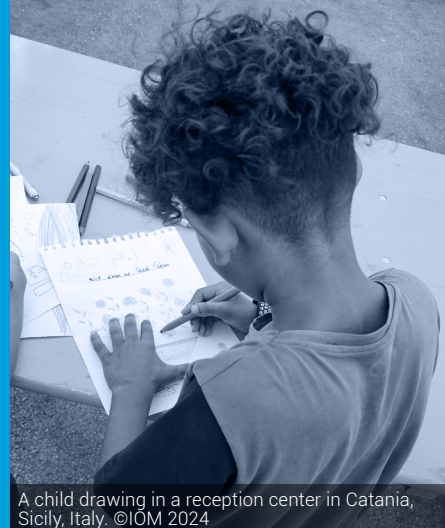


MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN VIA MIXED MIGRATION ROUTES IN EUROPE

Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated

OVERVIEW OF TRENDS – 2024



A child drawing in a reception center in Catania, Sicily, Italy. ©IOM 2024

Highlights



41,779
children

Some 41,779 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta in 2024 (23 per cent girls and 77 per cent boys).¹ This was 25 per cent less than the total number of child arrivals in 2023 (55,704).



21,323
unaccompanied children

More than half of all children who arrived in Europe in 2024 were recorded as unaccompanied children (UAC). The highest proportion of UAC arrived in Italy, where 69 per cent of children arriving were unaccompanied.



8,900
children in
resettlement

In 2024, children made up half of the 17,800 people undergoing resettlement procedures in Europe (8,900). Of them, 52 per cent were boys and 48 per cent were girls.

265,385
children sought
international protection
in Europe in 2024

Some 93 per cent were registered as first-time applicants. Out of the total, more than two thirds were first-time asylum applicants in only four countries: Germany (34 per cent), France (16 per cent), Spain (12 per cent), and Greece (7 per cent).

Arrivals in Europe in 2024²

Some 41,779 children arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain. Of these, 21,323 (51 per cent) were UAC.³ Overall, child arrivals by sea and by land decreased by 25 per cent in 2024 compared to 2023 (55,704).

Greece

In 2024, some 16,820 children arrived by land and sea in Greece.⁴ Nearly one in four were UAC (3,834 children). Due to the high number of people arriving in Greece overall in 2024, the number of children also rose, with a 58 per cent increase over 2023 (10,612 child arrivals). The number of UAC also increased and was 34 per cent higher than in 2023 (2,867). Most of the children, including UAC, were from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt.

Italy

Some 12,594 children arrived in 2024, a 54 per cent decrease compared to 2023 (27,420). Of these, 69 per cent (8,752) were UAC, 53 per cent less than in 2023. Most of the children, including UAC, originated from Tunisia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Guinea.⁵

Spain

In 2024, some 6,760 children were estimated to have arrived by land and sea, a 12 per cent increase over 2023 (6,021).⁶ Of these, 5,458 were UAC (81 per cent), 12 per cent less than in 2023 (4,865). According to estimates, most of the children, including UAC, originated from Morocco, Mali and Algeria.

Bulgaria

Some 4,021 children lodged an asylum application in 2024, 65 per cent of whom were UAC (2,601). Most of these asylum-seeking children originated from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Egypt.⁷

Cyprus

Some 1,539 children arrived by sea in 2024, including 633 UAC. Most of the children, including UAC, originated from the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia and Afghanistan.

Malta

In 2024, some 45 children, all UAC, arrived following search and rescue operations at sea.⁸ The number of child arrivals in 2024 was 67 per cent higher compared to 2023 (27). Most of the children originated from Bangladesh, the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt.

Demographics of arrivals by country of arrival

Figure 1: Total arrivals by sea and by land, by gender, age and country of arrival in 2024 (%)

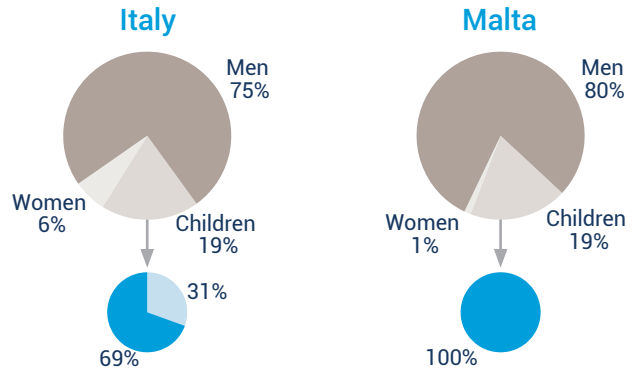
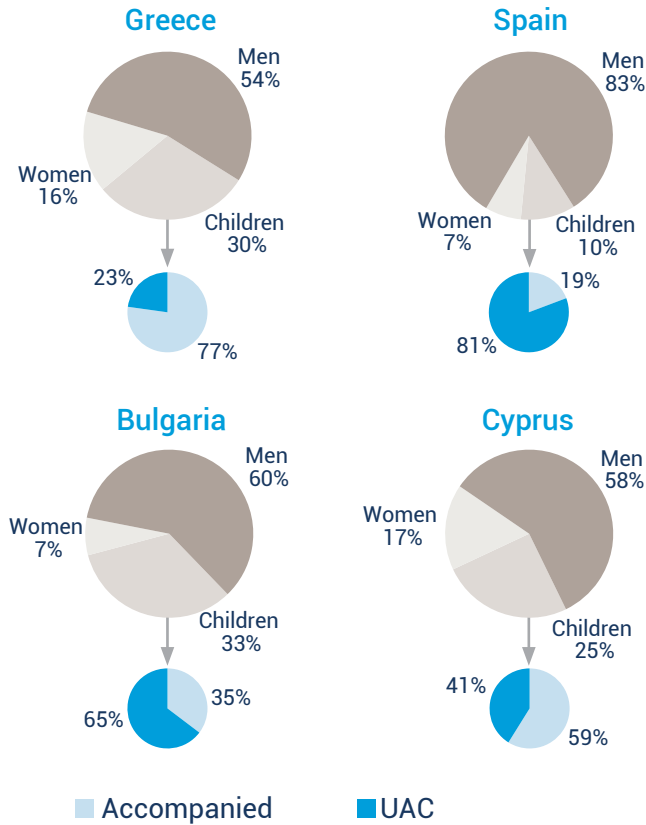
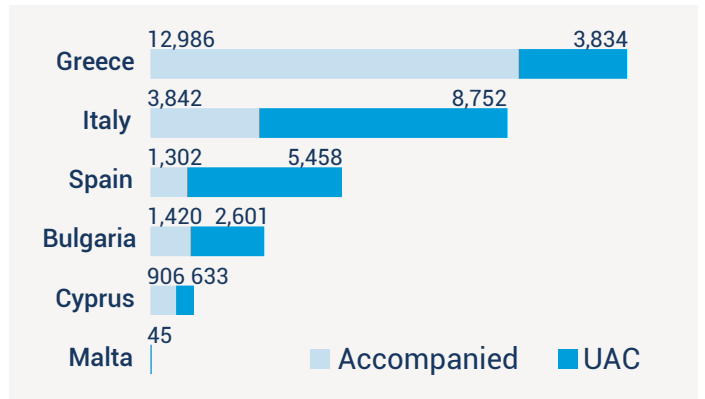


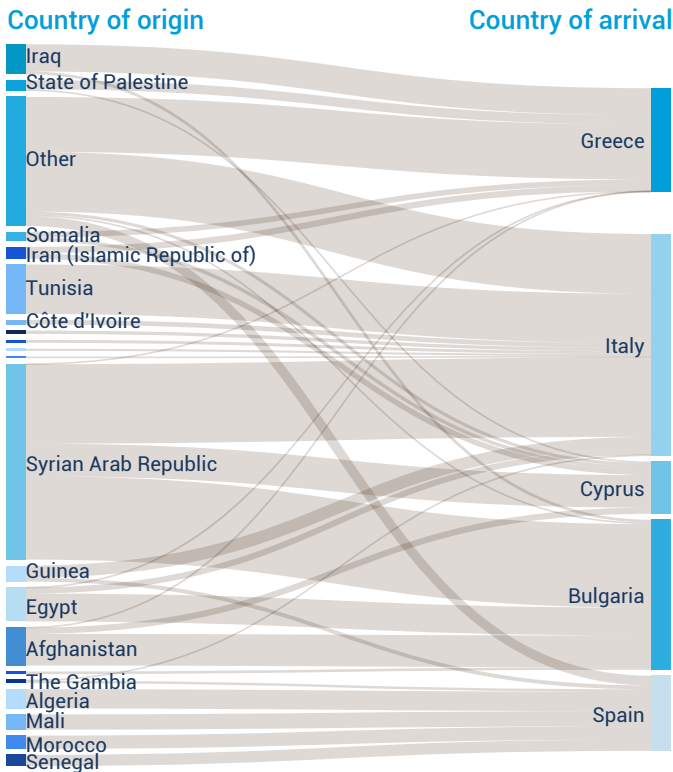
Figure 2: Number of children arriving by sea and by land, by status and by country of arrival, in 2024



Nationality by country of arrival⁹

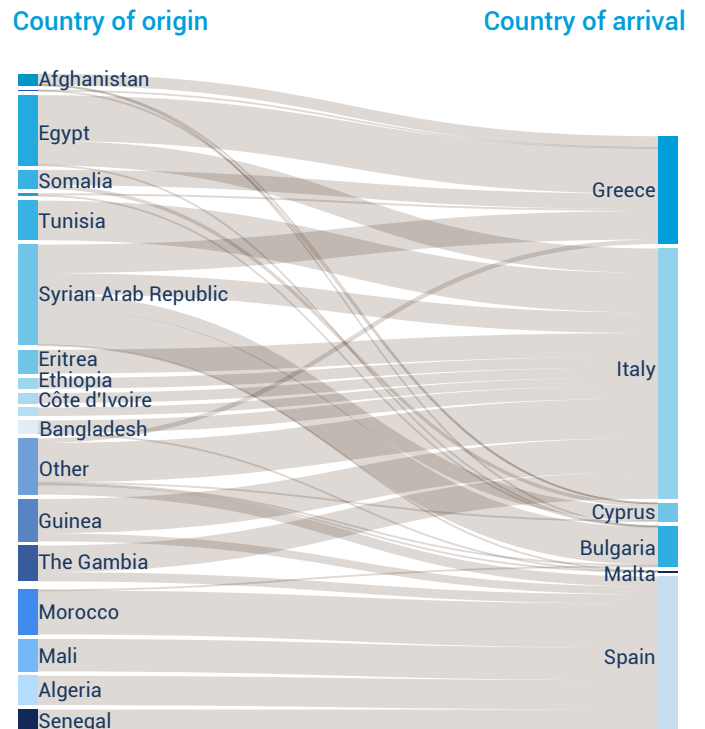
Accompanied Children

Figure 3: Accompanied children arrived in Europe, main countries of origin by country of arrival



UAC

Figure 4: UAC arrived in Europe, main countries of origin by country of arrival



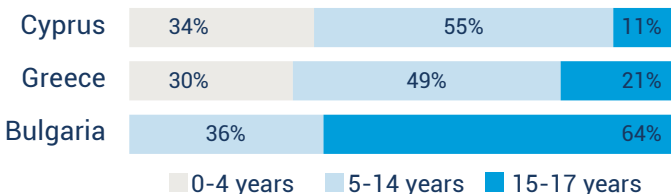
Source: Hellenic Police; The Greek National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA); Italian Ministry of Interior; Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees; Maltese Immigration Police; and Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE).

Age and gender breakdown by country of arrival¹⁰

Accompanied children

Among the 18,500 accompanied children who arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece in 2024, 23 per cent were 0-4 years old, 45 per cent were 5-14 years old and 32 per cent were 15-17 years old. The age breakdown for accompanied children in Italy and Spain were not available.

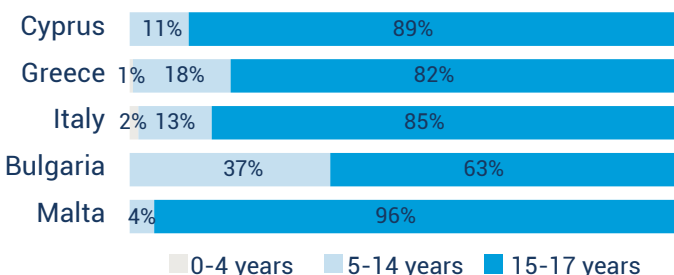
Figure 5: Age breakdown of accompanied children, by country of arrival (%)



Unaccompanied children

Most UAC who arrived in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta in 2023 were between 15 and 17 years old (81% overall). Age disaggregated data on children arriving in Spain were not available.

Figure 6: Age breakdown of UAC, by country of arrival (%)



Sources: Hellenic Police, EKKA, Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies on UAC in reception, Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, Maltese Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE).

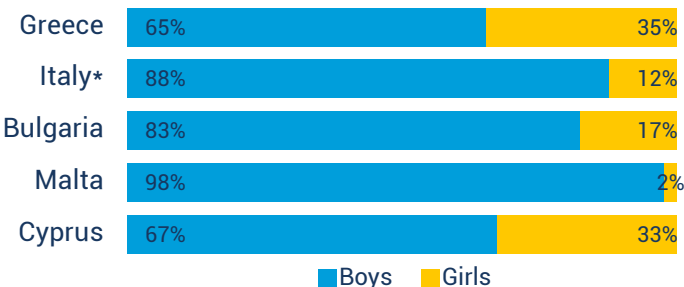
Note: Due to the limited disaggregation or inconsistency of data by age and gender across countries, these graphs refer to estimates.

Gender breakdown

Overall, the proportion of boys remains high, comprising 74 per cent of all children who arrived in Europe in 2024. The percentage of boys arriving in Bulgaria, Italy and Malta was significantly higher than the average: 83 per cent in Bulgaria, 88 per cent in Italy, and 98 per cent in Malta.

Meanwhile, the percentage of girls arriving in Greece remained comparable to 2023 (35 per cent in 2024 vs. 38 per cent in 2023), but proportion of girls arriving in Cyprus increased from 25 per cent in 2023 to 33 per cent in 2024.¹¹

Figure 7: Gender breakdown of children arrived in Europe by sea and by land, by country of arrival (%)



* For Italy, the calculation is based on the estimated 15,122 UAC registered in the reception system as of December 2024, according to the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. These do not include the 3,503 Ukrainian UAC who were in reception as of December 2024.

Refugee and migrant children's journey to Europe

Key routes

- Western African Atlantic route (WAAR)
- Central Mediterranean route (CMR)
- Eastern Mediterranean route (EMR)
- Western Mediterranean route (WMR)
- Western Balkans route (WBR)

In 2024, IOM interviewed 17,468 migrants and refugees arriving by sea or by land in nine countries of Europe and the Western Balkans.¹² This section focuses on the profiles, needs, intentions and vulnerabilities of the young people arriving, based on 6,462 interviews conducted with adolescents and young adults between 15 and 24 years of age.¹³ Responses have been grouped by route: 669 surveys were undertaken in Italy and Malta with youth travelling along the CMR (10 per cent of all interviews), 4,929 (76 per cent) in Italy, Greece and the Western Balkans (EMR and WBR), and 864 in Spain (13 per cent). Of the interviews in Spain, 734 took place with respondents who arrived in the Canary Islands (WAAR) and 130 with respondents arrived to the mainland or the Balearic Islands (WMR).

Sociodemographic profile

Most adolescents and young adults across all routes are male (93 per cent). The share of girls and young women is the highest on the WAAR (28 per cent), and it is higher than average also on the WMR (11 per cent). Out of a total of 56 different nationalities in the sample, the most common match well with those observed at entry in main arrival countries in 2024: Bangladesh, Egypt and Tunisia on the CMR; the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Morocco on the EMR and WBR; Algeria, Morocco and Mali on the WMR; and Mali, Senegal and Guinea on WAAR. Among the top nationalities by number of respondents, the higher shares of girls and women are among respondents from West and Central African countries, while adolescents and young adults from Bangladesh and Egypt are almost exclusively male.

Overall, about one-quarter of respondents had completed lower secondary education, while 38 per cent had primary education and 20 per cent did not have formal education. Only about 14 per cent had upper secondary education or higher, and female respondents reported having no formal education slightly more frequently than males overall (23 per cent versus 20 per cent). Differences in education level by route are significant: adolescents and young migrants on the WMR were those with the highest education level on average (53 per cent with lower secondary, 30 per cent with upper secondary or higher), while those reaching the Canary Islands were those with lowest education level (37 per cent with no formal education, 26 per cent with primary education).



A young adult and his brother speaking with an IOM enumerator in Gran Canaria, Spain. ©IOM 2025

Journeys and reasons for leaving

Almost half of the respondents left their country of origin while still under 18 years of age. On average, respondents from countries in West and Central Africa were younger than those from countries in North Africa, the Middle East and Asia at the moment of leaving their origin countries. Almost all migrants on WAAR report having left their origin countries alone (97 per cent), along with more than three-quarters of those on the WMR (78 per cent) and more than two-thirds on the CMR (69 per cent). Those travelling via the Western Balkans reported to be travelling alone in about 19 of the cases, and with either family or non-family groups in the rest of the cases.

Drivers of migration are diverse and often overlap, with the decision-making process shaped by a combination of economic, social, political, environmental, and personal factors.¹⁴ Economic reasons are the most frequently mentioned reasons for leaving one's location of origin overall (given by 57 per cent of respondents), followed by reasons connected to war and conflict at home (39 per cent), and personal or targeted violence (27 per cent). Other mentioned reasons are limited access to basic services (16 per cent), the desire to avoid military service (7 per cent), and long-term environmental changes impacting livelihood at origin (3 per cent). Driving factors seem to differ quite substantially across routes, as shown in Figure 8.¹⁵

Figure 8: Top three drivers of migration among youth and adolescents surveyed in 2024, by route (%)



Source: IOM's DTM surveys in 2024.

On average, young women and girls report economic drivers slightly less than their male counterparts (53 per cent versus 57 per cent), while they mention more frequently threats of personal and targeted violence as a reason for leaving (32 per cent versus 27 per cent). In particular, young women on WAAR and CMR reported instances of mistreatment and abuses within the family, threats and violence related to forced or arranged marriages, and desire to escape from female genital mutilation (FGM).

Intentions and needs

Germany, Italy, Spain and France are the top countries of intended destination for most respondents along all routes to Europe. Adolescents and young adults on the CMR intend to primarily reach Italy (77 per cent), followed by Germany (12 per cent), France (14 per cent), and to a minor extent the United Kingdom and Austria (1 per cent each).

Those on the WMR mention almost exclusively Spain (68 per cent) and France (29 per cent) as the main intended destinations. Similarly, those arriving to the Canary Islands also mention Spain (69 per cent) and France (19 per cent). On the route via the Western Balkans, Germany (44 per cent), Italy (25 per cent), France (10 per cent), Belgium (3 per cent) and other central and northern European countries are mentioned.

The main needs reported reflect the fact that most respondents wish to remain in the country where they were surveyed. More than half mention the need to find a job (54 per cent), followed by those who express the need to be supported with documentation (32 per cent), with language courses (18 per cent) and adult education or training courses (14 per cent).

Support with transportation, often from an island to the mainland, is mentioned by 18 per cent on WMR and 12 per cent on WAAR, while those on CMR also mention the need to find personal safety (16 per cent) and to receive financial support (11 per cent). Migrants and refugees who were most likely to be interviewed while in transit, such as those in the Northeast of Italy arriving from the WBR also mentioned the need for accommodation.



Italy. Four-year-old Tala from Guinea, at the port of Lampedusa with her mother, is being assisted by UNHCR staff. © UNHCR/Alessandro Penso

Vulnerabilities during the journey¹⁶

Youth and adolescents travelling by sea and by land frequently recount journeys filled with challenges and risks. Financial difficulties are reported by approximately one-quarter of respondents (24 per cent), with especially high rates among adolescents and young adults on the Western Balkan route to Italy (87 per cent) and the CMR (38 per cent). Consistent with previous rounds of data collection, those travelling along the CMR report the highest incidents of problems and incidents during the journey, while those on the WMR and on the WAAR report fewer, though increasing, difficulties. About 63 per cent of those on the CMR report being robbed at some point during their journey. Other commonly reported issues include financial hardship, lack of food, health problems, and lack of shelter, affecting between 30 per cent and 38 per cent of migrants on the CMR. Nearly 60 per cent of those entering Northeast Italy from Slovenia and the WBR also report insufficient shelter during their journey.

The survey examined various protection indicators through eight questions covering experiences such as unpaid labour, forced work, arranged marriage proposals (for themselves or close family members), being kept against their will, physical violence, forced travel, misleading or false information about travel and migration, and access to travel documents.¹⁷

Physical violence is a frequent experience, reported by over half (56 per cent) of youth and adolescents on the CMR, 47 per cent of those arriving in Italy via the WBR, 12 per cent of those transiting Western Balkan countries, and 8 per cent of migrants reaching Spain through the WMR. More than one third (39 per cent) of respondents on the CMR report experiences of unpaid labour during the journey, an incident that is also reported on the other routes with lower shares (from 21 per cent of migrants reaching Italy via the WBR to about one per cent of those on the WAAR). Experiences that may be associated with trafficking and exploitation were reported, including movement restrictions and forced labour. Being held against their will or being forced to work are more common among youth travelling on the CMR (32 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively), with shares between 1-3 per cent along the other routes. About a fifth of those on

the WBR and on the CMR report having been misled with false information or promises of well-paid jobs, safe journeys, or legal travel documents. In some cases, they were detained unexpectedly or abandoned, while in other cases they were requested to pay additional money by smugglers or facilitators at different stages of the journey.

Only one-fifth of adolescents and young adults in the sample state that they have access to their travel documents and that they had control over them during the journey. More than half (58 per cent) report that they did not have their documents during the journey. In particular, almost all (98 per cent) of those on the WMR and 72 per cent of those on the WAAR say they have departed without documents, often intentionally leaving them at home. Other respondents reported that someone else has control over their documents, particularly on the WBR (23 per cent), while 25 per cent of those on the CMR report they departed with their documents, but they were stolen during the journey.

Overall, adolescents and young adults on mixed migration routes to Europe continue to face significant protection risks. Libya remains the country most frequently reported as the location of reported incidents, consistent with previous data collection rounds. Protection concerns though arise also in other transit countries, such as Tunisia and Algeria, at the end of the journey before crossing the Mediterranean, and to a lesser extent in land border areas of North African countries and of Türkiye, and in remote and forest areas at the border of other transit countries in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans (for example, Croatia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Hungary). More stringent border management measures appear to contribute to riskier migration pathways, with an increasing reliance on smuggling networks and growing exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse for those trying to reach Europe by sea and by land.

Source: IOM's [DTM Europe – Migrants Travelling to Europe by Land and by Sea. Journeys, vulnerabilities and needs of migrants along the Mediterranean, African Atlantic and Western Balkan routes in 2024](#), Vienna, June 2025.



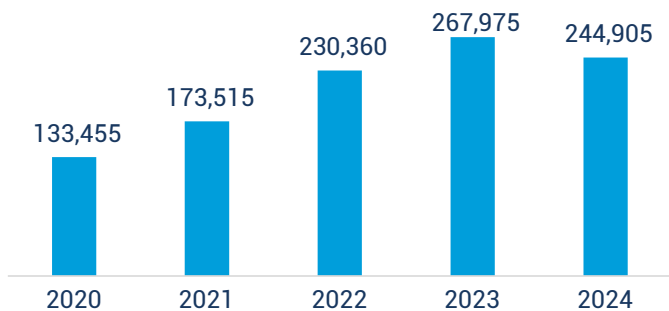
Bulgaria. A child paints on the facade of the Penyo Penev Fifth Evening School in Sofia. Artists from nine countries created a mural together with refugee children. © UNHCR/Dobrin Kashavelov

Asylum applications and decisions

Asylum applicants

In 2024, European countries¹⁸ reported a total of 941,940 new asylum-seekers (first-time applicants), a notable decrease of 143,860 (-13 per cent) from the previous year. Among these applicants, a little over one-fourth (244,905) were children, indicating an 8 per cent decrease from 2023 (267,975). Girls represented 42 per cent of all new asylum-seeking children (103,605).

Figure 9: First-time asylum applications lodged by children in Europe, 2020-2024



Source: Eurostat, Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data [migr_asyappctza_custom_17524319], last update 31/07/2025

The countries with the highest number of new asylum applications from children were Germany, France, Spain, Greece, Austria and Italy, collectively receiving 84 per cent of all first-time child asylum applicants in Europe. Germany led with the highest number of child asylum applications (84,315 or 36 per cent of the total), followed by France (39,995, or 17 per cent), Spain (29,740, or 13 per cent), Greece (18,000 or 8 per cent), Austria (12,335 or 5 per cent) and Italy (12,215 or 5 per cent).

Unaccompanied children as asylum applicants

In 2024, European countries recorded 34,605 new asylum applications from unaccompanied children,¹⁹ marking a 21 per cent decrease from 2023 (43,085). Of these applicants, 10 per cent were girls and 90 per cent were boys. Over three-quarters of these unaccompanied children seeking asylum were registered in Germany (13,345 or 39 per cent), Greece (4,710 or 14 per cent), the Netherlands (3,930 or 14 per cent), Bulgaria (2,600 or 8 per cent) and Italy (2,030 or 6 per cent). The Syrian Arab Republic led as the primary country of origin for asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied children, comprising 34 per cent of the total, followed by Afghanistan (17 per cent), Egypt (10 per cent), Somalia (6 per cent) and Türkiye, Guinea and the Gambia (3 per cent each). Together, these origin countries contributed 76 per cent of the total asylum applications by unaccompanied children in 2024.

First-instance decisions on child asylum applications

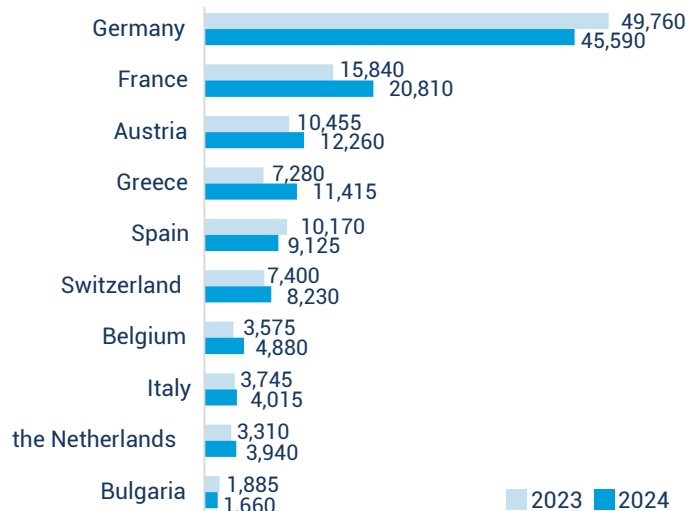
In 2024, European national authorities processed 202,240 first-instance decisions on child asylum applications. Among these, 128,610, accounting for 64 per cent, were positive decisions, marking a 2 per cent decrease from positive decisions issued in 2023. The bulk of these positive decisions, comprising 85 per cent of the total, were issued by Germany (35 per cent), France (16 per cent), Austria (10 per cent), Greece (9 per cent), Spain (7 per cent), Switzerland (4 per cent) and Belgium (4 per cent).

While refugee and subsidiary protection statuses adhere to EU regulations, humanitarian status is determined by specific national legislation and may not be uniformly applicable across the EU Member States. Out of the 128,555 children who received a positive decision in the first instance, 74,495 or 58 per cent were granted refugee status (compared to 69,190 or 57 per cent in 2023); 38,070 or 30 per cent

subsidiary protection (31,245 or 26 per cent in 2023), and 16,020 or 12 per cent were granted humanitarian status (20,575 or 17 per cent in 2023).

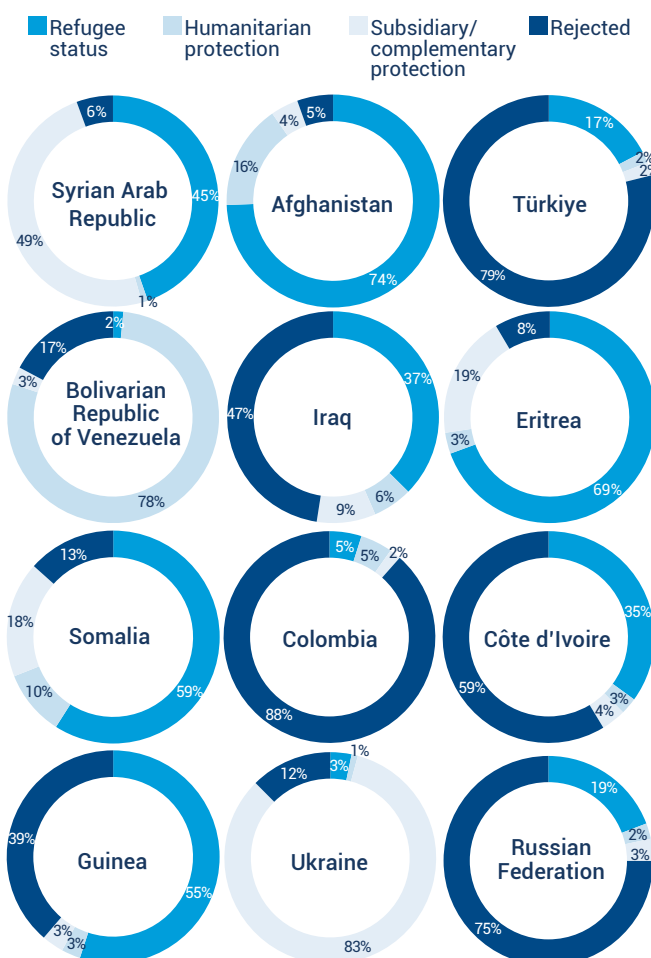
In absolute numbers, Germany led in issuing the highest number of positive decisions (45,590) granting refugee status and subsidiary protection mainly to Syrian, Afghan and Eritrean children. Conversely, Spain issued the most decisions granting humanitarian status, especially to Venezuelan children.

Figure 10: Top ten countries of asylum by number of first-instance positive decisions issued on child asylum applications in Europe, 2023-2024



Source: Eurostat, First instance decisions on applications - annual aggregated data [migr_asydcfst_custom_17595280], last update on 31/07/2025

Figure 11: First-instance decisions on child asylum applications in Europe in 2024, top 12 countries of origin by number of decisions (%)



Source: Eurostat, First instance decisions on applications - annual aggregated data [migr_asydcfst_custom_17595280], last update on 31/07/2025

Of all first instance decisions issued on child asylum applications, approximately 73,730 or 36 per cent were denied international protection, which is an increase of 2 per cent from 2023. Notably, among top countries of origin by the number of decisions issued for children in 2024, there is a great variability in the share of positive and negative decisions. A higher proportion of negative decisions is found among applications lodged by children from Colombia (88%, 4,790 rejections), Türkiye (79%, or 13,295), Russian Federation (75%, or 2,965), Côte d'Ivoire (59%, or 2,645), Iraq (47%, or 2,825), and Guinea (39%, or 1,740).

On the other side, the share of positive decisions overall is higher than the average for children from the Syrian Arab Republic (95%, 44,400 positive decisions), Afghanistan (95%, or 27,985), Eritrea (92%, or 5,390), Ukraine (88%, 3,645), Somalia (87%, 4,820), and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (83%, 6,460).

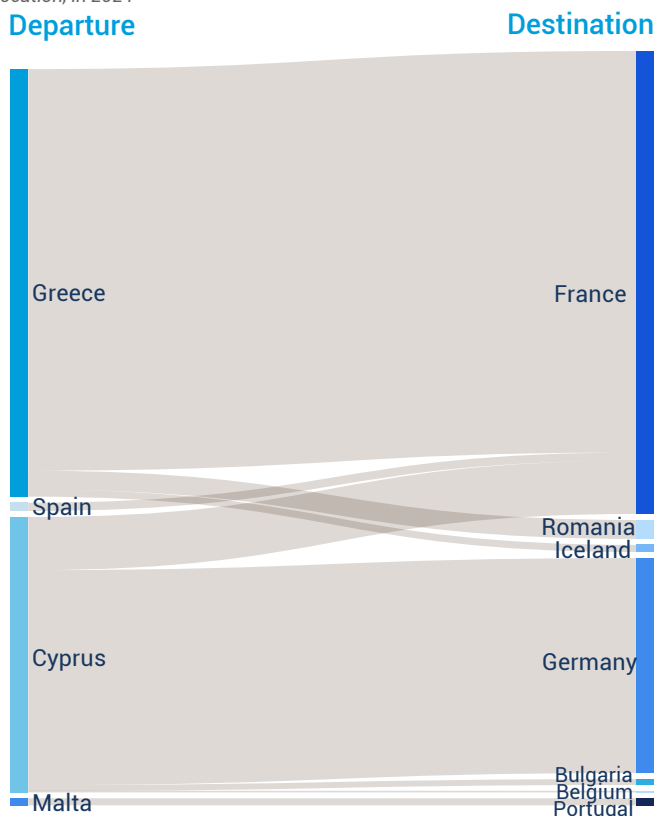
Relocation in Europe

Relocation has remained an important means of supporting vulnerable migrants and refugees in Europe, including UAC, and enhancing solidarity among States.

In 2024, IOM continued its support to relocation under the [Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism](#) from Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain. In close cooperation with involved governments and EUAA, and under overall coordination by the European Commission - DG HOME, a total of 608 children were assisted with voluntary relocation from Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy and Spain to seven European countries. This is a 21 per cent decrease compared to the 774 children relocated in 2023.

Out of the 608 children relocated in 2024, 328 were boys and 280 girls. Among all the relocated children, 26 were UAC (4 per cent of the total) and were relocated from Cyprus to Germany and Bulgaria.

Figure 12: Children relocated in Europe, by country of departure and country of relocation, in 2024



Source: IOM 2025

Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) for children and UAC

In 2024, IOM provided voluntary return support to 10,145 migrants from European Economic Area (EEA) countries, the United Kingdom and Switzerland (13 per cent of all 81,108 migrants assisted globally) to their countries of origin. Of these, around 23 per cent (2,373) were assisted in returning from Greece alone, followed by the Netherlands (2,081, or 21 per cent) and Belgium (1,646, or 16 per cent). Almost 17 per cent (1,745) were children, including 40 UAC.

Of all AVRR beneficiaries assisted in returning from the EEA region, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, around 45 per cent (4,569) returned to countries in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; 12 per cent (1,186) to Asia and the Pacific, 8 per cent (856) to the Middle East and North Africa, around 26 per cent (2,645) to South America, Caribbean and Central America and the rest, around 9 per cent (889), to other regions. Among the 1,745 children assisted in returning, the main nationalities were Georgia, Brazil, Colombia, Türkiye, Mongolia, Iraq, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Children resettled in Europe

Of the 17,800 people in resettlement procedures in Europe in 2024, 50 per cent were children (26 per cent boys and 24 per cent girls). Germany, France, Norway, and Spain were the main countries in Europe considering children's resettlement cases. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Syrian Arab Republic, Sudan and Afghanistan were the most common countries of origin of children whose cases were being considered for resettlement by European States in 2024.

Protecting Children on the Move in Europe Joint Advocacy by IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF

IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF welcome the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and its potential to strengthen protection for migrant, refugee and stateless children. As Member States implement their national action plans, the agencies stress the need to: uphold the best interests of the child in all decisions; ensure timely school enrolment; detect and respond promptly to child protection risks; and never detain children for immigration purposes. Unaccompanied and separated children should have immediate access to legal representation and age assessments should be rare, multidisciplinary, child-sensitive, and open to appeal. Please read here for more: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/documents/implementation-eu-asylum-and-migration-pact>



Adolescent out of a reception center in Gran Canaria, Spain. ©IOM 2025

Definitions

"A **child** means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." [\[source\]](#)

"**Separated children** are children (...) who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members." [\[source\]](#)

"**Unaccompanied children** (also called unaccompanied minors) are children (...) who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so." [\[source\]](#)

A "**refugee**" is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Article 1 A 1951 Refugee Convention).

An "**asylum-seeker**" is a person who has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision as to whether they are a refugee. Determination of refugee status can only be of a declaratory nature. Indeed, any person is a refugee within the framework of a given instrument if they meet the criteria of the refugee definition in that instrument, whether they are formally recognized as a refugee or not (UNHCR Note on Determination of Refugee Status under International Instruments). [\[source\]](#)

A "**migrant**" refers to any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from their habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. [\[source\]](#)

About the factsheet

This factsheet is jointly produced by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM with the aim to support evidence-based decision-making and advocacy on issues related to migrant and refugee children.

The document provides an overview of the situation in Europe with regards to migrant and refugee children (accompanied and unaccompanied). It compiles key child-related data based on available official sources: arrivals by sea and by land, asylum applications, asylum decisions, profiles of child and youth arrivals, relocation, assisted voluntary returns and resettlement to Europe.

The present factsheet covers the period January to December 2024, providing up-to-date information on migrant and refugee children, including unaccompanied children, who arrived via mixed Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic routes in Europe.

Limitations of available data on children and UAC

There are no comprehensive data on irregular arrivals (both adults and children) in Europe, as such movements are largely irregular and involve smuggling networks, which are difficult to track. If collected, data are rarely disaggregated by nationality, gender or age. Reliable data on the number of unaccompanied and of separated children either arriving or currently residing in different European countries is often unavailable. The number of asylum applications filed by UAC is used to provide an indication of trends, but does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the caseload due to backlogs in national asylum systems, onward secondary movements or children not applying for asylum at all. In addition, due to different definitions and national procedures and practices, collecting accurate data on separated children specifically is very challenging (e.g. separated children being registered as either accompanied or unaccompanied). Specifically for the European Union context, Eurostat data on asylum applications and decisions on children and UAC have been downloaded on 31 July 2025, and may be subject to consolidation.

Endnotes

- Age, gender and nationality disaggregated data on children arriving in Spain in 2024 are not available.
- Data on arrivals are partial due to the large scale of irregular movements. The data reflects both sea and land arrivals in Greece, land arrivals in Bulgaria, and sea arrivals in Cyprus, Italy, Malta and Spain.
- Please check the definitions of unaccompanied children on page 8.
- Arrival figures for Greece are collected in the framework of UNHCR's border activities and National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum (ESKESMA).
- Data on sea arrivals to Italy are based on information received from the Italian Ministry of Interior.
- Data for Spain are based on the Ministry of Interior's statistics and UNHCR's estimates.
- Statistics for Bulgaria are collected by the State Agency for Refugees. Observations on data and trends that are not typically compiled by government institutions are collected by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.
- Estimate on data provided by the Immigration Police under the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE), Malta. UAC figures are based on age declared by the refugees and migrants upon arrival. Not all persons who make such a declaration are recognized to be UAC by the authorities after the age assessment is completed. Moreover, not all UAC declare themselves as such upon arrival. Thus, there are UAC who declare to be adults at disembarkation and are age assessed as children after they change their date of birth before the authorities.
- See Footnote 1.
- See Footnote 1.
- See Footnote 1.
- Italy, Malta, Spain, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).
- Adolescents between 15 and 17 years old were addressed by enumerators only after having obtained written consent from the parent or the assigned legal guardian.
- In the survey, respondents could select maximum two main reasons, hence the total is higher than 100 per cent.
- See IOM (2024) [Impacts of Environmental Changes on Mixed Migration to Europe: Insights from Flow Monitoring Surveys in Italy, Malta and Spain](#) for more details.
- This section is based on a sub-sample of 2,314 respondents between 15 and 24 years old, who were asked the problems, violence, abuse and exploitation module.
- While these questions are not meant to identify potential victims of trafficking or abuse and exploitation, they provide indications about recurrent instances and risks to which migrants are exposed during their journeys. For more information, see [Migrants Travelling to Europe by Land and by Sea: Journeys, vulnerabilities and needs of migrants along the Mediterranean, African Atlantic and Western Balkan routes in 2024](#).
- Data includes EU 27 member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
- Eurostat, Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex - annual data [migr_asyunaa__custom_17524257], accessed on 18/07/2025.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

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