migration issues as a global hub for data and statistics on migration.

### Data Briefing Series

The GMDAC Data Briefing Series aims to explain what lies behind the numbers and the data used in migration policy and public debates. The Briefings explain what “the numbers” indicate about movements of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, on a range of topics for policy across the globe.

The way the data are presented has an important influence on public perceptions of migration in Europe and the development of policy. The Series will serve to clarify, explain and exchange specialist knowledge in an accessible format for wider public and policy audiences, for capacity-building and evidence for policy. Briefings will be of interest to expert, as well as lay audiences, including journalists, students, local authority and city planners and lawyers.

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Please visit the GMDAC website for publications, resources, and events: <http://gmdac.iom.int>

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