



Gender-based Violence Programme Overview

# Refugee and Migrant Response

September 2021

**Focus on the programme: Action Against Gender-Based Violence Affecting Refugee and Migrant Women and Children in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Serbia, supported by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, October 2019 – June 2021<sup>4</sup>**

## Refugee and Migrant Situation Analysis

An estimated 55,800 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro between January and June 2021. The figures signal a drastic increase in the number of new arrivals, with 34,000 arrivals between April and June alone and Italy, for example, registering a threefold increase compared to the same period last year. In total, an estimated 60,000 refugee and migrant children are now in Europe, including 11,250 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)<sup>5</sup>. Among all children seeking asylum in Europe in 2020, 53 per cent were boys and 47 per cent girls.<sup>6</sup>

While most UASCs are boys, girls now account for 24 per cent of this group, up from 15 per cent in 2019.<sup>7</sup> Girls who are unaccompanied or separated from their families are one of the least 'visible' groups in the European response as the result of a lack of understanding on gender dynamics and the specific needs of girls, as well as a lack of appropriate identification and support systems. This makes the growing share of girls among Europe's UASCs particularly worrying.<sup>8</sup>


COVID-19 has heightened severe challenges for refugees and migrants across the region, many of whom were already facing poverty, limited access to even the most basic services,


and poor living conditions. Many refugee and migrant women and girls have already fled from violence, including child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) in their home country, only to be confronted by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in Europe. The global pandemic has increased their specific vulnerabilities and the risk factors that expose them to gender-based violence (GBV). At the same time, it has exacerbated existing challenges in accessing vital care and support, particularly for the most marginalized; including adolescent girls, unaccompanied and separated girls, and women with disabilities.

UNICEF's review on the [Impact of COVID-19 on Gender-based Violence: Refugee and Migrant Response](#) has revealed serious concerns about the increased risks of intimate partner violence (IPV) against refugee and migrant women and girls. It has also highlighted the greater risk of other forms of violence, including sexual violence and sexual exploitation as a result of rising economic insecurity and the ongoing challenge of finding and staying in accommodation that is safe.<sup>9</sup> This dire situation mirrors the global warnings about the 'shadow pandemic' of an increase in all forms of GBV against women and girls in the context of COVID-19.

## KEY POPULATION FIGURES<sup>1</sup>

**34,000 arrivals** in Europe through Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro in Q2 2021. 

**7,500 children** among all arrivals in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro in Q2 2021. 

**11,250 unaccompanied and separated children<sup>2</sup>** registered in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. 

Of all first-time international protection applicants in 2020, **14 per cent were girls and 22 per cent were women<sup>3</sup>**

## UNICEF Priorities and GBV Strategy

UNICEF's multi-sectoral response to refugee and migrants in Europe aims to ensure protection, care and support for refugee and migrant women and children through life-saving GBV services in partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs) and institutions, with a complementary focus on systems strengthening and advocacy. With support from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), UNICEF is working to improve GBV prevention and response programming for refugee and migrant women and girls through the implementation of the [UNICEF Global Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies \(GBViE\) Theory of Change \(ToC\)](#). The overall

objective is to ensure that survivors of GBV and those at risk of such violence benefit from high quality and life-saving care, support and protection services. The GBViE ToC also aims to reduce the likelihood of GBV by focusing efforts to strengthen systems, working with government institutions to tackle the conditions that foster GBV and limit care for survivors. The aim is to achieve three key:

1. **Provide life-saving, coordinated multisectoral services** for GBV survivors, including **referral mechanisms** that are available and updated, and increase **capacity for GBV service delivery**.

2. **Mitigate the risk of GBV** across humanitarian sectors to ensure services are delivered in a safe and inclusive manner, prioritizing the empowerment, safety and resilience of women and girls through [safe spaces](#).

3. **Prevent GBV** by addressing its root causes and underlying conditions, engaging directly with governments and relevant ministries to **create an enabling legal, policy and institutional environment** that promotes the rights of girls and women and addresses GBV, and to put strategies in place to **transform harmful social norms**, including through continuous knowledge generation and advocacy.

## GBV Programme Updates and Achievements

In Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia, **8,298 women, 2,007 girls, 1,033 boys and 883 men accessed GBV prevention and response programming** between October 2019 and the end of June 2021. This brought the total number of people in need who accessed such programming to **12,221** – 132 per cent of the target of 9,250 to be reached by the end of the programme in June 2021. These services have included case management, psychosocial support, material assistance, referral to specialised services and prevention activities. A recent assessment of the quality of GBV services in terms of standard implementation, shows that **91 per cent** of the services have met UNICEF's standards for support.

Efforts to promote access to up-to-date information on GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated since March 2020. Cumulatively, **286,763 people were reached with information on GBV** from October 2019 to June 2021, featuring messages on GBV-related risks during the pandemic, what to do if someone experiences violence or is worried about someone at risk, and how to access support and remote services such as hotlines. The information included innovative approaches and tools, such as [U-report on the Move](#) in Italy, Facebook and WhatsApp Groups in Serbia and Bulgaria, and [podcasts](#) in Greece in multiple languages, among others.

Despite the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on GBV service provision, UNICEF's **efforts to strengthen capacity** have continued, with **2,037 frontline workers trained in GBV prevention and response** between October 2019 and June 2021. The training reached reception site staff, health care workers, social workers, teachers, and linguistic and cultural mediators.

UNICEF continues to **advocate** for a stronger national legal, policy and institutional environment and provide **technical support**,

including secondments, to relevant ministries and institutions. In Greece, for example, UNICEF has developed a strategic partnership with the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE) to support the development of operational guidance for safe shelters during COVID-19, as well as a programmatic review of access to services for children living in shelters run by the National Network mandated to tackle violence against women. In Serbia, UNICEF is working with the University of Belgrade to strengthen the capacity of professionals on GBV through [curriculum development](#) and implementation. In Italy, collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has generated a [pocket guide](#) on how to provide initial support to survivors based on global practices. In Bulgaria, UNICEF provides support to the Ministry of Interior for the development of a risk assessment in cases of domestic violence and a GBV information system.

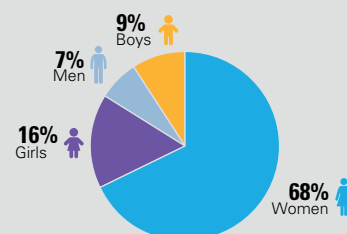
**Evidence generation and dissemination** of knowledge and lessons on what works in addressing GBVIE remains a priority. In 2020, UNICEF focused on the situation of unaccompanied and separated girls, to [raise awareness](#) about their situation and the challenges of reaching them as part of the migrant response. The report ['Making the invisible visible: unaccompanied and separated girls in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia'](#) highlights the experiences and risks faced by these girls while emphasizing persistent gaps in data and a lack of expertise on how unaccompanied girls can be identified and supported.

The generation of knowledge and the production of technical resources continued in 2021, with a focus on building the capacity of linguistic and cultural mediators (LCMs) to apply a survivor-centred approach in their work. [A dedicated training curriculum](#) tailored to the European refugee and migrant context was developed and [disseminated](#) for LCMs in collaboration with the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) to help LCMs support refugees and migrants who disclose experiences of violence. The partnership with WRC resulted in another practical resource for practitioners working with refugees and migrants: [A field guide on sexual violence against boys](#). The field guide is a first step towards building trust and creating a safe and enabling environment that facilitates disclosure and access to support for adolescent boys who have survived sexual violence or who are at high risk of such violence in the Europe's refugee and migrant context. The field guide also helps frontline workers to integrate protective interventions into existing protection programmes.

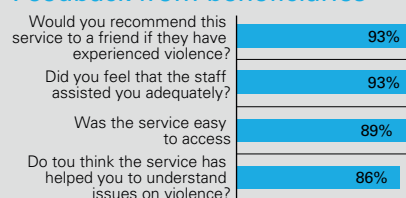
## RESULTS AT A GLANCE (October 2019 – June 2021)

**12,221** refugees and migrants accessing GBV prevention and response programmes

TARGET - June 2021 **9250**  
REACHED - June 2021 **12221**



### Feedback from beneficiaries



■ YES

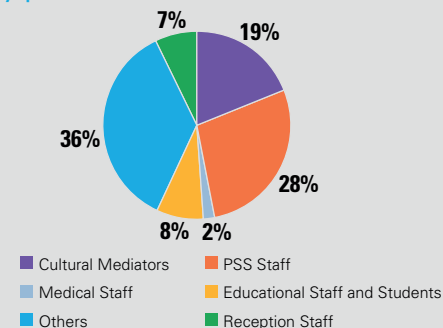
**286,763** women, girls, men and boys accessing information on GBV

**91%** of polled beneficiaries would know how to respond if a friend told them they have experienced GBV

**2,037** frontline workers trained

TARGET - June 2021 **1045**  
REACHED - June 2021 **2037**

### Frontline workers trained, by profession



**29** GBV service delivery points supported by UNICEF

Percentage of services surveyed that meet 80% of GBV minimum standards

End December 2020 **91%**  
End September 2019 **57%**



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### Adapting GBV service provision to the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it, from lockdowns to travel restrictions, presented UNICEF and partners with a rapidly changing situation that had a major impact on the safety and well-being of refugee and migrant women and children. UNICEF and its partners in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia responded quickly to the crisis, working together to assess and communicate GBV risks and adapt GBV service provision in coordination with service providers and institutions. By listening and responding to the views of refugee and migrant

women and girls, UNICEF and its partners have been able to adapt and tailor programmes to meet their needs.

With the support of UNICEF, partners in all countries made a rapid transition to some level of remote service delivery, and many combined this remotized support with continued in-person provision. UNICEF's review on the [Impact of COVID-19 on Gender-based Violence: Refugee and Migrant Response](#) confirms that UNICEF and its partners filled gaps in the provision of COVID-19 information and basic necessities as services were disrupted. In responding to the crisis, GBV information has been integrated

into a wider package of support that includes COVID-19 information in multiple formats and languages and the distribution of dignity and hygiene kits. Partners have built on long-term relationships with refugee and migrant communities to raise awareness about remote forms of support, the services that are available and to reach out to more children and families in need.

*'The most important thing is to guarantee the continuity of the services and re-strengthening the social response, the adjustment of PSS activities and keep working with survivors'* UNICEF implementing partner in Italy

### In focus: Multi-country coordination and technical assistance in programming on gender-based violence in emergencies

The GBViE programme follows a multi-country model to ensure quality services and standardized approach. The GBV Coordination Team, comprised of the Regional Gender Advisor, a GBV Specialist and GBV Programme Officer, provides overall coordination of the programme as well as technical assistance, including joint technical work, capacity development, monitoring and reporting.

A review has confirmed that this approach has helped the programme achieve higher quality GBV programming, in line with UNICEF's global GBV standards. This has included UNICEF's accountability to women and girls in humanitarian responses, as required by [UNICEF's GBV operational guide](#). It has helped to identify and address common GBV risks across the region, with joint coordination enabling quick and contextualized technical support and encouraging the coherent exchange of information and resources. In addition, an adapted monitoring framework has proved

useful for standardizing the work carried out and building the capacity of partners. Learning exchanges and training opportunities have also built capacity and confidence to address GBV among both UNICEF country offices and partners, helping them to adapt and sustain GBV service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic and build resilience.

The coordination structure and the multi-country component of the programme enabled the collection and analysis of diverse information and data from four countries in a standardized manner to generate knowledge on key issues that affect refugee and migrant women and girls. This, in turn, supported more comprehensive knowledge generation to build a wider picture of their situation beyond one single country. The focus on joint technical work revealed hidden issues, such as lack of understanding on gender dynamics and the specific needs of girls, as well as a lack of appropriate identification

and support systems, that have an impact on refugee and migrant women and girls in Europe so that these could inform the work of child protection actors and enhance joint advocacy for common solutions. This multi-country programming approach is not unique within UNICEF, but the strong focus on technical support and capacity development to promote GBV standards has been central, providing an opportunity to reflect on effective ways to support programming at different levels.

While the multi-country GBV programme ended in June 2021, its review has confirmed the need for funding for its continuation to sustain GBV capacity building, ensure the continued use of the technical products developed and of the technical support on GBV from the regional to country level, to ensure that all sections in UNICEF integrate GBV risk mitigation, and to replicate elements of this programme across other areas where there is a need to strengthen GBV programming.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report #40 ([www.unicef.org/documents/refugee-and-migrant-crisis-europe-humanitarian-situation-report-no40-30-june-2021](http://www.unicef.org/documents/refugee-and-migrant-crisis-europe-humanitarian-situation-report-no40-30-june-2021)).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat. European Statistics. 2021 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>).

<sup>4</sup> The Programme officially started in October 2017, however this factsheet focuses on the last phase of the Programme, which is from October 2019 to June 2021.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Situation Report #40 ([www.unicef.org/documents/refugee-and-migrant-crisis-europe-humanitarian-situation-report-no40-30-june-2021](http://www.unicef.org/documents/refugee-and-migrant-crisis-europe-humanitarian-situation-report-no40-30-june-2021)).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

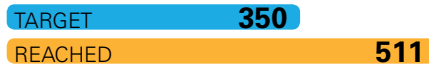
<sup>8</sup> UNICEF (2020) Making the Invisible Visible: The identification of unaccompanied and separated girls in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Serbia ([www.unicef.org/eca/reports/unaccompanied-and-separated-girls-europe](http://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/unaccompanied-and-separated-girls-europe)).

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF (2021) Impact of COVID-19 on Gender-based Violence: Refugee and Migrant Response, UNICEF Multi-Country Case study ([www.unicef.org/eca/media/15751/file](http://www.unicef.org/eca/media/15751/file)).

## Results per country at a glance (October 2019 to June 2021)

### BULGARIA

**511** Beneficiaries supported



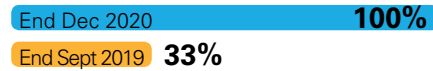
**97%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others



**5** GBV service delivery points supported



**100%** of services surveyed met 80% of GBV minimum standards<sup>1</sup>



**UNICEF Partners:** State Agency for Refugees, Animus Association Foundation, Mission Wings Foundation, Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria



**248** frontline workers trained

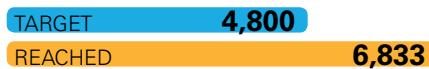


UNICEF and Animus Association are working on a structured capacity development programme for frontline workers to ensure sustainable support to GBV practitioners working in the field.



### GREECE

**6,833** Beneficiaries supported



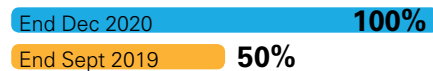
**89%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others



**16<sup>2</sup>** GBV service delivery points supported



**100%** of services surveyed met 80% of GBV minimum standards<sup>3</sup>



**UNICEF Partners:** General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGE), Iliaktida, Melissa Network of Migrant Women, KETHI (Research Centre for Gender Equality), Diotima, METAdrasi, Solidarity Now, Caritas Hellas



**903** frontline workers trained



UNICEF continues its strategic partnership with the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality and seconded a GBV Information Management expert to the Secretariat.



### ITALY

**1,615** Beneficiaries supported



**100%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others



**3** GBV service delivery points supported

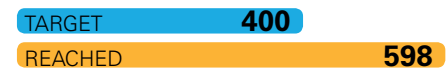


**100%** of polled beneficiaries report knowing how to respond if a friend told them they have experienced GBV

**UNICEF Partners:** Ombudsperson of Palermo, IOM, UNHCR, UNFPA, University of Palermo, Médecins du Monde, Intersos, Centro PENC, CLEUD



**598** frontline workers trained



UNICEF, in partnership with IOM and UNHCR, developed and launched the adapted version of the IASC GBV Pocket Guide, to support non-GBV specialists in providing first-aid support to GBV survivors.



### SERBIA

**3,262** Beneficiaries supported



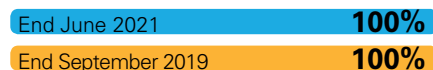
**95%** of polled beneficiaries would recommend UNICEF-supported services to others



**5** GBV service delivery points supported



**100%** of services surveyed met 80% of GBV minimum standards<sup>4</sup>



**UNICEF Partners:** Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs Commissariat for Refugees, Adra, InfoPark



**267** frontline workers trained



UNICEF and the National University in Serbia have developed a dedicated course on the Protection of Children Affected by Migration, which integrates GBV.



<sup>1</sup> Based on 4 services in 2020, 3 services in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> In Greece, UNICEF supports various accommodation sites and Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the mainland and islands, and also state-run counselling centres and shelters through interpretation support.

<sup>3</sup> Based on 3 services in 2020, 2 services in 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Based on 2 services in 2021, 2 services in 2019.