Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Refugee and migrant flows in Europe are at an unprecedented high since the dramatic increase in population movements in June; there have been record numbers of arrivals during the month of October. As sea waters remain treacherous, tragic accidents are an almost daily reality - more than 600 children are believed to have died crossing the Mediterranean Sea since the beginning of the year (UNHCR). As of 8 November, almost 793,000 people have arrived on
European shores since January, according to UNHCR. While the majority of refugees and migrants are escaping the conflict in Syria (80% in August and 62% in October), in recent months the proportion of people from Afghanistan registered at Gevgelija, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, has increased from 5 per cent in August to 30 per cent in October.

UNICEF country offices have observed increased numbers of women and children, including newborn babies. For example, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, children represent 26 per cent of all registered people in October, while in Serbia they account for 30 per cent of the total number of 180,344 registered refugees and migrants (33,819 boys and 19,430 girls). In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the numbers of unaccompanied children and adolescents increased six fold from 932 in August 2015 to 5,676 in October. In the first 10 months of 2015, more than 23,000 unaccompanied children and adolescents applied for asylum in Sweden alone. 13 More than 30,000 unaccompanied children are expected to apply for asylum in Germany by the end of 2015.

Behind the numbers, however, there are children, who urgently need safety and security, healthcare and counselling, shelter, dry, warm clothes, age-appropriate food and opportunities to rest and play. While in many cases authorities are intent on demonstrating a human-face to their response, there are still reports of mistreatment and profiteering by private sector actors on vital services such as transportation. Families on the move need protection and adequate support that will reduce threats, and enable the provision of adequately resourced reception facilities with well-trained, experienced child welfare experts on hand to provide the assistance that children and families need.

In many locations there has been a sharp drop in temperature during the night, and refugees and migrants are facing increasingly harsh conditions. Additional shelter capacity and medical assistance at the main entry and exit points is becoming critical. In Croatia alone, 374 cases of acute respiratory infections and an increase in gastro-intestinal problems (diarrhoea and vomiting) were recorded in children under 5 between 20 and 31 October. Children with disabilities and their families are still facing extreme difficulties during their journey. Children with mobility impairments and their families face extreme difficulties during their journey, whether travelling with or without wheelchairs, or with their parents often carrying them throughout the entire journey. There have been several cases of families with hearing and speech impaired members arriving at the reception centre in Opatovac, Croatia, and there was no access to sign language interpreters. Furthermore, there is no systematic identification of persons with disabilities during the registration process.

During the week of 26 to 30 October, UNICEF Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe and UNICEF Regional Director for CEE/CIS, Marie-Pierre Poirier travelled the route used by refugee and migrant children and their families through the Western Balkans: from Gevgelija, at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, through Presevo, Serbia, and on to Opatovac, Croatia, in order to witness first-hand the response in each of these countries, current challenges, and key priorities for UNICEF and partners. This visit was also an opportunity to meet with UNHCR, the Red Cross, site authorities and Governments, and to highlight the impact of the crisis on children on the move.

There are still challenges in cross-border coordination and the continuity of services along the route, especially when children and their families have to spend hours waiting for transport to take them to established centres. The relative absence of common standards where people are on the move, combined with more difficult weather conditions, represents additional challenges in meeting people’s needs. Up to the beginning of November, there were significant bottlenecks at the Serbian-Croatian border as people were dropped off busses 2.5 km away from the border crossing and had to proceed on foot uphill - a long way for young children, elderly and children with disabilities to walk up hill. On
1 November there was a backlog of refugees at the Berkasovo/Bapska border crossing between Serbia and Croatia, but since 3 November the situation has improved significantly. Busses have been diverted to two waiting locations-Principovac and Adasevci, near Sid, Serbia from where railway transport is organised.

In Slovenia, where 153,755 people arrived between 16 October and 6 November, the government has prepared an accommodation centre for 10,000 people, equipped to provide refugees and migrants with access to basic services and medical assistance. UNICEF is dialoguing with the Government to follow up on the recommendations of the two rapid assessment missions, which took place in October 2015.

A temporary registration point has now been established by the Serbian Government at the Serbian-Bulgarian border near Dimitrovgrad, through which 1,467 refugees and migrants (mostly from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq), have crossed in 2015. According to UNHCR, many of them reported extortion in Iran and beatings by Bulgarian border police. The number of refugees and migrants in Bulgaria is increasing (3,500 asylum applications were registered in October compared to 2,074 in September), and UNICEF has worked on the development of a preparedness and response strategy, has agreed to carry out a rapid assessment of the gaps in relation to the protection of refugee and migrant children and families in Bulgaria.

Humanitarian strategy
UNICEF is currently responding to the crisis in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Turkey and aims to extend similar support to children and women throughout their entire journey. In this context, UNICEF is currently exploring modalities for extending support in Greece, Austria, Slovenia, Germany and Italy. With fast approaching winter and possible tighter procedures in place on the borders of countries along the route used by refugees and migrants, UNICEF is looking at potential scenarios – including variations in flows of population movements and a longer stay for people in some of the affected countries – in order to calibrate the scale and effectiveness of its response. This includes ongoing preparedness support to countries presently not significantly affected but considered to be at higher risk including Bulgaria, Albania and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).

Through its existing network of 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 represent the interests of refugee and migrant children in national and regional policy processes undertaken in response to the present crisis. UNICEF also provides technical assistance to governments and partners, and supports capacity building to improve the quality and reach of protection interventions and other service delivery when needed.

Coordination
UNICEF is actively engaged in regular Government and UN country team coordination meetings on the refugee and migrant crisis. This includes consultation with Ministries of Interior and Ministries of Health, Labour and Social Affairs, as well as UNHCR, respective national Red Cross chapters, the Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, 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 – and water and sanitation. UNICEF is also engaging in policy advocacy with its Government partners and capacity development of the front-line responders especially related to the best interest determination for children. UNICEF is refining its operational response plans aiming to develop effective response strategies and projection of needed resources in the context of different scenarios related to the movement of refugees and migrants to Europe and the possible slow-down of population given the fast approaching winter and possible tighter measures of stemming the flow of people in the countries on the route.
Following recent humanitarian assessment missions, UNICEF is ready to support the national responses in Slovenia and Greece. Discussions with the Slovenian Government are ongoing around a few key activities, including training of first line responders; establishing child friendly spaces and possible gap filling in hygiene assistance and hygiene promotion campaigns. A UNICEF assessment mission took place in Germany between 2 and 6 November with the aim to explore possible collaboration with the German Government on how best to address the needs of refugee and migrant children arriving in Germany.

To continue responding to the ongoing crisis in Turkey, UNICEF is developing a humanitarian project to provide emergency support to vulnerable Syrian and other refugee children. In addition to strengthening child protection systems, direct emergency support will be provided to meet the immediate basic needs of 8,000 high-risk families and children on the move.

**Child Protection**

Child protection continues to be a core of UNICEF programme response in all affected countries. Activities focus mainly on establishment and provision of a wide range of services in child friendly spaces, operating mobile outreach teams of social workers, activities for adolescents and family tracing and reunification for children, who get lost during their journey.

In collaboration with local and international non-governmental partners, UNICEF sustains the continuity of 6 CFS in the sub-region. With support from local and international NGO partners, UNICEF sustains the continuity of CFS in all major reception and registration centres in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, as these are among the few places children can be again children for at least a few hours. During the night the CFS provide women and children with a safe place to rest. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, during the past two weeks 5,424 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, 4,216 children have benefitted from CFS in Presevo and in Berkasovo since the beginning of October, while in Croatia, this number reached around 2800 between 19 and 31 October (number of children varying from 100 to 400 per day). UNICEF is scaling up efforts in Tabanovce, at the northern border of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where a new child friendly space is being established in partnership with SOS Villages in a winterized prefabricated structure. UNICEF has started its interventions in the newly established winter reception centre in Slavonski Brod, Croatia, which will replace Opatovac centre. In addition, UNICEF is discussing with the Serbian Government the establishment of three new CFS in temporary shelters located in the vicinity of Sid. An assessment is also on-going to determine the best way to deliver services as refugees and migrants have to wait for buses.

In order to provide services to children outside reception facilities, a mobile approach to child friendly services has been adopted in Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia. Also, partnerships are developed to provide trainings of frontline workers in the three latter countries to allow for better identification and referral of child protection risks. 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 Vinogoj reception centre. During the second half of October, 1,753 women and 5,424 children (2,674 boys and 2,750 girls) were provided with emotional and psychosocial assistance. Among them there were pregnant women, unaccompanied and separated children and children with disabilities (30 boys and 28 girls). In Serbia, additional social workers in Presevo and Belgrade have been deployed to help identify and support the most vulnerable children and families. Agreement has been reached with the Centre of Social Work in Sid to deploy additional social workers 24/7. Training of the first group of social workers was held on 22 and 23 October. In Croatia, temporary mobile units have been responding to the
needs of children while on the move, providing psychosocial support, occasional medical support, items for protection from the cold and basic recreational activities. In order to enhance the capacity for identification and registration of unaccompanied and separated children in Serbia, UNICEF is supporting the Government and partners to establish Standard Operating Procedures to identify such children and determine a response in the best interests of the child. An assessment of the child-sensitive procedures for unaccompanied children is also being finalized. In Croatia, the protocol for attending the needs of separated, lost and unaccompanied children in Opatovac reception centre established with the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, Red Cross, UNHCR and UNICEF has already been successfully implemented.

UNICEF continues to provide support to family tracing and reunification of children, who become separated or lost during their journey. Due to strong advocacy and effective coordination with authorities and partners on the ground, in particular the Red Cross cases of family separation have considerably decreased during the second half of October.

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.

Two mother-and-baby spaces in Opatovac, Croatia and in Presevo, Serbia continue supporting breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding 24/7. The mother-and-baby space in Belgrade was closed due to decreasing needs, but three new ones are to be opened in the vicinity of Sid, Serbia. In Serbia, video materials in Arabic are available to effectively counsel women on infant feeding. Information materials on breastfeeding in Farsi and Urdu have also been developed and made available in UNICEF mother-and-baby care centres. Some 800 babies and 591 mothers have benefitted from those services over the past two weeks. Over 1000 infants and children below two years of age traveling through Croatia have attended mother-and-baby facilities in Opatovac between 19 and 31 October. 15 per cent of infants and young children were treated for diaper rash and 10 per cent for diarrhoea. 150 lactating women received breastfeeding counselling and support.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNICEF is regularly distributing age-appropriate food for children. Since 20 September 2015, UNICEF has procured and is distributing 4,500 jars of semi-solid complementary food for babies, 4,500 packs of baby appropriate biscuits, 1,500 Oral Rehydration Sachets, 9,000 bottles of water, and 7,000 200-ml packs of milk. In Croatia, around 9,000 children have been provided with food by UNICEF and its partners.

In Serbia, Standard Operating Procedures on controlled handling of infant formula (including sourcing) are being finalised, as a follow-up to the UNICEF/WHO joint assessment mission. In addition, UNICEF has agreed with UNHCR to organise sensitisation trainings for a number of partners on the standards of nutrition for infants and young children to ensure a consistent and harmonised approach.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
UNICEF continues to support WASH infrastructure, distribute supplies (mainly hygiene kits) and organize hygiene promotion in response to the most urgent needs of refugees and migrants related to access to safe water and adequate sanitation and hygiene. UNICEF partners continue with regular distributions of wet wipes, antibacterial gel and diapers in mother and baby corners in all UNICEF operated child friendly spaces. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNICEF has also supported partners in helping mothers and young children maintain personal hygiene by providing access to bathing facilities and hygiene sets. Since 20 September, 1,538 babies and children (689 boys and 849 girls) were provided with hygiene kits. In Croatia, over the last two weeks of October, 900 hygiene kits were distributed. In Turkey, four trucks containing 12,750 family hygiene kits (serving approximately 60,000 people) and 5,000 baby hygiene kits in Mugla Province. 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 mat) they need on the spot in the mother and baby spaces and can take with them when they leave. More than 500 children have benefitted from those items during the second half of October.

During the last two weeks of October, UNICEF and partners supported reunification of one family with a prematurely born 20 days old baby girl who arrived with her aunt to Opatovac, Croatia. The mother of the baby died in Syria, and the father had already crossed into Slovenia. While the Red Cross in Slovenia made every effort to trace him, UNICEF together with partners provided the aunt with psycho-social support in Opatovac and later in the Childen’s Institution Klasje in Osijek. The baby girl was provided with health care and nutritional support until the family was successfully reunited in Slovenia within a week.
Winterization
With the aim of preparing all UNICEF facilities for winter, the child friendly spaces in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia have been equipped with hard flooring and heating devices, and were protected from the elements with additional tarpaulins, so that services can be provided throughout the winter. Winterization of the the child-friendly space in the Vinojug reception centre is progressing with the construction of new “prefabricated” structures to replace the tents. An additional 40 electric heaters were procured and 20 were distributed.

UNICEF has already ordered and provided some warm clothes and boots for children on the move. UNICEF procurement focuses on winter clothing and footwear for children and adolescents, blankets, as well as equipment to improve conditions in all UNICEF supported child friendly spaces, including heating devices. The total estimated value of the required items is US$2,456 million for three months based on an estimated flow of approximately 6000 migrants per day, crossing each country, out of whom 40 per cent in average are estimated to be women and children.

In addition to the use of International Long Term Agreements, local agreements for winterization in Serbia were successfully established and can be used regionally by others affected countries.

The first winter supplies have arrived at end of October 2015. 1,500 baby blankets have already been distributed in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and 9,000 sets of winter clothing and shoes for children are currently being shipped. In Serbia, 1,200 raincoats, 1,050 baby blankets, 7,200 winter hats, scarfs, gloves and 7,200 winter socks were distributed to partners in Presevo and Sid. 5,200 thermal sets and 3,450 winter jackets are under procurement. In Croatia, around 900 children have received dry clothes and shoes, while 2000 children received folium to protect them from hypothermia. In addition, UNICEF has been preparing its interventions in the newly established winter reception centre in Slavonski Brod, Croatia, to replace Opatovac centre. In Turkey, as part of a larger winter support initiative targeting 30,000 families across Turkey – e-vouchers will be provided for the winter needs of 3,950 vulnerable refugee families in Adana, Izmir, Istanbul and Kayseri.

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.

In addition, UNICEF has taken measures to systematically collect data on the situation of children on the move, as well as services provided by UNICEF and partners. With support from the Innovations Unit in New York and UNICEF in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), an application for tablets and mobile phones has been developed to enable quick, real-time data collection at different points on the refugee and migrant route and at service delivery points. This application should improve data collection on total numbers of children, as well as their age and gender. It will also enhance the utilization of services in child friendly spaces and information on the basic needs of children and their families.

UNICEF in Serbia is currently liaising with partners to determine the best locations for free Wi-Fi hot spots to provide refugees and migrants with information on available services along their journey, including child-friendly spaces, infant feeding, etc. UNICEF has provided information on the location of and services in the child-friendly and mother-and-baby corners to the NGO “Asylum Protection Center APC / CZA” to include them into the Android App for refugees and migrants “Asylum in Serbia”, available in Arabic, Farsi and English.

Advocacy and Communication
On 4 November, the Special Coordinator gave a briefing to international Geneva-based media on her Balkans mission – the briefing was attended by 30 journalists and resulted in strong media coverage across several outlets – Reuters, AP, RFI (France), RSI (Swiss), RTP (Portugal), Efe (Spanish); CBC (Canada); (Headlines - Rough seas force new refugee routes,
more children on move – UNICEF; More children joining the ranks of exodus to Europe; Onset of winter weather appears not to be deterring flow: UNICEF; Possible new emerging routes through Bulgaria. 

There have been more than 15 million views of UNICEF videos and photo essays on refugee and migrant children on Al Jazeera+, Upworthy, and UNICEF’s digital platforms, including one with more than 5,4 million views, another with 3,5 million views, while several others have been viewed more than 1 million times. A number of interviews with international media, including with BBC and CNN, have been given during the reporting period.

There continues to be strong engagement on social and mainstream media in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia, with many human interest stories about children on the move shared on UNICEF regional and country Facebook and Twitter accounts.

UNICEF continues to advocate for the rights of refugee and migrant children with local and national authorities and partners on the ground. This includes ensuring that children have access to adequate shelter, safe places to rest and play, dry and warm clothes and appropriate psycho-social support not only in registration centres, but also while on the move. On 30 October, UNICEF participated in a joint letter signed by 59 different organisations to the European Council, which highlighted 10 action points to ensure children’s rights in the EU’s migration policy. They advocate *inter alia* for the safeguard of children’s best interests, non-discriminatory access to services, protection from all forms of violence, non-detention of children, family unity, provision of regular and safe ways for children to come to Europe, non-refoulement and access to justice. This was also shared with UN-accredited media in Geneva.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNICEF and UNHCR have jointly expressed concerns with poor conditions of trains used for transporting refugees and migrants and the fact that people on the move are charged a five-times more expensive train ticket than at the beginning of the summer. In Croatia, UNICEF used the occasion of the European disability forum on 31 October to advocate for the improvement of the situation of children with disabilities and their families while on the move.

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**Next SitRep: 23/11/2015**

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