



Save the Children



## Report

# EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Programme and Advocacy Report, February 2017

## Context

More than 1.3 million people have crossed the Mediterranean since 2015, taking potentially perilous journeys to flee conflict, instability and persecution across the Middle East and Africa.<sup>1</sup> With the Balkans border closures, more than 62,590 people are currently stranded in Greece, while following the signing of the controversial EU-Turkey deal in the first months of 2016, 14,640 people are still being held on the islands. Such restrictions have also shifted the focus to Italy, where 2016 marked the deadliest year on record for thousands of refugees and migrants crossing the Central Mediterranean to reach Italian shores.

Along the route, children face extortion by smugglers, sexual abuse and exploitation, violence and trafficking. Many have been living for months in detention centres, which lack the right protection, information, and services they so desperately need. Yet despite proposals made by Europe for an immediate response to the crisis such as the relocation and resettlement schemes, we are still experiencing the European failure to ensure children's rights and safety are guaranteed.

## Advocacy priorities at EU level

### 1) Improve reception conditions for refugee and migrant children

Too often reception procedures are not in the best interest of the child. This includes determining children's identity, assessing their age, their specific needs, as well as identifying a guardian or arranging temporary care solutions for unaccompanied children. These problems lead to prolonged uncertainty about children's legal status and future. Many children have lost trust in the institutions and measures intended to guarantee their rights, safety and well-being and they eventually disappear from the radar, increasing their exposure to smugglers and human traffickers.

Save the Children is therefore calling for:

- A reformed asylum system by EU members, guaranteeing the strongest possible protection for children.
- Reformed age assessment and identification procedures, which are in line with child friendly minimum standards.
- Education and health services that all refugee and migrant children to have access to in Europe.
- Effective durable solutions for all unaccompanied children.

### 2) Improve and expand existing regular and safe channels for children on the move to and within Europe

The focus on European policy makers remains on border control rather than the safety and needs of children fleeing violence and exploitation. Only a small proportion of refugees and migrants have been relocated and resettled under the relocation and resettlement schemes adopted by the EU. If people can make their way to the



### ISSUE OF THE MONTH

*This month, European leaders gathered in Malta to back a new deal that supports the Libyan coast guards in blocking migrant departures from the Libyan coast. On the same day, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Libya and Italy. Save the Children is deeply concerned about this deal which would trap thousands of children in war torn-Libya, exposing them to physical and sexual abuse. [Read more about our position here.](#)*

<sup>1</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

EU in an organized and orderly manner, this can decrease the likelihood of children absconding and disappearing into the irregular circuit or risking their life crossing the Mediterranean. It enhances Member States' control over migration procedures and reduces people smuggling.

*Save the Children is therefore calling for:*

- Improved relocation of children from Greece and Italy.
- Improved family reunification and resettlement schemes, and humanitarian visas for all refugees as well as private sponsorship programmes.

### **3) Ensure EU migration initiatives respect the rights of children on the move and their best interest.**

The EU is intensifying cooperation with governments in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Mali, as well as in East African countries like Ethiopia. Essentially, this means we could see the return of migrants to their countries of origin. With the primary focus of these agreements on curbing migration, deterrence and expulsion, there are no safeguards envisaged to ensure that human rights, rule of law standards and protection are in place. As a result, people are at risk of being deported to countries where their rights are not safeguarded.

*Save the Children is therefore calling for:*

- Migration management agreements between the EU and third countries to respect fundamental rights and prevent returning people, particularly children, from a European country to a third country if they violate or risk violating fundamental rights.
- The EU position on the Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular migration to be in line with international human rights standards.

## **Greece and the Balkans advocacy priorities**

With freezing winter conditions across the region, overcrowding in camps and deplorable conditions of those still staying in makeshift shelters and tents, urgent scale up of appropriate reception and support services, with a particular focus on emergency winterized accommodation for children and vulnerable persons is needed.

In view of the increased numbers of pushbacks of refugees and migrants, including many children and unaccompanied minors, being carried out by countries of the region, in some cases while using violence, Save the Children is calling for human rights of all refugees and migrants to be respected regardless of their migratory status. It is unconscionable and unlawful to continue clandestinely moving people from one country to another with no regard to their rights or needs.

With more frequent instances of detention of migrants, including children, all countries of the region must consider alternatives to detention for children since detention can never be in the best interest of the child.

### **KEY DATES**

- 1 – 24 March:** 34th Human Rights Council's session –interactive dialogue on the human rights of migrants in the context of large movements
- 9-10 March:** European Council
- 20 March:** First anniversary of EU-Turkey Deal
- 26-27 May:** G7 Summit (Italy)
- June (TBC):** Children on the Move Conference
- 20 June:** Refugee Day
- 22-23 June:** European Council
- 7-8 July:** G20 Summit (Germany)
- 22-23 July:** IOM International Dialogue on Migration
- 2 September:** Aylan Anniversary
- 12-25 September:** 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly
- 19-20 October:** European Council
- November (TBC):** Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact on Migration
- 14-15 December:** European Council

## RESPONSE UPDATES

### Greece

#### Context and issues

- With the border between Greece and FYROM officially closed, more than 62,590 people are stranded in Greece, including 14,640 people held on the islands as part of the EU agreement with Turkey.<sup>2</sup>
- Since the start of the EU-Turkey in March, the number of arrivals has dropped significantly. In February 2016, 57,066 people arrived in Greece compared with just 471 so far in February 2017<sup>3</sup>. So far, 889 people have been deported to Turkey as part of the EU-Turkey return agreement.
- Camps and detention centres on the mainland and the islands often fall far below minimum humanitarian standards. Some sites are equipped with basic services while others lack adequate accommodation, toilets and other hygiene facilities. With movement from the islands to the mainland now banned for most people, the sites are becoming overcrowded with families sleeping in tents or out in the open.
- Almost all camps on the islands are at or are exceeding maximum capacity due to the number of new arrivals in recent weeks, causing massive concerns related to protection, health, physical security. Conditions are extremely poor and security incidents, such as fights and protests, are continuing in many locations.

#### Programmatic work

- Save the Children in Greece is working in more than 20 sites across Greece, including camps, detention centres and shelters. Since launching its response in Greece in August 2015, the team has reached more than 518,000 children and adults.
- Save the Children Greece runs Child and Youth Friendly Spaces, case management where trained case workers, social workers, psychologists and lawyers provide support for the most vulnerable families and children and help them access services, Mother and Baby Areas, and non-formal education where children can attend language and maths classes.
- The team also provides shelters and supports in other accommodation arrangements with counselling and recreational activities for the most vulnerable lone children.

#### Advocacy priorities

- Immediate access to appropriate shelter is needed for all refugees and migrants, regardless of their status, to prevent unnecessary loss of life, particularly for children.
- The need for safe and appropriate facilities in line with international standards is urgent. For this purpose, increased collaboration and planning between NGOs, the Ministry of Migration Policy and the Ministry of National Defence is required not only for the improvement of the conditions in the already existing sites but also for ensuring that new sites will meet approved standards before opening.
- The Asylum Service needs to be immediately strengthened, particularly to avoid any potential backlog. The slow processing of asylum claims is leading to severe overcrowding at detention facilities on Greek islands.

### FYROM

#### Context and issues

<sup>2</sup> Government of Greece: <http://mindigital.gr/index.php/προσφυγικό-ζήτημα-refugee-crisis/957-summary-statement-of-refugee-flows-to-eastern-aegean-islands-13-02-2017>

UNHCR: as of 13 Feb 2017: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>

<sup>3</sup> As of 13 Feb 2017: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>



# Report

- The official closure of the Balkans Route on March 9, 2016 has not stopped the migrant flow through FYROM but only led to increased smuggling activity making refugees transiting through FYROM even more vulnerable.
- There is a regular flow of new arrivals, with an average of 60 persons daily during Dec/Jan (from July-Nov 2016 there were between 100-150 newcomers on daily bases). Those are reportedly irregularly arriving from Northern Greece, mainly with smugglers.
- The majority of refugees are placed in two transit centers: one the Southern border with Greece 'Gevgelija' and one on the North with Serbia 'Tabanovce'. They offer services for approximately 200 individuals that have been 'stranded' after the border closure.
- In recent months, there has also been a growing trend of 'pushbacks', sometimes violent, including families, children and unaccompanied and separated children from Serbia to FYROM. As a result, refugees and migrants in FYROM are exceptionally vulnerable to abuse, violence, exploitation and trafficking.

## Programmatic work

- As the risks and vulnerability of the people on the move increases every day with winter, strict police patrols, and more frequent push backs to Greece and from Serbia, Save the Children and Macedonian Red Cross is covering the whole region around Tabanovce with two mobile teams, consisting of five professionals: social workers, psychologists, medical doctors, paramedics and translators.
- Save the Children FYROM via Red Cross is also providing medical assistance for prevention of infective diseases such as scabies which is on the rise among the migrants and refugees.
- The team also continues to support the Infant and Young Child Feeding program in both transit centres by providing technical support to the Mother and Baby Areas.

## Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children FYROM is advocating to ensure the rights and needs of those crossing are met, particularly for unaccompanied and separated children, and that they receive quality services and support. Alternative care arrangements should be considered as solutions for these unaccompanied and separated children.
- FYROM's advocacy focus has also been on returns, in particular on the procedural requirements for the return of children.

## Serbia

### Context and issues

- Refugees and migrants are arriving to Serbia daily; about third of them are children.
- More than 8,000 refugees and migrants are stranded in Serbia.
- Around 86% of refugees and migrants present in Serbia are accommodated in official asylum centers. Temporary shelter was found to accommodate people squatting abandoned buildings and warehouses in Belgrade's city centre, but over 800 are still sleeping rough there, while over 200 people are staying rough in Subotica, close to the border with Hungary. The smugglers are strongly present, increasing the risks for many, but especially for the lone children.
- Unlawful push-backs and collective expulsions, with some alleging maltreatment by police, continue – over 2,000 push-backs are reported from the beginning of the year from Hungary and Croatia to Serbia and over 50 from Serbia to FYROM and Bulgaria (UNHCR).

### Programmatic work

- Save the Children Serbia provides temporary shelters for unaccompanied children and supports in hiring social workers and psychologists for these children.
- In Belgrade, Save the Children, together with other agencies and local partners, runs a 24/7 drop-in centre for the new arrivals to provide immediate life-saving assistance for those waiting to be registered and

accommodated in official shelters. The service also includes a youth space and child friendly corner, providing psychosocial support through creative activities.

- In Belgrade, the team also runs mobile outreach teams providing legal counselling, identifying and referring vulnerable cases, as well as distributing Non Food Items to the most vulnerable cases.
- We provide psychosocial support to refugee and migrant population through Child Safeguarding teams in the Presevo Reception Centre and within the Asylum Centre Bogovadja. In both centres our teams are conducting educational activities preparing children to enrol in schools.
- We have been providing crucial NFIs for winter conditions (solar lamps, blankets, clothes and shoes) through our local partners and volunteer groups, both in the camps and for those outside of the centres.
- The team is particularly worried about the numerous cases of unaccompanied minors who face grave risks and therefore we have been working with the Serbian Government to increase capacities for adequate accommodation of unaccompanied children by refurbishing and equipping 4 temporary shelters. We have also supported hiring additional 65 social workers and psychologists to provide support to unaccompanied children.

## Advocacy priorities

- Greater visibility needs to be ensured for refugees and migrants still arriving to Serbia (and traveling through the Balkans route) to prevent rights violations and reduce protection concerns.
- With more favourable weather, we expect the number of refugees and migrants to increase necessitating an increase in shelter capacities, and urgent shelter capacities, in Serbia with adequate financial support by donors.
- Emergency shelter capacities need to be urgently increased by Serbia with adequate financial support by donors, mainly EU.
- Legal and safe routes for migration need to be discussed, including enhanced family reunification, resettlement, humanitarian visas, private sponsorship and similar as the best way to combat smuggling everywhere along the route.

## Croatia

### Context and issues

- In Croatia, all refugee and migrants have been accommodated in two Asylum centres: one in Zagreb, accommodating 500 people and one in Kutina, accommodating more vulnerable people (families, elderly etc.), currently accommodating 80 people.
- Arrivals to Croatia happen through: illegal crossings mainly from Serbia; reallocation from one EU member state to another (namely Greece and Italy); resettlement from third countries (Turkey, Jordan) to the EU (to cities of Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Osijek); and returns from EU countries - those whose asylum application has been turned down in EU countries.

### Programmatic overview

- Save the Children in Croatia implements informal educational activities in Zagreb and Kutina which include Croatian language education for teenagers and adults, creative and life skills workshops for teenagers, including unaccompanied minors, workshops for pre-school children, English language education for adults, and literacy class for adults when needed. The team also supports unaccompanied children recently accommodated in the homes for children.
- We provide support to mothers in both asylum centres, advising them on feeding, providing hygiene items and clothes for babies and young children and breast milk substitute. We also organize individual counselling sessions and art-therapeutic workshops for mothers and women.

- Psychological support and cultural mediation is provided by Save the Children on a daily basis for asylum seekers and irregular immigrants in both asylum centres. The team also provides support to women and families with medical problems and visits to medical exams and hospitals.

## Advocacy priorities

- Adequate identification and support to the most vulnerable, unaccompanied minors in particular need to be strengthened
- Adequate support must be provided for integration of all refugees and migrants, unaccompanied minors in particular.
- We remained concerned about clandestine push-backs and call on all countries to refrain from unlawful collective expulsions that could amount to a grave breach of the countries' international human rights obligations.

## Italy

### Context and issues

- 181,436 refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea and reached Italy in 2016 (153,842 in 2015). 13% were women and 16% children.<sup>4</sup>
- 90% of the children were unaccompanied. The number of unaccompanied children more than doubled in 2016 from 12,360 in 2015 to 25,846 in 2016.
- There was a large decrease in Syrian arrivals in 2016 and a growing trend of migrants from the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mali and Bangladesh.
- As of mid-February 2017, more than 9,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy, of which 1,400 are children (150 accompanied and 1,250 unaccompanied).

### Programmatic work

- Since October 2016, Save the Children Italy has been working on two EU projects. The first 18 months project aims to reinforce the unaccompanied and separated child protection and reception system. The team works with 9 mobile teams displaced in the Northern (Lombardia) and Southern Borders (Sicily – including Lampedusa, Apulia, Calabria, Campania and Sardinia).
- The second 15 months project aims to enhance psychological first aid to children who have arrived in the Southern Border and to promote child safeguarding in the first reception centers.
- In 2017 the team will continue working with children in CivicoZero reception centers based in Rome, Milan and Turin as well as in the Helpline (SC Italy phone-line).
- Save the Children Italy reached 23,666 children including 4,121 accompanied and 19,545 unaccompanied children in 2016. Total reach figures for 2017 are 1,470 children, where of 290 accompanied and 1,160 UASC.

### Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children Italy asks Parliament to approve the law proposal inspired by Save the Children, which aims to provide Italy with a comprehensive system of protection and reception for unaccompanied and separated children.
- Save the Children also asks local authorities and tutelary judges to facilitate the designation of volunteer legal guardians for unaccompanied and separated children.

## Search and Rescue

### Context and issues

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<sup>4</sup> Italian Ministry of Interior

# Report

- 2016 was the deadliest year on record for refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean with more than 5,000 deaths at sea - the majority between North Africa and Italy.
- 366 refugees and migrants have already died this year in two separate shipwrecks.

## Programmatic work

- In September 2016 Save the Children launched a Search and Rescue vessel in the Central Mediterranean, working in close coordination with the Italian Coastguard to rescue and bring children and adults to a safe port in Italy.
- On board child protection experts offer support to vulnerable rescued children and provide a child friendly space. The team also works in close cooperation with Save the Children Italy's domestic Child Protection programme and other service providers on-shore to ensure they are prepared to receive and follow up on the vulnerable cases.
- Rescued persons are also offered lifesaving medical support by our medical experts and provided with nutritional rations and an adult kit which includes a blanket, face towel, and a bottle of water when they come on board.
- The operation ran from September to November 2016. It then paused for the winter and will resume on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.

## Advocacy priorities

- Search and Rescue is asking for European States to support Italy with search-and-rescue operations: saving lives – not border control – should be the over-riding priority.
- European states must also provide safe and legal alternatives both for those in need of international protection and for other migrants, which ensure human rights and respect dignity, and also establish a long-term plan to tackle the root causes of unsafe and forced migration.

## Lebanon

### Context and issues

- Lebanon, a country with a population of a little over 4 million, still hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees relative to its population in the region, with almost 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees, while over 400,000 remain unregistered. This equals more than one-quarter of the country's population.
- There is a need to expand and improve access to formal education. The non-formal education programming needs to be formalized and rolled out.

### Programmatic work

- Save the Children Lebanon provides Early Childhood Care and Development activities and psychosocial and child protection activities for children in the Bekka area, Beirut and the North.
- Save the Children is reinforcing the importance of education through our Back-to-School campaign by supporting both children and teachers.
- Save the Children also managed the distribution of garbage cans to Al Mankoubin Municipality and distributes hygiene kits to children's parents.

### Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children Lebanon is advocating to remove barriers to education, implementing a clear, simple and reliable residency renewal process for Syrian refugees that does not require substantial fees or sponsorship.
- International donors and policy-makers should also engage in dialogue with the Ministries on issues of education, residency permits, right to work and other limiting factors that adversely affect children's wellbeing and their right to education.

## Jordan



# Report

## Context and issues

- The number of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan to date is 656,170. About 50% of the total registered Syrian refugees, are children between 5-17 years old.
- From the total registered Syrians, almost 78% are residing in the host community, while more than 20% are situated in camps.

## Programmatic work

- Save the Children in Jordan's response focuses on education, protection, health, nutrition and Food Security and Livelihoods programming.
- The team runs child and family centres, informal education centres and Informal Tented Settlements across the different regions in Jordan where children are provided with life skills, psychosocial support, and informal education.
- Case management is provided in the camps' schools and 12 help desks across Jordan.
- The team also runs Infant and Young Child Feeding centres in the camps and host communities and distributes e-cards, bread and meals to refugees in Za'atari camp.
- Through Livelihood programs, the team provides training session through vocational training centers to provide employment opportunities.

## Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children Jordan's advocacy focus is around refugee children's education and access to education for the most marginalised refugee children as part of the Every Last Child campaign, and on the Sustainable Development Goals in the lead up to the High Level Political Forum on SDGs

## Turkey

### Context and issues

- In January 2016, the number of registered Syrians was over 2.5 million, and as of December 2016 the number is over 2.7 million, an increase of approximately 200,000. This is comparatively low given that fact that 2016 has been one of the most violent years in the Syrian crisis.
- Since March 2015, the Government of Turkey (GoT) has pursued tighter border controls, which now render the borders effectively shut.
- The GoT has shifted its education policy, and plans to have all Syrian children integrated into the state education systems within 3 years. It has been recently announced that Turkish citizenship would be available to well-educated and highly qualified Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

### Programmatic work

- Save the Children Turkey has supported 54 Temporary Education Centres across Hatay province, and distributed 15,343 student kits, 14,414 hygiene kits, and provided transportation support to 1390 children of which 432 were out of school and are now attending education full-time.
- The team is rehabilitating classrooms and making 5 Temporary Education Centers quality learning environment according to international standards. 3 schools are being constructed in three districts of Hatay province that will serve the educational needs of 1,530 Syrian children. The construction is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2017.
- Two adolescent friendly centres are due to be fully operationally in January 2017, and will provide the following services: catch up classes, language courses, psychosocial support, certified skills training in areas like IT, and nutrition support for young mothers and infant children.
- To address issues specific child protection cases, a case management team has been established. The case management team have been able to reach some of the most vulnerable refugees, such as new arrivals from Syria, and able to provide them assistance and information about access to services and rights.

### Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children Turkey's advocacy priorities centre around expanding the Turkey programme into new provinces, such as Istanbul.
- We continue to promote children's rights, and advocate for access to education. Our programmatic work seeks to strengthen and link into existing services provided by the Turkish government, rather than produce parallel systems. We identify gaps – such as addressing the specific education and vocational needs of adolescents and children with irregular access to formal education – and provide pragmatic workable programming to address these needs.

## Norway

### Context and issues

- A historical low number of people sought asylum in Norway in 2016. The total number was 3460 people, of which 320 were unaccompanied children. The majority were from Eritrea, Syria and Afghanistan. The majority of unaccompanied minors were from Afghanistan.
- So far in 2017 approximately 150 people have sought asylum in Norway.
- Norway has so far only received approximately 300 relocation refugees, of the 750 Norway promised to relocate in 2016 and the 750 in 2017.
- The Norwegian government is prioritizing the return of asylum seekers, and children are often detained for a short period of time as part of the process.
- An increasing number of asylum seeker applications from Afghanistan are being rejected. A significant higher number of unaccompanied children from Afghanistan are given temporary permits until they turn 18 only. Norway has returned several unaccompanied minors, who have been age assessed to be over 18, to Afghanistan. There is a concern that some of the youth may have been under 18 as the age assessments are largely based on poor quality medical methods.

### Programmatic work

- A 2-year plan has been developed for the Save the Children Norway domestic response, which encompasses direct work with children (largely through volunteers) during the asylum process and integration process; advice, training and support to government and organizations working with migrant and refugee children; and direct advocacy with the government as the leading child rights organization in Norway.
- 546 children in reception centers have participated in our activities, organized by 212 volunteers. 139 children have participated in our integration activities, organized by 112 volunteers
- SC Norway works with teachers for better inclusion of children seeking asylum at school.
- There is a clear need for more information for children asylum seekers, and someone to talk to in their own languages. The team is therefore looking into the possibility of setting up a helpline (similar to that of Save the Children Sweden).

### Advocacy priorities

- An increasing number of unaccompanied children from Afghanistan are not granted asylum in Norway but are given temporary permits only, which means they will be returned to Afghanistan when they turn 18. Save the Children Norway is pushing the message that unaccompanied children should not be given temporary visas.
- The government has published a white paper regulating the detention of children in the asylum process. The team is advocating that no children should be detained.
- A new research report on unaccompanied minors that disappear from reception centres and care centres in Norway has been published. The report looks at what is being done to prevent and follow up these disappearances, and how this work may be strengthened. Save the Children Norway have been following up the findings from the report calling for greater responsibility to be taken to prevent and follow up minors who go missing.

# Report

- The government announced plans to lower the standard of care to unaccompanied and separated children under 15 years in Norway. The team is therefore advocating that all children, regardless of immigration status, have the right to equal protection and care standards.

## France

*\*Save the Children's response in France is now concluded after the demolition of the camp at Calais and the end of our partnership with the Refugee Youth Service in December 2016. We continue to monitor the situation in France and build developments there into our advocacy work, but we will no longer be programming there.\**

## UK

### New Context Development and Issues

- During 2016, 30,603 people applied for asylum in the UK.
- There were 3,175 asylum applications from unaccompanied and separated children in 2016, a 2% decrease compared to 2015 (3,253).
- The UK Government announced in February that it will only transfer 150 more vulnerable children from Greece and Italy under the Dubs amendment. The amendment remains in statute.

### Programmatic work

- We have given out 50 Eat, Sleep, Learn, Play! Grants to children and families arriving in the UK.
- We have delivered Journey of Hope to colleagues at Refugee Radio, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT), Homewood School, KRAN (Kent Refugee Action Network), Nottingham Refugee Forum. West Sussex Local Authority will delivery Journey of Hope to teenage refugees (including unaccompanied asylum seeking children).
- We trained 12 foster carers in Northampton via our capacity-building training aimed at foster carers taking in unaccompanied children.

### Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children UK is advocating for a relocation process for children and their families from Europe to the UK under Dubs and Dublin III that places children's best interests at its heart.
- The team has run a backbench Conservative business debate on Dubs and Dublin with UNICEF and UNHCR; responded in the media to the announcement of the remaining 150 places for Dubs relocations; and run a reactive campaign to increase investment in developing a functional, proactive Dublin system to reunite children in Europe with their families in the UK.

## Sweden

### Context and issues

- During 2016, 28,939 persons applied for asylum in Sweden (163,000 in 2015).
- The situation for unaccompanied children has been very difficult since last summer and during the last month this has culminated in 3 suicides among the children. Many people have protested against poorly made age assessments that have had a big effect on these youth. Now after increased pressure, the Migration Authority finally stated that the age assessments in the current form would be stopped as of last Saturday (18<sup>th</sup> February). This until a proper procedure for assessments is in place.

### Programmatic work

- In 2016, Save the Children Sweden is helpline received approximately 1400 calls. Due to above situation, calls to the helpline increased from approximately 5-7 per day to over 40 per day and the team had to increase staff. It is now back to normal.

# Report

- At least 20 of the team's local branches run at least one child friendly space each. The local branches have a total reach of 1260 girls, 1620 boys and 1900 adults between February-November 2016.

## Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children Sweden is demanding that all the assessments that were carried out be reinvestigated by the National Board of Forensic Medicine. We are also demanding that once the new assessments start, the 'benefit of the doubt' principle is used, so if there is uncertainty about the age, the age should be set closest to what the youth themselves claim.
- Save the Children Sweden's biggest priority for this year is to advocate against the temporary migration law that was enforced in 2016.
- The team has been advocating to support unaccompanied children in different ways. We published an article about the worrying situation for refugee children in one of the major newspapers and we are sending out one for local advocacy to improve conditions for unaccompanied youth at the municipality level.

## Finland

### Context and issues

- A total of 5657 persons applied for asylum in Finland in 2016 (32,476 in 2015)
- There are approximately 120 reception centres in Finland with about 16,000 refugees and migrants. Many reception centres will close during the spring 2017.
- Currently many people whose asylum claims have been accepted are still waiting for residence decisions from the municipalities. Those whose asylum claims have been rejected are not willing to return voluntarily to their home country, as such the number of people staying in Finland without legal status is expected to grow.

### Programmatic work

- Save the Children Finland runs three Child Friendly Spaces for asylum seeking children in three reception centers across Finland. Trained volunteers provide activities for children to strengthen children's psychosocial wellbeing, to encourage children to learn new skills and express themselves. Most of the activities are offered for under school-aged children and for children between 7 and 13 years of age.
- Save the Children Finland has two under age units for unaccompanied minors in Oulu, Northern Finland and in Espoo, southern Finland. In Espoo the team runs a supported housing unit for unaccompanied minors (16-17 years old) who have been granted asylum or another permission to stay in Finland, and are now integrating in Finnish society. There are places for 38 persons in the supported housing unit. In Oulu there is a group unit for children of whom most already have a permission to stay in Finland but who are waiting for their further placement, and a family group unit for children who have permissions to stay in Finland and are in need of special assistance. Through the family group unit the children are learning skills for everyday life.

### Advocacy priorities

- In its advocacy work related to child refugees and migrants Save the Children Finland is concentrating on:
  - Child refugees globally - as one thematic focus in our national Every Last Child campaign
  - Returns to Iraq and Somalia; Finland has already signed bilateral return agreement with Afghanistan, and is now pushing one with Iraq
  - "Paperless" children - children who do not have a legal status and staying in Finland
  - Best interest of the child in asylum processes in Finland; Save the Children Finland is participating with UNHCR led working group for BIC that brings together the officials of the Finnish Migration

# Report

Services and certain Finnish NGOs, such as Central Union for Child Welfare and Refugee Advice Centre

- Family reunification: advocating for change in the extremely tight processes

## Spain

### Context and issues

- According to UNHCR in 2016, over 3,900 refugees and migrants entered the EU through Melilla, including more than 950 minors.
- The six largest nationalities were Syria, Guinea, Algeria, Morocco, and Palestine. The arrival of people from Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and the significant increase in the arrival of people from Yemen, especially in the last month of 2016 is expected to continue.
- 70% of the Syrian refugees that arrived in 2016 are women and children, many of whom claim to have used the route through Melilla, one of only two land borders between the EU and Africa, to avoid the dangerous maritime route.
- The number of asylum applications formalized in Melilla in 2016 was approx. 2,450.
- As for the situation of unaccompanied children living in Melilla, inside or outside the protection centers, there have been a large number of new minors reported in January (180 according to police data).

### Programmatic work

- In the temporary reception center in Melilla, CETI, Save the Children Spain runs recreational activities through Child Friendly Spaces for children up to 3 years old and activities in Youth Friendly Spaces for up to 16 years old. The team also identifies vulnerable children in foster homes, offering support and legal advice and runs outreach activities for street refugee and migrant children.
- Save the Children Spain is opening a day center in 2017 to facilitate non-formal education, recreational activities, protection and psychosocial support to refugees and migrants and unaccompanied children in Melilla. Many of the activities in CETI will be transferred to the day center.

### Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children Spain's priority is ensuring the Spanish government fulfil the obligations committed in terms of relocation from Greece and Italy, with a particular focus on unaccompanied minors. For that purpose, we are advocating to make available a sufficient number of places for the relocation of unaccompanied minors in their territories. Meanwhile, the protection and reception conditions of unaccompanied minors in Melilla and other parts of Spain is still a priority.

## Denmark

### Context and issues

- Over 6,500 refugees and migrants sought asylum in Denmark during 2016 (21,316 in 2015). Asylum seekers from Syria and Afghanistan made up about 40% of the asylum applicants in 2016. Other major groups are 'stateless persons' and asylum seekers from Iraq.
- Unaccompanied minors made up around 20% of the asylum applicants in 2016 compared to around 10% in 2015.
- In 2017, the influx continues to be very low due to border restrictions, but unaccompanied children form a relatively higher percentage than before. The largest group of unaccompanied come from Afghanistan. A number of asylum centres are being closed down, and people moved from centre to centre in the process.

### Programmatic work

- SC Denmark has now started a pilot resilience-building project in the northern part of Denmark aimed at unaccompanied minors during their stay at a children's asylum centres.
- The team runs integration activities through Family Clubs where families with children come together to participate in a range of family oriented activities. An additional integration project helps newly arrived



refugee children and their families getting access to some of the many sports clubs and other social activity clubs and societies in Denmark. Other integration projects are aimed at especially distressed refugee families who participate in out-door/nature activities.

## Advocacy priorities

- We advocate for the rights of migrant/refugee children, for increased access to social services, for better training of staff in asylum centres, and we are concerned about treatment of children in connection with increased pressure for (forced) repatriation.

## Netherlands

### Context and issues

- In 2016 18,171 persons applied for asylum in the Netherlands (43,093 in 2015). An additional 11,814 persons arrived as a result of family reunification. The majority are from Syria.
- 40% of those who applied for asylum in 2016 were children of which approximately 1500 were unaccompanied minors from Eritrea, Afghanistan and Syria.

### Programmatic work

- Save the Children Netherlands together with War Child and UNICEF Netherlands, developed a project organizing structured weekly sport, games and dance activities for children age 6-18 living in 'refugee' shelters. The project runs in 8 shelters with 56 facilitators reaching 500 children by the end of 2016. New funds will allow the team to expand to 32 shelter locations.
- Currently the team is exploring the possibility of a similar pilot project in primary education in the Netherlands.

### Advocacy priorities

- Save the Children Netherlands is asking the Dutch Ministry of Security & Justice to investigate the whereabouts of missing refugee children in the Netherlands and Europe. We focus specifically on the risks of refugee children becoming victims of children trafficking, gender-based violence and (sexual) exploitation.
- The Dutch government is supporting the increasing amount of agreements between the EU and so-called third countries, for example the *Joint way forward* deal between the EU and Afghanistan. Save the Children Netherlands is actively lobbying the Dutch government to safeguard children's rights during the implementation of these deals.

## Germany

### Context and issues

- 745,545 asylum applications were registered totally by the Federal Office of Migration and Refugees of Germany in 2016. 36.2% of all asylum seekers are younger than 18 years. 10.8% of all asylum seekers are younger than 4 years.
- In January 2017, the Federal Office of Migration and Refugees of Germany registered 16,057 first asylum applications. In comparison to January 2016 the number of registered first asylum applications decreased by 68.2%.
- A 16-point action plan of 16 German states' ministries of interior calls for speeding and scaling up deportations from Germany by setting up federal deportation centers near airports to facilitate collective deportations.

### Programmatic work

- Save the Children Germany has operated Child Friendly Spaces in Berlin-Tempelhof that have served 982 children, with 3,151 children attending in 2016. Tempelhof-CFS opened in January 2016, and the team will be phasing out its support there by March 2017.
- Save the Children Germany are sending mobile teams to two additional field locations to support the establishment of Child Friendly Spaces.
- A child rights' situational analysis in six reception centers in Berlin, Sachsen-Anhalt and Brandenburg has been completed by the end of 2016. The results are currently being shared with the centers, as well as round table discussions are being planned at the centers to discuss the results and make an action plan to address the results.
- Child Protection experts are currently training 4 Child Protection specialists who will support the Child Protection work in the field for Save the Children Germany.
- Child practitioners and teachers increase their capacity through Psycho-Social Support (PSS) trainings in kindergartens and primary schools in Berlin and Brandenburg run by Save the Children.

## **Advocacy priorities**

- With the upcoming elections and calls to lower the numbers of refugees, there is lots of political pressure on the remaining legal pathways to Germany, namely family reunification. A stakeholder dialogue with the German Government, Judges, UNHCR and civil society on February 21<sup>st</sup> will be the kick-off for a series of advocacy tools, followed by a position paper.
- Returns and returns procedures under Dublin and readmission agreements will be major issue in the months to come.
- Reception conditions: With the results of our child rights' analysis now available, Save the Children Germany are able to argue evidence-based for better and dignified reception conditions.