Regional Humanitarian Situation Report # 5

8 DECEMBER 2015: REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CRISIS IN EUROPE

Highlights

- Refugees and migrants continue to arrive in Europe at unprecedented levels– so far this year 921,713 people have arrived by sea. Nearly 212,000 of them are children.

- The proportion of children registered at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has increased from 9 per cent in June to 32 per cent in November.

- Between 18 November and 1 December, more than 9,372 children have rested and played in UNICEF child-friendly spaces in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia.

- More than 2,980 babies and infants used UNICEF mother-and-baby care spaces in Serbia and Croatia during the second half of November. This is an increase of more than 30 per cent compared to the beginning of November.

- The speed of population movements, selective processing of refugees and migrants based on their nationality at border crossing points and the limited time spent by children in reception centres are currently the major factors influencing the UNICEF’s response to the crisis.

- UNICEF still faces a funding gap of US$2,070,481 which is 15 per cent of the total appeal of US$14,019,135 to respond to the crisis. Funding needs are being revised to address the evolving situation.

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

More than 921,713 people have taken perilous journeys by sea to reach Europe so far in 2015 (UNHCR). Of them, 83 per cent arrived through Greece. Approximately 212,000 are children, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Children are particularly at risk during sea crossings, and at least 185 deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean this year were of children- 5 per cent of them under 2 years of age. Between 28 and 30
November, 8 children died after their boats sank off the Turkish coast of Canakkale and Mugla provinces. Such accidents are expected to rise as weather conditions deteriorate with the onset of winter.

The number and proportion of refugee and migrant children on the move across Europe continues to increase. In Serbia, more than 46,820 children were registered by the Ministry of Interior in November 2015. During the past month, one in three refugees and migrants on the move in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia was a child (compared to 1 in 10 in June and 1 in 4 in September). In Slovenia, 49 per cent of all arrivals since 16 October are women and children, many of whom under the age of 5. The number and proportion of unaccompanied and separated children registered at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has also increased from 5 per cent of all registered refugees and migrants in September to 7 per cent in December.

UNICEF is concerned about possible repercussions, including exposure to violent clashes, for children and women on the move, due to unpredictable border restrictions and policies of selective processing of refugees and migrants based on their nationality, as well as the erection of new fences on national borders. The latest such situation was at the border of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece leading to violence and temporary border closure on 3 December. Technical barriers along the Slovenian border with Croatia continue being erected.

Due to the decreased number of people on the Western Balkans route and fast tracking of nationals of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, registration is now much faster and the time spent in reception centres has decreased to one hour in Slavonski Brod, Croatia. This imposes significant challenges to service provision and humanitarian relief for refugee and migrant children. Winter, fast-changing political discourses which result in altering migration routes in South-Eastern Europe also require urgent actions to adapt the humanitarian response. During the second half of November, more than 1,050 refugees and migrants were registered in Bulgaria, amongst whom one third were children. The three-fold increase in the number of people arriving in Serbia from Bulgaria (422 people during the last two weeks of November) requires attention as many families and children are among the arrivals. Although the flow of people through Bulgaria remains limited, UNICEF is concerned about the reports of violence and extremely difficult conditions endured by refugees and migrants. Another serious concern is that 138 refugee and migrant children remain in detention- the large majority of them attached to non-related adults.

Countries of destination, such as Germany, which has received an estimated 260,000 children by the end of November 2015, see their capacities overstretched. The high number of new arrivals and backlogs in pending asylum cases leave children in overcrowded temporary accommodation centres and emergency shelters for months, exposed to considerable protection risks and limited or no access to education, health care and social inclusion.

**Humanitarian strategy**

In line with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF continues to respond to the crisis in Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia through a combination of advocacy, capacity building and service delivery response. UNICEF is working to extend support to children and women throughout their entire journey, most notably in Greece, Austria, Slovenia, Germany and Italy. Preparedness support to countries and
territories considered to be at higher risk of being affected by the crisis is already taking place. UNICEF has developed preparedness plans in Bulgaria, Albania and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), and is finalizing those in Romania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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 as the voice of refugee and migrant children in national and regional policy processes undertaken in response to the present crisis.

Coordination

UNICEF is actively engaged in regular Government and UN country team coordination mechanisms and platforms on the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe. This includes consultation with all relevant ministries, as well as UNHCR, respective national branches of 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 rights 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 longer term support to national child protection systems. In addition, UNICEF ensures cross-border coordination through its network of country teams along the Western Balkans route so as to facilitate response planning, family and children tracing and reunification and advocacy.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

With the aim to better protect and assist refugee and migrant children on the move, UNICEF is finalizing jointly with UNHCR and IOM a Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RRMRP). It will ensure that the special needs of babies, children with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children and other vulnerable children are adequately addressed along their entire journey from east of Turkey, through Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. The plan will also ensure consistency, predictability and quality of UNICEF interventions in South-Eastern Europe in key areas, including child protection, health and nutrition – especially infant and young children feeding – water, hygiene and sanitation, as well as education. In Turkey, this plan is already being finalized and aims to bolster the efforts of the Turkish Government to address the increasing needs of persons on the move toward Europe, strengthen outreach and monitoring, and improve identification and referral of persons with specific needs.

Following the recent humanitarian rapid assessment missions, UNICEF is operationalizing its engagement and support to the national responses in Slovenia, Greece and Germany. After an assessment on the situation of refugee and migrant children in Bulgaria, UNICEF is planning to scale up the following activities: i) improved monitoring of the situation of refugee and migrant children; ii) capacity development for front line workers; iii) introducing child protection standards for reception, transit and accommodation centres suited to the specific context in Bulgaria.

Child Protection

The refugee and migrant crisis is a protection crisis, especially for children, and UNICEF continues to adapt its response to the individual needs of children through service provision, capacity building and technical assistance to Governments.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, 6 child-friendly spaces (CFS), equipped with educational materials and toys continue providing services 24/7: two in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (one in Gevgelija and one in Tabanovce); two in Serbia (Presevo and Adasevci), and several mobile CFS teams in Croatia (Slavonski Brod). The newly established CFS in Tabanovce, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, incorporates a mother-and-baby corner, toilets, a kitchenette, and, in an adjacent building, an information and communication technology corner for adolescents with free Wi-Fi, photocopiers and charging stations. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, between 16 to 29 November, 4,559 children (2,094 girls and 2,465 boys), including 90 children with disabilities, and 373 unaccompanied and separated children, were able to rest and play in a safe environment at the UNICEF child-friendly spaces. In Serbia, the number of children attended in the CFS during the same period was 3,265. In Croatia UNICEF was able to reach an estimated 1,550 children.

During the whole month of November and December, UNICEF continued to support mobile teams of social workers along the entire Western Balkans route to identify and refer vulnerable children.
Anticipating possible delays in the transit of refugees and migrants in Serbia, UNICEF has obtained two rooms at Sid train station to operate CFS and mother-and-baby space. To address the needs of the increasing number of vulnerable children and families arriving from Bulgaria, UNICEF has also started negotiations with the Serbian Government to establish a CFS in the town of Dimitrovgrad, on the border with Bulgaria. In Croatia, two additional indoor CFS are being established in the winter reception centre of Slavonski Brod.

Protection of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) remains challenging in all countries where children are on the move, primarily due to the fast population movement and the limited expertise of staff at registration points. UNICEF therefore continues to advocate and support efforts to prevent family separation and ensure that national procedures align with children’s best interests in the context of the current crisis. With UNICEF’s technical and financial support, a meeting was held on 27-28 November 2015 to discuss the strengthening of Serbia’s child protection system to advance the protection of refugee and migrant children, and in particular unaccompanied and separated children. In addition, UNHCR and UNICEF jointly advocate for registration procedures to help identify UASC at risk. In Croatia, UNICEF is closely following up and supporting case management of UASC in institutional care facilities, as well as children in critical medical conditions. Strategies to avoid family separation within the reception centre in Slavonski Brod are also being implemented, and child-friendly stickers were placed to allow easy identification of each tent and container within different sectors. To address insufficient coordination of child protection activities in Slavonski Brod, on 24 November UNICEF set up a child protection coordination mechanism, followed by a training on child safeguarding for all UNICEF staff and partners. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, between 26 and 28 November, UNICEF together with Terre des Hommes, conducted a scoping mission to assess training needs of humanitarian workers in contact with children as well as of those delivering more specialized child protection services, with trainings being planned for the first half of December.

As children with disabilities and their families continue to face extreme difficulties during their journey, UNICEF has been advocating for the systematic identification of children with physical disabilities during the registration process. UNICEF is closely following these cases and ensures through its partners provision of psycho-social support and sufficient supply of wheelchairs.

**Health and Nutrition**

UNICEF continues working with Governments and partners to improve standards on child nutrition, and in particular Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices for children on the move.

Four mother-and-baby spaces in Gevgelija, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Presevo and Adasevci, Serbia and Slavonski Brod, Croatia, continue supporting breastfeeding mothers and their infants and young children 24/7. During the second half of November, 2,045 women, 194 of whom were pregnant, received emotional and psychosocial support and counselling on child health, nutrition and safety in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Also, 288 babies were bathed and supplied with clean clothing at the Mother and Baby Corner at Gevgelija. During the same period, 660 babies and 423 mothers benefited from the mother-and-baby spaces in Serbia. Since 23 November refugees and migrants in Croatia no longer enter the sectors of the reception centre in Slavonski Brod and leave as soon as registration process is completed. UNICEF has therefore adapted to this challenging situation and adjusted its mother-and-baby activities to be provided near the registration point. A heated tent was set up on 29 November. Between 17 November and 1 December this new approach enabled UNICEF to reach more than 470 infants and young children. Only on 23 November, a record number of 136 babies were reached by mother-and-baby services in Slavonski Brod.

In Serbia, UNICEF and WHO currently support the Ministry of Health to develop Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to provide appropriate guidance to ensure awareness and sensitization of all relevant actors on good nutrition practices, promoting breastfeeding as key to infants and young children feeding.
In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, during the second half of November, UNICEF distributed through its implementing partners 856 jars of semi-solid complementary food for babies, 489 boxes of baby appropriate biscuits and 1,824 200-ml packs of chocolate milk.

**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. UNICEF WASH specialist has now been deployed to assess needs for improvements in WASH facilities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

In Serbia, during the second half of November, UNICEF partners in Presevo and Sid distributed 6,333 diapers, 49 changing mats for babies and 279 baby covers. In Croatia, UNICEF reached 2,300 children with diapers and dry clothes. This is twice as many as in the previous period. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNICEF partners distributed 3,359 diapers, 55 bars of soap, 202 sachets of baby cream and 406 bottles of baby shampoo.

**Education**

UNICEF has now finalized an education plan for children on the move, children who are stranded in transit countries, as well as 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 winter weather conditions already have arrived in Europe, additional shelter capacity (including in-door space for psycho-social support) and medical assistance at the main border entry and exit points become increasingly urgent UNICEF has now launched its plan for winterization activities, which include procurement of additional 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.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, support of winterizing the child-friendly spaces and refugee and migrant transit centres in the country, UNICEF procured and placed two diesel-powered generators with a total output of 100KVA, as well as additional high-performance electric heaters. In addition, 20 large electric heaters were distributed in Tabanovce transit centre, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, to support uninterrupted operation during winter.

As part of its ongoing winterization programme during the second half of November, UNICEF in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia distributed 672 baby blankets, and 1,424 sets of baby clothes, 479 pairs of baby shoes, 1,023 pairs of baby socks and 201 winter jackets. In Serbia, 1,154 children received raincoats, and 740 babies received blankets. Additional 2,859 winter hats, scarfs, gloves, 3,172 pairs of winter socks, 1,438 thermal sets, 2,242 winter jackets and 101 overall winter clothes were distributed in Presevo and Sid. In Croatia biweekly supplies for winter clothing for 2,300 infants and young children are available through collected clothing activities implemented with partners.

**Monitoring, Data Collection and Information on Available Services**

In all countries, where children are on the move, UNICEF continues advocating with governments and relevant international actors to implement statistical breakdowns of gender and age during registration processes and establish this as a standard. UNICEF is also scaling up collaboration with IOM, UNHCR and other partners at the regional and local 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, UNICEF is ready to implement a newly developed tool to collect data on the situation of refugee and migrant children. Activities are planned for the first half of December. Information collected through this survey will be shared with the Government and partners, and will be used to inform UNICEF programming to better shape the response to meet children’s needs.

Communications and Advocacy

Latest analysis from Factiva Dow Jones, for the reporting period 24 November to 7 December 2015 shows that UNICEF is the leading voice in published articles by news outlets. In analysis from top media sources in English, French, Spanish, and Arabic where leading humanitarian organizations were mentioned with the key words “migrants” or “refugees” and “children” over the last two weeks, UNICEF had the highest share of voice (32%), followed by IOM and UNHCR (both with 20%) and MSF (15%).

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNICEF launched the global #FightUnfair initiative to bring attention to the plight of children on the move. A national press release focusing on refugees and migrants was issued and picked up by nine local media outlets (http://www.unicef.org/tfyrmacedonia/media_28451.html). The UNICEF Representative in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia gave an interview for Deutsche Welle on the impact of new policies restricting movement of children.

UNICEF continued to publish social media content on the plight of children and on the response. This included highlighting the new WASH facilities for children and people with disabilities in Gevgelija; 24/7 operations; new operations in Tabanovce; the winterization response funded by ECHO; and the overall impact of winter on children on the move. In Serbia and Croatia, UNICEF continued to publish social media content regularly about refugee and migrant children. The most engaging Facebook post was about Muhamed, a little boy from Syria, who was waiting for the train to Croatia with his family.

In Slovenia, a special press conference, organized by children themselves and with support of UNICEF Slovenia, took place at one of primary schools in Slovenia. Taking place on Universal Children’s Day (20 November), its aim was to present the refugee and migrant crisis through children’s perspective and raise awareness about the risks and challenges children on the move face every day, including family separation, poor hygiene conditions, lack of child-appropriate food and education.

Next SitRep: 22/12/2015

Who to contact for further information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Tel</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marie-Pierre Poirier</td>
<td>Special Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+41229095502</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mppoirier@unicef.org">mppoirier@unicef.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert McCarthy</td>
<td>Regional Chief of Emergency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+41 22 909 56 46</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rmccarthy@unicef.org">rmccarthy@unicef.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TsvetomiraBidart</td>
<td>Information Management and Reporting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+41 22 90 95 536</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tbidart@unicef.org">tbidart@unicef.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>