

## Europe's Migration Crisis:

# Save the Children Sustaining Strong Responses at Sea and in Transit and Destination Countries

## May 2017

***“We were in the sea for hours. A helicopter flew above us three to four times, then left. Less than half an hour later we saw Save the Children’s ship. I cried and hugged the children. I thanked God that we had made it.”***

– Fadi\* and his wife and two children fled Syria in an overcrowded boat. When the engine failed, they were picked up by our search and rescue vessel off the North African coast.

\* name changed to protect identity

### The Emergency

More than 1.3 million people have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe since 2015, taking perilous journeys to flee conflict, instability and persecution in the Middle East and Africa. Through April of this year, 44,060 migrants or refugees had arrived in Europe by sea – most of whom arrived in Italy. Another 1,092 people have perished or gone missing while crossing the central Mediterranean to reach European shores this year.

There are 62,000 migrants and refugees now stranded in Greece because of border closings and the 2016 repatriation agreement between the European Union and Turkey, where most had departed from. Thousands of children and adults are also stuck in other countries they were hoping to quickly transit through; those still on the move are practically invisible because they fear deportation or becoming stranded. Everywhere along the migration route, children face extortion by smugglers, sexual abuse and exploitation, violence and trafficking. Many have been living for months in detention centers,



Staff aboard our search and rescue vessel in the Mediterranean Sea, the *Vos Hestia*, carry a woman off an unsafe boat. Many women aboard the boat, which was attempting to reach Italy from North Africa, were too weak to stand. We provided medical care aboard the *Vos Hestia* and brought those rescued to safety in an Italian port during our first mission of 2017.  
*Save the Children photo*

which lack the protection, information and services they desperately need. Despite proposals made by Europe for an immediate response to the crisis, children's rights and safety are not guaranteed.

## Our Response

Save the Children's search and rescue vessel stationed in the Mediterranean between North Africa and Italy is saving lives as migrants and refugees cross the sea, often on dangerously unseaworthy boats. We provide humanitarian relief and support to children and families in Greece and Italy and along the migration routes. We make every effort to reach children who are unaccompanied by families or adults, as they are in grave danger of exploitation and abuse.

Our teams in Europe's destination countries ensure that children receive the support they need to adjust to their new lives and that their rights and best interests are respected.

## At Sea and Along the Mediterranean and Aegean Coasts

### Search and Rescue Vessel

Our chartered vessel, the *Vos Hestia*, is on station in the Mediterranean Sea between North Africa and Italy for a second year, rescuing children and adults being smuggled across this dangerous sea route to Europe. Within a week of being deployed in early April, we rescued over 300 people and brought them safely to Italian ports. While aboard the *Vos Hestia*, children and adults receive food and water, health care and child protection services. The *Vos Hestia* will be operational from now until November. During the *Vos Hestia*'s first deployment from September to December 2016, it rescued more than 2,700 people, 400 of whom were children. We coordinate the *Vos Hestia*'s movements with the Italian Coastguard and ships of other aid agencies.

### Italy

As of late April, 34,810 refugees and migrants had arrived in Italy this year after crossing the Mediterranean. The majority were women and children. Save the Children has run program in Italy to aid migrants and refugees for the past nine years. We are established on the southern border of Italy, including the Lampedusa, Sicily, Calabria and Apulia regions, and in transit cities such as Rome and Milan.

- Our child protection team meets refugees and migrants as they disembark from the *Vos Hestia*. They identify vulnerable children and provide legal information.
- We have run training sessions on legal assistance and psychological support for staff working in reception facilities for unaccompanied children.
- We have started a telephone helpline for children in several languages.

### Greece

With the border between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia closed, over 62,200 refugees and migrants are stranded in Greece, including thousands being detained in facilities on the Greek islands. While the number of new arrivals has fallen dramatically, many of those stuck in the country while their status is decided face harsh conditions in camps and detention centers. It's estimated that 20,000 of those stranded are children.

- We are working in more than 20 sites, including camps, detention centers, hotels, apartments and shelters. Since August 2015, we have reached nearly 500,000 children and adults with assistance.

- We run child- and youth-friendly spaces where children and youth can meet, play and receive psychosocial support in a safe environment.
- At our mother-baby areas, mothers and pregnant women receive advice and support on nutrition and breastfeeding for children under age 2.
- On the islands of Lesbos, Samos and Kos, and in Athens, we run shelters for unaccompanied children and offer counselling and activities to children in detention centers and other accommodations.



This Afghan girl and her mother benefit from one of our mother-baby areas in Greece. We provide advice and support to women on child nutrition and distribute infant care supplies and clothing. The family fled fighting in 2016 and is seeking asylum in Europe.  
*Photo: Anna Pantelia/Save the Children*

## Turkey

There are over 2.8 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey. Iraqi refugees swell this number to over 3 million. Since March 2015, Turkey has tightened border controls, which have effectively shut all borders. The government plans to have all Syrian children integrated into the state education system within three years.

- We have supported 58 temporary education centers in the Hatay Province and have provided over 15,000 kits of education supplies to students.
- We are rehabilitating classrooms, improving five temporary education centers so that they meet international standards and are constructing three schools that will serve the educational needs of 1,530 Syrian children.
- We have created a team to assist very vulnerable refugees from Syria, including those newly arrived, by providing information on their rights and access to services.

## Transit Countries

Along the once-busy and often chaotic migration route through Balkan countries, refugees and migrants are still on the move or, as in Greece, stranded in reception centers, camps and abandoned buildings while their status is determined.

## Croatia

Up to 100 refugees and migrants arrive monthly by crossing the border from Serbia, being returned from other European Union members or through relocation from Greece or Italy. Between 500 and 600 people are in centers for asylum seekers during an average month.

- Our non-formal education activities, creative and life skills workshops, psychosocial support and cultural mediation activities benefit unaccompanied children in five social welfare facilities.
- We provide mothers with clothing, hygiene supplies and information on their children's nutrition.

## Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Over 300 refugees and migrants pass through the country monthly. If caught, they are pushed back to Greece. Others are stranded at two reception centers.

- We and a partner support those on the move near the border with Serbia, providing essential supplies, psychosocial support, medical assistance, information and referrals to services.
- We have mother-baby areas that provide access to nutritional services.

## Serbia

Our staff estimate that up to 1,000 people arrive monthly from Bulgaria or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The vast majority want to keep moving to other destinations. Refugees and migrants travel with smugglers, which exposes them to risks of exploitation. Some 7,300 refugees and migrants are stranded, waiting to seek asylum in Hungary – many are staying in unhygienic, unsafe and undignified conditions in abandoned warehouses in Belgrade.

- In Belgrade, we and a partner run a drop-in center for new arrivals and children staying in Belgrade's urban areas. Services include psychosocial support, information and referrals. We also run mobile outreach teams in Belgrade, referring vulnerable children to services and providing assistance with registration and legal counselling.
- At two reception centers, we provide psychosocial support and non-formal education activities to unaccompanied children.



A boy stranded in Serbia eats a meal at an abandoned building in Belgrade where he and others were staying. Our mobile outreach teams in the city provide assistance and legal counselling to those stuck, and identify vulnerable children and help them obtain services.

*Photo: Tatjana Ristic/Save the Children*

## Destination Countries

Our teams are working in Romania, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. They ensure that newly-arrived children and families have the support they require and that their rights are respected. Here are examples of recent activities:

- In Romania, we organize a daily program for children in six reception centers, consisting of social, cultural and recreational age-appropriate activities. We have established child-friendly spaces, mother-baby areas and breastfeeding corners, support educational programs and inform children and their families of their rights.
- In eight refugee shelters in The Netherlands, we have run structured recreational activities for hundreds of children and adolescents. We have received funding to expand activities to 32 shelter locations over the next two years.
- In Germany, we trained some 50 staff at two “first reception centers” in Halberstadt and Eisenhüttenstadt to provide psychological first aid to children.
- We provide housing to unaccompanied minors who have been granted asylum in Finland and are waiting for further placement.
- At our family clubs in Denmark, Danish and refugee families come together to participate in a range of activities. Our Space for All program helps refugee children access sports and recreational activities and clubs.
- Our child- and youth-friendly spaces in Spain serve children and youth from ages 3 to 16. We are preparing to open a new center in Melilla to provide non-formal education, recreational activities, protection and psychosocial support to refugees, migrants and unaccompanied children.



One of our staff holds a Syrian child at a temporary reception center for refugees and migrants in Melilla, Spain. We have run two child-friendly spaces in the center to give children a respite from the stress of their journey to Europe; we have also run education and recreation activities there.

*Photo: Pedro Armestre/Save the Children*

## Advocating for Children and Families on the Move

Given our presence in countries of origin, transit and destination, Save the Children is uniquely placed to advocate for the rights of children and families on the move. Our main messages revolve around improving

conditions in reception centers, improved practices for relocating and resettling children, and ensuring that children's rights are respected and their best interests govern all decisions made about them.

## **Why Save the Children?**

Save the Children is the world's leading child-focused humanitarian organization. We have nearly 100 years' experience responding to children and their families during and after crises. We are exceptional among aid agencies because we provide comprehensive emergency preparedness, relief and recovery programs that are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of children and their families. We have well-trained national staff ready to respond at a moment's notice. Our international experts in health, nutrition, food security, shelter, water and sanitation, education and child protection can join our local staff if needed. We also have pre-positioned relief supplies and medicines that can be distributed quickly.

Because we work directly with children and families in the heart of the crisis, we know immediately when conditions change and can adapt our programs to meet children's most urgent needs. Save the Children also stays as long as it takes to help children, families and communities recover from their losses, rebuild their lives and become more resilient to future shocks.

*Nobody knows when the next crisis will strike. That's why 10 percent of your generous gift goes to helping our emergency team prepare for and provide critical assistance when and where children need us the most.*