Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

More than 862,901 people have undertaken treacherous sea crossings in 2015 according to UNHCR. Of them 82 per cent arrive through Greece. The Mediterranean Sea is one of the world’s deadliest migration routes, which has taken the lives of nearly 1,300 children in only 10 months in 2015. Despite the dangers and risks, more children take the journey to Europe in the hope of reaching peace and security. UNICEF has seen a steady increase in the proportion of women and children, who register in Gevgelija, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia- from an average of 634 per day (36 per cent of all registered) in September to an average
of 1,329 per day (44 per cent all registered) in October and an average of 1,651 per day (49 per cent of all registered) in the first two weeks in November. Moreover, during the first two weeks of November the number of children registered in Gevgelija, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (10,565) exceeded the number of children registered for the entire month of September (9,563). Since June 2015, total of 12,450 unaccompanied and separated children were registered at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. 8,890 of them were registered since the beginning of October.

More than 214,355 children have claimed asylum within the European Union between January and September 2015 according to Eurostat data as of 17 November. This is twice as many as the total number of child asylum applications for the whole of 2014. Children from three conflict-affected countries alone (Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq) account for 49 per cent of all asylum claims in the EU.

Many of those asylum seekers take the Western Balkans route and in only one month (16 October-16 November), 221,044 people arrived in Slovenia from Croatia. The Slovenian Government has made significant efforts to provide basic shelter and transportation services, but the lack of translators, overcrowded trains and physical restrictions by police officers impose difficult conditions during people’s movement. As of 19 November Slovenia, followed by Croatia, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have started to restrict the flow of refugees and migrants on the move, allowing only Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans to continue, while people from other nationalities are being returned to previous county of transit. Recent restrictions in the flow of refugees and migrants create additional challenges to this extremely complex emergency, including stranding of people at different crossing points and putting additional pressure on the first-line responders. Concerned about the consequences of such political decisions, on 20 November a first joint statement from UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM raised strong voice for children uprooted by violent conflicts and asked European countries to provide safe, legal avenues, such as resettlement, humanitarian admission and family reunion, as alternatives to the chaotic and dangerous smuggling routes they are forced to take today to reach safety. UNICEF believes that sudden border closures will only add to the distress of children on the move. As winter start in Europe, another hour spent in the rain and cold, another day caught in the mud in no man’s land risks the health and safety of thousands of children.

Due to unusually favourable weather conditions during the first half of November and the continuous humanitarian service provision to children and their families along the Western Balkans route, cases of infants suffering from hypothermia have partially decreased during the first half of November 2015. However, as cold, rain and snow is rapidly starting across Europe, it becomes increasingly urgent to ensure sufficient supply of blankets and winter clothes for the population on the move, as well as improved conditions and heating in the reception centres along the route. Adequate access to child-appropriate food is still problematic causing digestive problems among children on the move. The lack of private space, stress and fatigue are additional risks for young children and their mothers, affecting the infant health and nutrition. UNICEF is concerned that no systemic response to the rights of refugee and migrant children to adequate health care in cases requiring longer periods of hospitalisation and surgeries. Children with disabilities and their families are still facing difficulties with regards to their mobility and ability to communicate during their journey, while existing constraints with the registration process do not allow for the systemic identification of persons with disabilities and their needs.

Humanitarian strategy

In line with the Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies, UNICEF is currently responding to the crisis in Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia through a combination of advocacy, capacity building and programmatic response. UNICEF is also working to extend similar support to children and women throughout their entire journey, most notably in Greece, Austria, Slovenia, Germany and Italy. With winter fast approaching and Governments tightening of procedures on the borders of countries along the route used by refugees and migrants, UNICEF is looking at potential scenarios – particularly if populations get stranded. This also includes ongoing
preparedness support to countries and territories presently not significantly affected but considered to be at higher risk including Bulgaria, Albania and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).

Through its country offices and in collaboration with its National Committees and other partners, UNICEF is engaged in policy dialogue and advocacy with governments and the institutions of the European Union in order to be the voice of refugee and migrant children in national and regional policy processes undertaken in response to the present crisis.

In addition, UNICEF is partnering with UNHCR and IOM on the development of an inter-agency Regional Refugees and Migrants Response Plan (RRMRP) to ensure that the special needs of babies, children with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children and other vulnerable children are properly addressed along their whole journey from Turkey, through Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia.

**Coordination**

UNICEF is actively engaged in regular Government and UN country team coordination meetings on the refugee and migrant crisis. This includes consultation with all relevant ministries, as well as UNHCR, respective national branches Red Cross chapters, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, IOM, and key international NGOs. As the global humanitarian and development agency for the rights of every child, UNICEF has taken the lead in mobilising all relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of the concerns of refugee and migrant children, to adapt its response to their needs, and improve assistance to children and their families during their journey across Europe, both as part of the immediate humanitarian response and through long-term support to national child protection systems.

**Summary Analysis of Programme Response**

UNICEF is continuing with its response for the protection needs of children and their families amongst the refugee and migrant population on the move in Europe, prioritizing activities in the areas of child protection, health and nutrition – especially infant and young children feeding – water and sanitation, nutrition and education. UNICEF is also engaged in policy advocacy with its Government partners and capacity development of the front-line responders especially related to the best interests determination for children.

In collaboration with UNHCR and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a concept of Children and Family Support Hubs has been developed and agreed upon to deliver a set of standards and key interventions to support families on the move. The Children and Family Support Hubs will aim to build from and scale up the interventions provided through existing child-friendly spaces and provide a range of services including recreation and play activities for children, psychosocial support to families on the move, dedicated mother and baby/toddler spaces, where women can breastfeed and clean their children in private areas, and access safe drinking water. The Children and Family Support Hubs will also be a key setting for family tracing and reunification, referral services for cases of violence or specialized medical assistance, provision of direct assistance to children with disabilities and other special needs, legal aid, hygiene, health and nutrition counselling. The Hubs will also serve as dedicated points for distribution of supply to the families on the move, including specialized kits and warm clothes. In this way the partner agencies are striving to maximize the coherence and predictability of a package of services provided and aiming to achieve better visibility through a unique and recognizable label that each Children and Family Support Hub will have.

Following recent humanitarian assessment missions, UNICEF is working to operationalize its engagement and support to the national responses in Slovenia, Greece and Germany. Discussions with the Slovenian Government are ongoing around a few key activities, including training of first line responders, establishing Children and Family Support Hubs and possible gap filling in hygiene assistance and hygiene promotion campaigns. Following a UNICEF assessment mission to
Germany (3-6 November 2015), UNICEF has proposed technical assistance to the German Government which could consist of: i) support on the development and implementation of minimum protection measures for children and women in temporary accommodation centres; ii) advice and capacity building to partners for the establishment of child-friendly spaces; iii) technical expertise and resource materials on psycho-social support for children; iv) orientation for staff and volunteers to conduct structured learning and play activities with young children; and v) technical advice and support on the monitoring and data collection systems on migrant and refugee children.

Child Protection

Child protection has been a key priority area of UNICEF programme response to the refugee and migrant crisis. As UNICEF adapts its interventions to the specific needs of refugee and migrant children, five groups of particularly vulnerable children have been identified. These include: i) babies and children under three; ii) children with disabilities and special needs; iii) lost children/children separated from their family or caregivers during the journey; iv) children left behind/children who do not have the financial means, contacts or support networks to pursue their journey; and v) unaccompanied adolescents on the move. UNICEF is making every effort to adapt its response to their needs in different national contexts in Europe and has developed context specific “Actions and Asks” to protect refugee and migrant children.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, 7 child-friendly spaces (CFS) continue providing services 24/7. During the day they provide recreational activities and psycho-social support, and are among the few places where children on the move can be children again for at least a few hours. At night the CFS provide women and children with a safe place to rest. During the first half of November, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 4,296 children were able to rest and play in a safe environment at the UNICEF CFS at the registration centre on the border with Greece. In Serbia, 4,594 children benefitted from services in UNICEF CFS in Presevo and mobile recreational activities in Adasevci. UNICEF winterized CFS with heating opened doors on 19 November in Tabanovce, at the northern border of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition, UNICEF is discussing with the Serbian Government the establishment of three new CFS in temporary shelters located in the vicinity of Sid, as well as in Adasevci, while the child-friendly space in Presevo will soon expand its activities to include adolescent/youth component.

Thanks to favourable weather conditions mobile child-friendly spaces could be established on a daily basis over the first half of November. Mobile teams continue providing psycho-social support, basic medical assistance, items for protection from the cold and basic recreational activities all along the Western Balkans route and in Turkey.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNICEF is supporting 16 professionals - social workers, psychologists, pedagogues, translators and support staff - to protect women and children in and around the Vinojug reception centre. Between 2 and 15 November, 994 women and 2,032 children (1,149 boys and 983 girls) were provided with emotional and psychosocial support in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, including 705 unaccompanied minors (636 boys and 69 girls); 103 pregnant women; 2 children separated during their journey; and 32 children with disabilities (16 boys and 16 girls). In Croatia, during the first half of November, more than 4,000 children received psycho-social support, and on average, between 3 and 5 children with disabilities were reached through different UNICEF-supported activities on daily basis at the reception centre in Slavonski Brod.

Protection of unaccompanied and separated children on the move still represents a major challenge in many countries on the Western Balkans route, and UNICEF is working with Governments and partners in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia to establish Standard Operational Procedures, and build the capacity of frontline
workers to allow for better identification and referral of child protection risks. UNICEF in Serbia has already trained 22 social workers and is pre-testing recently developed tools. In Croatia, although the protocol for attending the needs of separated, lost and unaccompanied children, established in Opatovac reception centre, has been successfully implemented at the reception centre in Slavonski Brod for cases of lost children, additional mechanisms for dealing with more complex cases are required.

Health and Nutrition
UNICEF has been working with Governments and partners to improve standards on child nutrition, and in particular on Infant and Young Child Feeding practices.

Three mother-and-baby spaces in Slavonski Brod, Croatia and in Presevo, Serbia continue supporting breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding 24/7. Video materials in Arabic and other information materials in Farsi and Urdu continue supporting nurses to effectively counsel women on breastfeeding and infant feeding. On 9 November, a new mother-and-baby corner was established in the Vinojug reception centre in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, at the border with Greece. In Croatia, mother-and-baby care facilities were established in two sectors at the reception center in Slavonski Brod, but a mobile approach was adopted to reach as many young children as possible outside those sectors. Between 3 and 17 November, around 1,800 infants and young children benefitted from those services, and around 110 lactating women received breastfeeding counselling and support. In Serbia, since 1 September, 1,021 babies and 820 mothers have benefited from the mother-and-baby spaces. Three additional facilities are expected to open doors soon in the vicinity of Sid, Serbia.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNICEF continues distributing age appropriate food for children. During the first half of November, UNICEF distributed through its implementing partners 1,059 jars of semi-solid complementary food for babies, 96 packs of baby appropriate biscuits and 396 packs of 200-ml chocolate milk.

In Croatia, between 9 and 16 November, 1,005 children (or around 13 per cent of all children at the reception centre in Slavonski Brod during this period) received appropriate nutritional support and health care by UNICEF national health partner Magna. The majority of young patients were children under 2 years (64 per cent). This is an increase of almost 10% per centim in comparison to the month of October. Most common health problems requiring medical assistance were acute upper respiratory infections and gastrointestinal disorders.

Between 3 and 16 November 26 pregnant women received medical service and counselling on the site. On 4 November UNICEF assisted a mother who gave birth at the hospital in Slavonski Brod. This is the second refugee baby that was born in Croatia.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
UNICEF continues to support WASH infrastructure, supply distribution (mainly hygiene kits) and hygiene promotion in response to the most urgent needs of refugees and migrants related to access to safe water and adequate sanitation and hygiene. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, children and babies have been provided with hot-water bathing facilities within the newly established mother-and-baby corner in the Vinojug reception centre. In addition, UNICEF complemented the reception centre’s sanitation facilities with premises accessible for people with a disabilities.

UNICEF partners continue with regular distributions of wet wipes, antibacterial gel and diapers in mother-and-baby corners. In Serbia, UNICEF has adapted the distribution of hygiene items to the needs of people on the move by allowing
mothers to choose the quantity and type of items (diapers, antibacterial gel, wet wipes and waterproof baby changing mats) they need on the spot in the mother-and-baby spaces, and more than 1,020 babies and young children benefitted from these services during the first half of November. In Croatia, between 1 and 17 November, more than 1,000 infants received dry clothes and diapers.

Education
The provision of education has been very challenging in countries where children are on the move as families spend only few hours in reception centres aiming to reach their final destination as fast as possible. The length of stay in a given place is therefore a crucial factor in determining the appropriate Early Childhood Development and Education response to the learning needs of children and adolescents.

UNICEF has now developed a regional education plan for refugee and migrant children on the move, children on the move who are stranded in transit countries, children with uncertain status in country of final destination and children resettled in country of final destination. It aims to provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the planning and delivery of educational and recreational interventions relevant to the context and learning needs of children and adolescents.

Winterization
As colder temperatures now prevail and winter has already arrived in Europe, refugees and migrants are facing increasingly difficult conditions, and additional shelter capacity (including in-door space for psychosocial support) and medical assistance at the main entry and exit points become increasingly urgent. With the likely slow-down of population movements and subsequent longer stays of people in some of the affected countries, UNICEF is looking into strategies to adequately calibrate the scale and effectiveness of its response. Due to still unpredictable flows of people, which can be altered by worsening weather conditions and changes within the overall policy and security environment, UNICEF developed its plan for winterization activities which target estimated flows of 6,000 refugees and migrants per day in transit in each of the countries in South-Eastern Europe, of which estimated 44 per cent are women and children. Implementation of the UNICEF winterization plan will be closely coordinated with Government counterparts in countries where the plan is to be rolled out as well with other partners in the region, most notably UNHCR, IOM, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The total amount required for winterization in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and other countries, where children are on the move is US$ 8,755,314.00.

Key interventions planned include procurement of winter clothes, footwear and hygiene supplies as well as materials and supply to equip the network of child-friendly spaces and Children and Family Support Hubs for continued delivery of services throughout the winter. At present, these activities are ongoing in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia and preparations are underway to extend the scope of UNICEF’s response in other countries on the route – including Greece and Slovenia – and to scale up the overall volume of this winterization programme.

Child-friendly spaces in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia are already being equipped with hard flooring and heating devices. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the construction of a new prefabricated structure with two main rooms and a breastfeeding centre, to replace the currently used tents in Vinojug reception centre, is expected to open in the last week of November.

UNICEF has already initiated the distribution of winterization supply. In Serbia, 1,200 children raincoats, 1,050 baby blankets, 7,200 winter hats, scarfs, gloves and 7,200 pairs of winter socks, 3,200 thermal sets and 3,450 winter jackets have been distributed by partners in Presevo and Sid. In Croatia, 4,000 children received winter clothes and footwear during the first half of November 2015. Such items have also been procured for reception centres in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and distribution is planned to start towards the end of November.
Monitoring, Data Collection and Information on Available Services

In all countries, where children are on the move, UNICEF is advocating with governments and relevant international actors on the ground such as UNHCR and IOM to capture and allow for statistical breakdowns of gender and age during registration processes.

UNICEF is also scaling up collaboration with IOM, UNHCR and other partners at the regional level to address existing data gaps and improve availability of data on refugee and migrant children in Europe.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with support from a monitoring and evaluation consultant a data collection tool and protocol for assessing the situation of refugee and migrant children was developed. The tool will provide profiles of children and allow of adapting services to their needs.

UNICEF response to the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe

as of 23 November 2015

214,355 child asylum applications were registered in the EU Member States and Switzerland* (end of September 2015)

30% of refugees and migrants registered in Serbia are children (end of September 2015)

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