A photograph of a person with short dark hair, wearing a light blue t-shirt, seen from the back and side. They are looking out from under a large, wrinkled blue tarp. The scene is dimly lit, with the tarp's texture and the person's shirt clearly visible against the dark background.

# EMERGENCY WITHIN AN EMERGENCY

The Growing Epidemic of Sexual Exploitation  
and Abuse of Migrant Children in Greece

FXB CENTER FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

# Acknowledgments

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Authored by Vasileia Digidiki & Jacqueline Bhabha

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The cover photo shows a Kurdish child from Syria in Greece at the EKO gas station site during the summer of 2015. The child in the photo is not a victim of sexual violence.

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<b>CRC:</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>ECPAT:</b>	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
<b>EEAA:</b>	National Commission for Human Rights
<b>EEDD:</b>	Association of Greek Judges and Public Prosecutors for the Democracy and the Liberties.
<b>EKKA:</b>	National Centre for Social Solidarity
<b>ESCA:</b>	Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse
<b>EU:</b>	European Union
<b>fYRoM:</b>	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
<b>GBV:</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>IASC:</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>IOL:</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>IOM:</b>	International Organization of Migration
<b>IRC:</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>KEELPNO:</b>	Greek Center for Disease Control
<b>NGO:</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>OPSC:</b>	Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
<b>PEP:</b>	Post-exposure prophylaxis
<b>SGBV:</b>	Sexual and gender-based violence
<b>UM:</b>	Unaccompanied minors
<b>UNICEF:</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNFPA:</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR:</b>	United Nations Refugee Agency
<b>WASH:</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WHO:</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WRC:</b>	Women's Refugee Commission

# Definitions

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**Commercial sexual exploitation of children:** this term refers to the sexual exploitation by an adult with respect to a child or an adolescent, female or male, under the age of 18. The exploitation is accompanied by a payment in money or in kind to the child or adolescent or to a third party.<sup>1</sup>

**Migrant:** Throughout this report, we use the term “migrant” as a shorthand to cover both refugee and other distress migrant children caught up in current large scale forced migration flows. While the term “refugee” covers those fleeing a well founded fear of persecution for specific reasons defined in international law, the term “migrant” covers a broader population. The latter may not fall within or be held to qualify for the protections afforded by the “refugee” category but nevertheless often requires protection and urgent humanitarian attention. This is particularly the case for children on the move who, because of their age, displacement from home and frequent separation from parents or guardians, are at greater risk of harm, neglect or other human rights violations. Our use of the term “migrant” is without prejudice to the question of whether a particular individual or group fall within the refugee definition. The phrase “distress migrant” used throughout this report is intended to signal the broad need for sustained protection for the population under investigation.

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1 International Labour Organisation (IOL). Commercial sexual exploitation of children. Available at: <http://ilo.org/ipsec/areas/CSEC/lang--en/index.htm>



## Executive Summary

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The present study analyzes the risk factors responsible for the exposure of migrant and refugee children to physical, psychological, and sexual violence and exploitation in Greece in the context of the ongoing migrant humanitarian crisis. It documents sexual and physical abuse of children inside migrant camps and reports new information about the commercial sexual exploitation of migrant children in the main cities of Greece. This research also explores the existing gaps and challenges in intervention efforts that contribute to victimization of migrant children.

This study was conducted using rapid assessment methodology, combining qualitative research with in situ observation. Data collection was completed in late November 2016 in four sites in Greece—namely, the islands of Lesbos and Chios and the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. These areas were chosen because they host large migrant populations, facilities, and camps. The conclusions are based on 24 key informant and stakeholder interviews with on-site participants who work closely with migrant children and are thus qualified to comment on the conditions inside migrant facilities and camps. For ethical and security considerations, no direct interviews with migrant children or adults were conducted.

This report highlights the following six major risk factors: (1) insufficient number of specialized facilities for children; (2) risky living conditions inside camps; (3) potentially hazardous and unsupervised commingling of migrant children with the adult migrant population; (4) weak and insufficiently resourced child protection systems; (5) lack of coordination and cooperation among responsible actors; and (6) an inefficient and radically inadequate relocation scheme.

The report describes the context where migrant children are exposed to and become victims of physical, psychological, and sexual violence inside migrant facilities and camps in the studied geographic areas. In particular, it analyzes five key aspects related to the commercial sexual exploitation of migrant children: (1) prevalence of the phenomenon; (2) profile of the victims; (3) mechanisms of recruitment and victimization; (4) role of purchasers of migrant child sex; and (4) impact of the exploitation on the victims. Participants working with migrant children underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon and highlight the negative influence of institutional, legislative, individual, family, and societal factors and conditions that contribute to the endangerment of migrant children. On-site participants also identify a cascade of socio-psychological and mental health symptoms evidenced by affected migrant children; these symptoms correlate with the children's reduced resilience and increased vulnerability to re-victimization. On-site participants further confirm that the criminal nature of the phenomenon seriously impacts prevention efforts, resulting in numerous missed opportunities to provide an effective safety net for migrant children. State child protection systems, in particular, have far failed to adapt to the reality of the situation.

Furthermore, the report analyses the significant gaps in both government and non-governmental responses to the current child migrant situation. The results emphasize an immediate and urgent need for substantially improved child protection policy and practice, including recruiting and training qualified staff and improving coordination and case management.

The report concludes with recommendations that address the complexity of the current humanitarian emergency. As a whole, the results call for flexible and well-informed prevention measures to address the many interconnected factors driving child migrant vulnerability. In view of the deterioration of the political climate for refugee and migrant populations in Europe and other parts of the world, national and international stakeholders should come together to ensure adequate prevention measures, as well as to create safe and legal paths to migration for migrant children in acute need of protection.

This report is a first step towards documenting the many and severe risks faced by migrant children in Greece. The ultimate aim is to influence current policy towards migrant children in Greece and to pave the way for future research to better understand and eliminate sexual abuse and exploitation of migrant children caught up in this humanitarian crisis.

# Introduction

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## 1.1 The unfolding humanitarian crisis

In 2015, Greece became the gateway to Europe for hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants fleeing war, violence, and persecution. In the hope of finding safety, these distress migrants risked beatings, abuse, rape, detention, and death. During the course of the year, about one million migrants entered the Greek territories with the intention of traveling through the adjacent Balkan countries towards Northern and Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> In early 2016, a series of regional political developments in Europe, including the sealing of borders with Greece by key Balkan countries<sup>3</sup>, severely impaired the movement of migrants. As a result, Greece transitioned from a short-term transit country to a long-term host country. This transformation posed a direct and severe threat to the well-being of the migrant population and drove the country into a dire humanitarian situation.

In an effort to curb the flow of migrants to the shores of Greece, the European Union entered into an agreement<sup>4</sup> with Turkey to return all irregular migrants arriving in Greece after March 20, 2016 to Turkey. In view of the immediate threat of deportation from Greece, asylum or relocation elsewhere in Europe became the only viable options for distress migrants arriving in Greece and seeking security and protection. Between March and November 2016, the Greek asylum service received 41,741 new claims<sup>5</sup>, a 216% increase on claims received throughout 2015. This unprecedented scale of asylum applications overwhelmed the system and led to protracted delays in claim processing.

Ten months after this change in the political landscape, almost 63,000 asylum applicants remain in limbo, facing inhumane living conditions inside camps as they await a determination of their claims. Meanwhile, new daily arrivals further stress the already burdened system.

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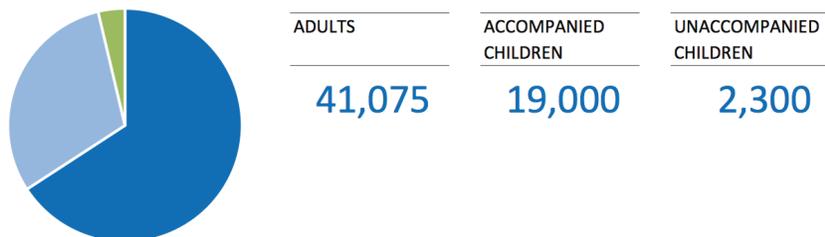
2 Jonathan Clayton and Hereward Holland, “Over one million sea arrivals reach Europe in 2015,” UNHCR, December 30th, 2015. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html>.

3 Initially, regional agreement among some of EU Member States (Austria, Croatia and Slovenia) and non-EU countries (FYRoM and Serbia) reduced the uncontrolled flight through these countries. The closure of the Greek FYRoM borders that followed blocked the migration route out of Greece.

4 This historic agreement calls for the deportation back to Turkey of all the people who enter the Greek borders illegally after March 20th, 2016, as long as Turkey is considered a “safe third country” or “a first country of asylum” for each individual case. This agreement raised serious human rights concerns among policymakers, NGOs and practitioners, while its effectiveness was questioned as refugees and migrants continue to arrive on the Greek shores.

5 Asylum Service, Asylum Statistics November 2016, available in Greek at [http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Greek-Asylum-Service-statistical-data\\_November2016\\_gr.pdf](http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Greek-Asylum-Service-statistical-data_November2016_gr.pdf).

Further depletion of already insufficient financial resources aggravates the destitution of forced migrants and predictably results in frustration, impatience, anger, and aggression that, in turn, lead to outbreaks of violence inside the camps. The intolerable situation in camps has driven many migrants to seek alternatives, including engaging in high-risk attempts to leave Greece, frequently with the assistance of exploitative smugglers.



## 1.2 A Child Protection Emergency

A striking feature of this humanitarian crisis is the number of children involved—a scale comparable only to the flight of population triggered by World War II. In June 2015, one in every ten migrants was a child; six months later, this proportion tripled to one in every three migrants. Of the approximately 1.2 million migrants passing through Greece<sup>6</sup> since 2015, almost 480,000<sup>7</sup> have been children. While the majority of these migrants moved on to their chosen destinations, a significant number were blocked at the border. Of the 62,375<sup>8</sup> migrants currently stranded in Greece, about 21,300 are children and, among them, 2,300 are estimated to be unaccompanied.<sup>9</sup>

Although the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ratified by Greece calls for the protection of all children, including those seeking asylum or without a regular migration status, the sheer magnitude of this crisis has critically strained the Greek child protection system. System failures have had a particularly dramatic impact on the safety and well-being of unaccompanied minors.<sup>10</sup> Despite numerous efforts to provide aid and assistance by the European Union (EU),<sup>11</sup> international organizations, and the Greek government,<sup>12</sup> children

6 UNHCR, refugees/migrants emergency response-Mediterranean, December 8th, 2016, available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php> (This is subject to change as daily arrivals are added to this figure).

7 UNICEF, *Neither safe nor sound: Unaccompanied children on the coastline of the English Channel and the North Sea*, p. 4-5. France, 2016. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef\\_NeitherSafeNorSound\\_\(003\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Unicef_NeitherSafeNorSound_(003).pdf)

8 UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe January to December 2017, December 2016*. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

9 UNICEF, *Refugee and migrant children in Greece*, December 31st, 2016. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/>

10 UNICEF, *Refugee and migrant Crisis- Child alert. Danger every step of the way*. June 2016. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/childrenonthemove/files/Child\\_Alert\\_Final\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/childrenonthemove/files/Child_Alert_Final_PDF.pdf)

11 European Commission, “Press Release: EU provides €83 million to improve conditions for refugees in Greece,” IP/16/1447, 19 April 2016. Available at: [www.ifa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Daily-News-12-09-2016.pdf](http://www.ifa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Daily-News-12-09-2016.pdf)

12 “Emergency plan for hosting 100,000 refugees in Greece”, 1 March 2016, available in Greek at: <http://bit.ly/1nfdp6K>.

continue to face many of the same hazards and risks as adults. In addition, as children are intrinsically more vulnerable, they are at a higher risk<sup>13</sup> of succumbing to violence, physical and sexual abuse, labor and sexual exploitation, and to the extortionate services of smugglers, and the predatory exploitation of a flourishing human trafficking industry.

### 1.3 Research aims

This study evaluates the vulnerabilities of distress migrant children on the move in Greece by documenting their experience and focusing on instances of exploitation.<sup>14</sup> To the best of our knowledge, it is the first assessment of this kind in Greece. We hope that the findings of this report will inform effective policy briefs and intervention campaigns to combat migrant child abuse and sexual exploitation.

### 1.4 Research methodology

Data collection was conducted in late November 2016 in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as the islands of Lesbos and Chios, four key sites of refugee and migrant arrival and concomitant exposure to violence. A description of each geographical area is provided below.



**Islands of Lesbos and Chios:** These islands are the main entry points to Greece for the majority of migrants crossing the Aegean Sea. As a result of the March 2016 EU-Turkey statement to block flows of migrants leaving Turkey and attempting to reach Western Europe through

13 UNICEF, *Refugee and migrant Crisis- Child alert. Danger every step of the way.* June 2016.

14 Specific aims of this study can be found in the appendix.

Greece, the main reception centers on Lesbos and Chios turned into detention centers. Since April 2016, new arrivals in Lesbos and Chios have been detained while waiting for their asylum claims to be processed. At the moment, the centers are operating at nearly twice their intended capacity, struggling to provide necessary services and to contain tension and frustration among the detained migrants. Reports from these two islands highlight increasing instances of violence and unrest among the migrant population.<sup>15</sup>

**Athens, Thessaloniki, and surrounding areas:** These areas, the two most densely populated cities in Greece, and their suburbs, host the bulk of migrants who arrived prior to the EU-Turkey statement but subsequently became stranded in the region as a result of border closures and other European political developments. While adult migrants and accompanied children are commingled in open camps, unaccompanied children in the care of the Greek State, are kept separated in other, specialized but open facilities. Camp inhabitants are free to move outside the camps, but the size and anonymity of the cities expose migrant children to serious risks of violence and exploitation.

Our evaluation was performed in two phases and employed Rapid Assessment (RA) methodology, a strategy for gathering information about a particular issue within a short period of time. The RA method can yield cogent results when research is focused on small, clearly defined geographical areas.<sup>16</sup>

During Phase 1, we undertook a thorough literature review of the field of child violence and abuse during humanitarian crises. We also gathered all available information on the current situation in Greece, including documentation of violence, abuse and exploitation within migrant camps.

Stakeholders & Key Informants Interviewed: 24

Key Informants: 9



Psychologists: 6



Medical Doctors: 4



Gov. Officials: 3



Lawyers: 2



<sup>15</sup> See for example: International Business Time, Refugees In Greece Riot At Migrant Camp: Government Buildings Set On Fire With Turkey-European Union Deal Stalled, October 24th, 2016. Available at:<http://www.ibtimes.com/refugees-greece-riot-migrant-camp-government-buildings-set-fire-turkey-european-union-2436107>; RT America, Thousands evacuated as major fire engulfs Greek refugee camp, September 19th, 2016. Available at: <https://www.rt.com/news/359924-fire-refugee-camp-evacuated/>

<sup>16</sup> Bahattin Aksit, Nuray Karanci and Ayse Gunduz- Hosgor, Turkey Working Street Children in Three Metropolitan Cities: A Rapid Assessment, *Investigating the Worst Forms of Child Labor No. 7*, International Labour Organization International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), November 2001: Geneva.

In Phase 2, the research team visited the identified study areas and conducted in-depth interviews and field observations. Primary data were gathered from interviews with 24 key stakeholders, including government officials, psychologists, pediatricians, lawyers, and volunteers directly involved in the provision of humanitarian aid and other forms of protection to distress child migrants within the four target areas.

Secondary data were gathered via naturalistic observation<sup>17</sup> of two locations in Athens—Victoria Square and Pedion tou Areos—districts previously identified by key informants as hubs for sex trade.

For ethical considerations, given the ongoing trauma of distress migrants in the current circumstances, we did not conduct any interviews with migrant children or adults. The testimonies of children presented in this report stem from primary sources referenced throughout the report.

### 1.5 Research limitations

Given the scope of the present research, several limitations need to be addressed. As interviews with stakeholders working in all migrant facilities in Greece were beyond the scope of the present study, we recruited participants using the haphazard<sup>18</sup> and snowball<sup>19</sup> sampling methods. The first sampling method allowed us to directly approach the stakeholders involved in the humanitarian crisis, who work closely with migrant children in the studied areas and were available to share information. The second sampling method facilitated our getting in contact with important stakeholders linked to the initial sample we contacted.

In view of the limitations outlined above, this report does not provide an exhaustive analysis of the situation in all migrant facilities in Greece; therefore, our findings cannot be expected to hold for all Greek migrant sites and for time frames beyond those specified above. However, because the sites we document are the main hubs of migrant concentration, we are confident that our findings have relevance to the handling of the humanitarian situation as a whole. We hope our report proves useful in informing policy initiatives and intervention campaigns to eliminate child sexual exploitation and abuse of migrant children in Greece.

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17 Naturalistic observation is a “study method that involves covertly or overtly watching subjects’ behaviors in their natural environment, without intervention. Naturalistic observation is a common research method in behavioral sciences such as sociology and psychology. This technique is great because the experts can see the subject’s behavior in their own natural settings”. Gillian Fournier, Naturalistic observation, Available at: <http://psychcentral.com/encyclopedia/naturalistic-observation/>

18 Haphazard sampling is a sampling method that does not follow any systematic way of selecting participants.

19 “Snowball sampling is a non-probability (non-random) sampling method used when characteristics to be possessed by samples are rare and difficult to find. This sampling method involves primary data sources nominating another potential primary data source to be used in the research. Snowball sampling method is based on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects”. In Research Methodology, Snowball sampling, Available at: <http://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/snowball-sampling/>

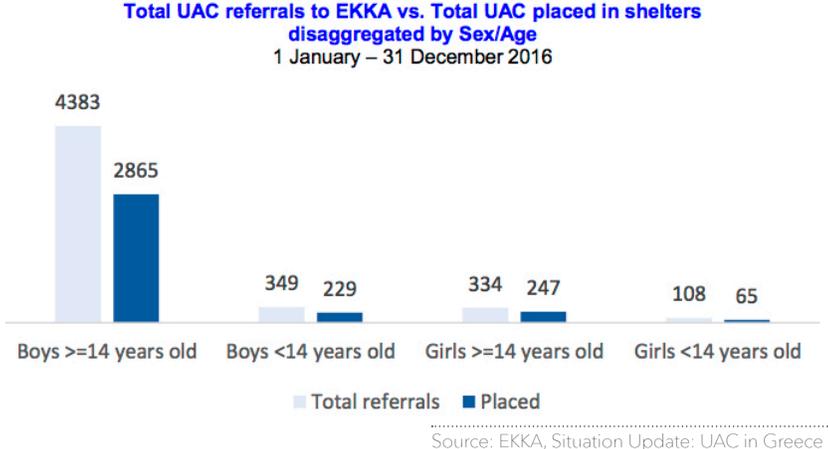
# Migrant child exploitation and Abuse

# 2

## 2.1 The profile of the child migrant population in Greece

Migrant children travel in a range of configurations. They may accompany family members, they may travel completely alone (so called “unaccompanied” child migrants) or they may be in the company of unrelated adults (so called “separated” child migrants). Some children embark on their migration accompanied but become unaccompanied or separated in the course of the journey. Since the beginning of the crisis, almost 480,000 children have crossed through Greece. In 2016, as a result of the EU-Turkey statement the number of children entering Greece dropped by almost 85 percent as compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, children still constituted a significant proportion (37 percent)<sup>20</sup> of the approximately 173,000 migrants entering that year.

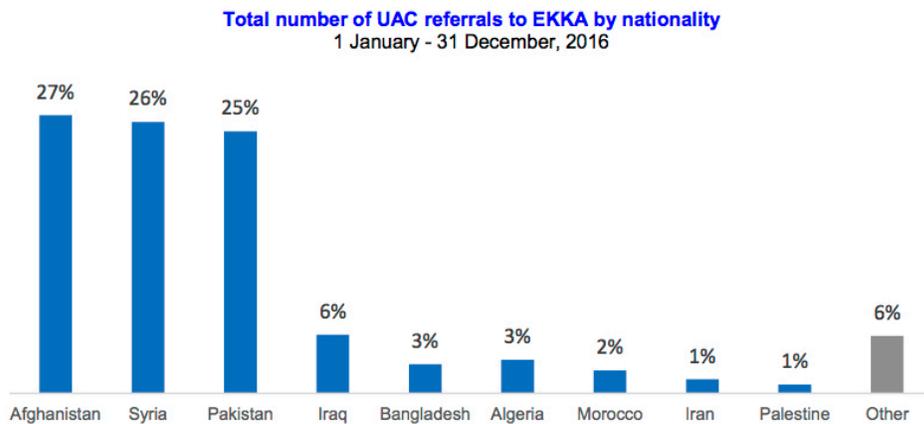
Although direct data on the number of unaccompanied children are not available, estimates can be made based on the referrals recorded by the Greek child protection agencies. Throughout 2016, 5,174 unaccompanied children were referred to the child protection system for services. Boys made up 91 percent of this population, 93 percent of them over 14 years of age. By contrast, girls tended to be younger, with only 76 percent registered as aged over 14.



<sup>20</sup> UNHCR, Bureau for Europe, Refugees and Migrants Sea Arrivals in Europe, Monthly data update: November 2016. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

The majority of recorded child migrant arrivals originate from three countries, Syria (27%), Afghanistan (27%), and Pakistan (24%). The remaining 22 percent come from Iraq, Bangladesh, Algeria, Morocco, Iran, Palestine, and several other countries.<sup>21</sup> Actual figures of unaccompanied child migrant arrivals are likely to be considerably higher than those reported, as many unaccompanied children present themselves as adults or as accompanied during registration in order to avoid delaying their onward journey.<sup>22</sup>

1,443 unaccompanied children currently in detention in closed facilities and police stations, and in open facilities among the adult population.



Source: EKKA, Situation Update: UAC in Greece

As of early of 2017, an estimated 21,300 children (among them 2,300 unaccompanied) remain in Greece awaiting completion of their asylum process. 1,443 of these children, waiting to be transferred to appropriate specialized facilities, are in state custody—detained in closed facilities, police stations, or open facilities commingled with adults.<sup>23</sup> Disaggregated data by age and gender are not fully available for accompanied children, the majority of whom are hosted with their families among adult populations.

## 2.2 Risk factors increasing vulnerability of migrant children

Specific risk factors increasing migrant children’s vulnerability were identified in the studied geographic areas. These factors directly and detrimentally impact the physical and psychological well-being of migrant children by disrupting their habitual protective environments and by generating challenging new family dynamics.<sup>24</sup>

21 EKKA, Situation Update: Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece, December 28th, 2016. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

22 See also Jacqueline Bhabha et al., “Children on the Move: An Urgent Human Rights and Child Protection Priority.” Boston: Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, 2016. Available at: <https://fxb.harvard.edu/reports/>

23 EKKA, Situation Update: Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece, December 28th, 2016. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

24 Save the Children, *Physical violence and other harmful practices in humanitarian situations. Minimum Standard for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: CPMS 8*. Available at: [http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/tdh\\_pvohp\\_formatted.pdf](http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/tdh_pvohp_formatted.pdf)

## Lack of capacity

After the closure of the borders of key countries along the Balkan route of migration (fYRoM, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Austria), the Greek authorities invested considerable effort into improving the long-term living conditions of migrants and, particularly, of migrant children. These efforts led to the creation of three distinct types of migrant facilities in Greece. First-line facilities, or detention centers, host post-EU-Turkey statement migrant arrivals and are located on the islands in the Eastern Aegean Sea. Furthermore, second-line facilities, or open camps, are located both on the islands and in mainland Greece and host pre-EU-Turkey statement migrant arrivals, as well as vulnerable migrant groups, such as single mothers with children and migrants with special needs. Finally, third-line facilities are community-based, specialized shelters charged with securing protection and well-being of unaccompanied children and very vulnerable migrants. These facilities are managed by a range of government and non-governmental parties and differ considerably in their ability to meet migrants' needs.<sup>25</sup>

“A 16-year-old boy from Afghanistan was detained in the detention center in the island of Lesbos for more than six months. He kept asking us why he is imprisoned and why he is not able to leave. He thought that he was a criminal and that’s why he was deprived of his liberty. How can you explain to him that he is detained because the government and the EU cannot find a suitable place for him to stay?”

– Volunteer in the camp

The circumstances faced by migrant children largely depend on the facility where they are housed. However, although third-line facilities are the most suitable and beneficial settings for migrant children, these facilities have a severely limited capacity. Consequently, many migrant children are held in prolonged detention or among a larger adult migrant population, in contexts that aggravate their exposure to perilous living conditions and violence.

## Risky living conditions

Since the onset of the humanitarian crisis, migrant living conditions have been characterized<sup>26</sup> as deficient and precarious, failing to meet minimum health and safety standards and subjecting migrants to inhumane treatment. In July 2016, the Greek Center for Disease Control

<sup>25</sup> See also Bhabha et al., “Children on the Move: An Urgent Human Rights and Child Protection Priority.”

<sup>26</sup> See also, Rita Carvalho and Francesca Pierigh, “Have you seen this camp?” ECRE & AIRE Centre, October 24th, 2016. Available at <https://onhold.exposure.co/have-you-seen-this-camp>; Bhabha et al., “Children on the Move: An Urgent Human Rights and Child Protection Priority.”

(KEELPNO)<sup>27</sup> and the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR)<sup>28</sup> corroborated these claims, deeming several locations unsafe and unfit to accommodate migrants. Although, since then, some areas have shown slight improvements, living conditions still remain largely unsuitable and dangerous, particularly for the most vulnerable migrants.

Due to space and resource shortages, as well as the absence of appropriate planning, migrant camps were created haphazardly in old army camps, car parks, derelict warehouses and factories, or other unused locations outside main cities. Most of these facilities continue to be inadequate as living spaces and do not offer separate accommodation or sanitary facilities for children and families. Migrants live in tents or prefabricated containers with minimal protection from the elements. “One of the kids told me that she was afraid of a dog barking outside their tent. I told her that she should not be worried, as she is protected inside the tent. ‘But how? It doesn’t even have a door. How can I be protected?’, she asked me. I didn’t know what to tell her,” notes one of our informants, a psychologist working in one of the camps.

Some camps offer protected living areas for families; however, since space is severely constrained, many families are forced to live in tents among the general adult population without any protection or separation. Inside the protected areas, families are forced to share their living space with unfamiliar families.

Other camps offer unaccompanied children separate living areas with more protective tents or structures. However, according to an NGO worker in Athens, “These places are open and accessible to everyone, especially during the night.” According to another NGO worker, “Some camps have ‘Safe Spaces’ for children that are supervised 24 hours a day by members of NGOs. However, it depends on the camp you are in. Some children are lucky and some are not.”

Structural factors, such as a lack of night lighting in camps, increase the risk of violence against women and children.<sup>29</sup> A psychologist working in one of the main Athens camps notes: “NGO workers tend to leave the camps at 6 pm, other officials leave at 9. They return at 7am, so at night no one is there to protect the refugees.” As reported by a volunteer: “In some camps, NGO workers do night shifts, but their numbers are dwarfed by the size of the camp population. It is really scary to be inside the camps without lights during the night. I can’t even imagine how children feel.”<sup>30</sup>

Exposure to the elements and seasonal weather aggravate these risky living conditions.

27 See also “Health agency says migrant centers must be closed,” July 26th, 2016. Available at: <http://www.ekathimerini.com/210759/article/ekathimerini/news/health-agency-says-migrant-centers-must-be-closed>

28 Tania Karas, “UNHCR flags concerns over refugee sites in northern Greece,” UNHCR, May 27th, 2016. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/57484e9f0.html>

29 See also H. Emmanouilidou, et al., “Conditions in refugee camps: the case of Schisto,” Network for Children’s Rights, January, 2017.

30 Testimony of a UAC to the CPU Team of the Network for Children’s Rights. H. Emmanouilidou, et al., “Conditions in refugee camps: the case of Schisto.”

“No one guards the camp. Even the fence has holes in it and anyone can go in and out through them including dangerous individuals who don’t live here and whose aim is to sell drugs or do other bad things.”

-UAC<sup>30</sup>

One of the psychologists working in a camp in Northern Greece sharply criticizes the situation by sharing the following example: “We try to support children psychologically as part of the child protection service, but often the children laugh at us. They say, ‘Look at us. We wear sandals in the middle of winter. We are cold. Give us clothes first.’ How can you support them psychologically when they are extremely cold?” Poorly insulated shelters force many migrants to light gas stoves inside tents or build make-shift fires to keep themselves warm, jeopardizing their own and others’ safety in the camp.<sup>31</sup>

According to the IRC Regional Representative, “No one should have to endure the harsh cold of winter in an unheated camp or an overcrowded facility anywhere in Europe. The failure to provide appropriate accommodation and basic assistance for this relatively small caseload is a sad example for the rest of the world. EU leaders should ensure that no refugees remain in substandard conditions this winter.”<sup>32</sup>



Source: Lesvosnews.net

However, despite recent efforts to improve living conditions and to provide fundamental services, camps continue to struggle to meet migrants’ basic needs. In combination with poor living conditions, limited access to healthcare has resulted in an increase in cases of Hepatitis A inside the camps. Other worrying health issues include respiratory and ear infections, as well as the spread of infectious diseases, such as chicken pox. According to a pediatrician working in a camp in northern Greece, “When it rains, the whole place turns into a mud pool where the kids play. Though we tell them to wash their hands

“We can’t sleep at night because it is too loud. We have no home here and no door. I don’t walk around at night because it is too dark and I am afraid.. [...] Where are we?”

-55-year-old Syrian mother<sup>33</sup>

31 A fire in the detention center of Lesvos caused by an “explosion of a gas stove inside a tent caused the death of a refugee minor, while it destroyed part of the camp. See also Philip Chrysopoulos, Explosion at Lesvos Refugee Camp Causes Large Fire; 2 Dead,” Greek Reporter, November 25th, 2016. Available at: <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2016/11/25/explosion-at-moria-refugee-camp-causes-large-fire-2-dead/>

32 IRC, “Press release: Europe is failing refugees in Greece and the Balkans this winter; immediate action needed,” November 22nd, 2016. Available at: <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-europe-failing-refugees-greece-and-balkans-winter-immediate-action-needed>

33 Interview conducted by T. Karas, UNHCR, “UNHCR flags concerns over refugee sites in northern Greece.”

frequently and to follow sanitation instructions, in practice, there is no control. When one child gets sick, everyone gets sick, because there is no space for quarantine and proper treatment. We vaccinated all the children under 12 against Hepatitis A, but it is financially impossible to vaccinate everyone.”

Prolonged exposure to these living conditions drives many migrants awaiting legal decisions on their claims to pursue their journeys. As mentioned by a psychologist working in a camp in mainland Greece, “We know that they are leaving. They come to the doctors and request a final check-up, saying that during the night they will leave to cross the borders. We tell them about the risks, but they want to try. They say that, if they try, they will have a chance; if they stay here, they will have to face this.”

### Delays in the asylum and relocation process

Between January 2015 and September 2016, over 664,500 migrant children claimed asylum in Europe, a third of all asylum claims made in Europe during the period.<sup>35</sup> Within the first 10 months of 2016,<sup>36</sup> asylum claims in Greece soared to 36,750, with 10,410 claims registered by children.<sup>37</sup> Unprepared for this volume of cases, the Greek asylum system was quickly overwhelmed, resulting in widespread processing delays. Migrants, including children, now have to wait for extended periods of time for their asylum claims to be registered, let alone processed. Increased investments in administrative and human resources in the Greek asylum service have proved to be largely ineffective in decreasing processing delays. The reluctance of other EU member states to accept registered refugees under the intra EU relocation scheme contributes to inhibit progress.

As of the end of December 2016, only 2,413 migrant children, or 11% of those currently stranded in Greece, were successfully relocated to other European countries. 191 of these were unaccompanied<sup>38</sup>, a tiny proportion of the 160,000 relocation slots promised<sup>39</sup> and a fraction of those eligible. What these numbers underscore is the reluctance of many European countries to provide refugee children with a safe and permanent home,<sup>40</sup>

“The system doesn’t work. At this rate, they’ll need 10 years to get it finished. But if we’re here for another month, we’ll be in a mental asylum.”

-30-year-old Syrian male.<sup>34</sup>

34 Interview conducted by Patrick Kingsley, “ ‘Prisoners of Europe’: the everyday humiliation of refugees stuck in Greece,” *The Guardian*, September 6th, 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/06/prisoners-of-europe-the-everyday-humiliation-of-refugees-stuck-in-greece-migration>

35 UNICEF, *Child asylum seekers in Europe, situation in figures*. November 1st, 2016, Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Infograph\\_Child\\_Relocation\\_and\\_Asylum\\_02\\_11\\_16\\_\(002\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Infograph_Child_Relocation_and_Asylum_02_11_16_(002).pdf)

36 Ministry of Migration, Asylum service, Statistics of asylum claims for the period 1.1.2016-31.10.2016. Available at: [http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Greek-Asylum-Service-statistical-data-October2016\\_gr.pdf](http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Greek-Asylum-Service-statistical-data-October2016_gr.pdf)

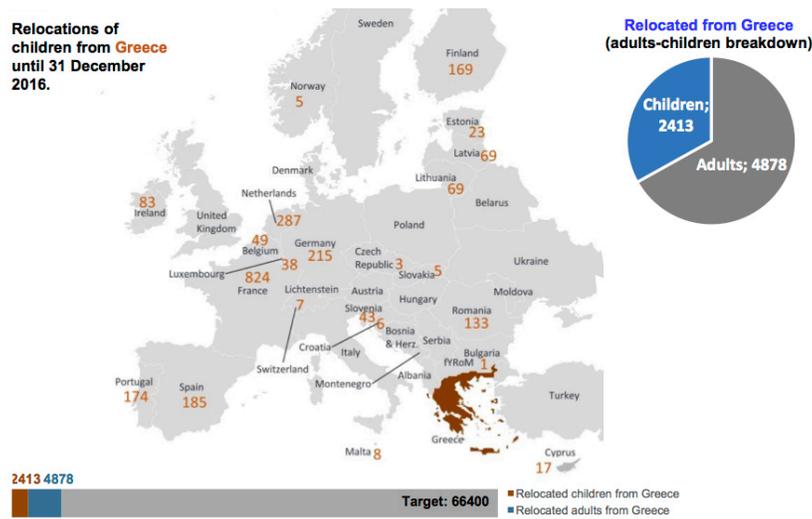
37 Ibid.

38 UNICEF, Refugee and migrant children in Greece, December 31st, 2016. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

39 European Commission, *European Solidarity: A refugee relocation system*. Available at: [http://www.ionnederland.nl/images/MTRI/2\\_eu\\_solidarity\\_a\\_refugee\\_relocation\\_system\\_en.pdf](http://www.ionnederland.nl/images/MTRI/2_eu_solidarity_a_refugee_relocation_system_en.pdf)

40 UNICEF, *Refugee and migrant crisis in Europe: Humanitarian situation report #17*. November, 14th, 2016. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

a situation that diminishes the hopes of those waiting in Greece to be relocated.



Source: UNICEF, Refugee and Migrant Children

In early December 2016, citing significant progress in “...putting in place the essential institutional and legal structures for a properly functioning asylum system,”<sup>41</sup> the European Commission decided to reenact the Dublin Regulation III (inoperative in Greece since 2011), with effect from March 2017. Under the Dublin Regulation, the first EU country reached by an asylum seeker will generally<sup>42</sup> be responsible for processing his/her asylum claim, as well as for accepting the return of those asylum seekers who leave the country without completing the legal asylum process. As a result, Greece, the first EU country for the majority of migrants entering Europe, now has to face yet more severe pressure, and to experience additional—potentially crippling—strains on its asylum system.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.3 Exposure to violence

The forced cohabitation of hundreds of migrants of different cultural backgrounds, genders, and ages in inhumane conditions while facing an uncertain future and potential deportation has predictably generated anger, frustration, and hostility—sentiments that often spill over into acts of violence. Because of inadequate protective systems, women and children, who make up almost a half of the migrant population, face a particularly high risk of such violence.

#### Physical violence

Fights among adult migrants are commonplace, especially in the most overcrowded camps.

41 Human Rights Watch, “EU: Returns to Greece put refugees at risk,” Athens, Greece, December 10th, 2016. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/10/eu-returns-greece-put-refugees-risk>

42 Entrants who have a preexisting visa from an EU member state are the responsibility of that state, irrespective of the country of first entry.

43 ECRE & the AIRE Centre, With Greece: Recommendations for refugee protection.

Volunteers working in these camps report violent outbreaks, deriving from ethnic stereotypes and hostilities, among different nationalities and different religious groups. Several other factors also trigger incidents of violence or rioting. These include frustration with the quality or quantity of food and the method of its distribution, harsh living conditions, physical control over a part of the camp by a certain group of migrants, and acute feelings of despair and uncertainty. Asylum services themselves have occasionally become targets of violence. During these outbreaks, adults attack each other, start fires, and destroy tents and prefabricated containers, indiscriminately jeopardizing the lives of other migrants.

Young children and adolescents witness these acts of violence or, when caught in the crossfire, become its victims; some imitate violent acts themselves by participating in the riots. “During a riot, the teenagers are very edgy and irritable. They throw rocks at each other; they grab whatever is available around them, such as pieces of wood, and attack each other. It is very difficult to calm them down,” notes a psychologist working in a camp in Northern Greece. Several incidents in which children in the camps have been injured as a result of physical violence have also been documented.<sup>44</sup>

These incidents of violence have a severe psychological impact on children, reviving in them adverse experiences of violence from their past. “During these riots, younger children are in panic. Most of the time, they do not understand the reasons for the violence and they connect the act with memories of war and persecution in their countries and of the journey with the smugglers where they endured a lot of violence or saw other people experiencing physical violence. This has an immediate impact on their physical and mental health,” reports a psychologist working in one of the camps.

“During these riots, younger children are in panic...they connect the act with memories of war and persecution in their countries and of the journey with the smugglers...”

-Psychologist working in a camp

“Violent episodes were triggered when migrants learned that their asylum claims had been rejected. Their despair led many immigrants to try and hurt themselves; some hit their heads against the walls or tried to rip their hair out or cut their veins. They exhibit violent behavior towards their children also by pushing them and kicking them when they’re on the floor.”

-President of the Association of Greek Judges and Public Prosecutors for Democracy and Liberties (EEDD) <sup>45</sup>

While accompanied children, traveling under the protection of caregivers, may appear to be at a lower risk for becoming victims of violence in the camps, the hardships created

44 See also: Agencia EFE, “Clashes at refugee camp on Greek island of Lesbos leave 7 injured,” Athens, Greece, September 5th, 2016. Available at: <http://www.efe.com/efe/english/portada/clashes-at-refugee-camp-on-greek-island-of-lesbos-leave-7-injured/50000260-3031485>

45 See also EEDA (NCHR), “Οι συνθήκες διαβίωσης στα κέντρα υποδοχής και φιλοξενίας μεταναστών και προσφύγων,” December, 2016. Translated from Greek (page 17). Available at: [http://www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/apofaseis/prosfugesmetanastes/kentra\\_filoxenias\\_autopsia.pdf](http://www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/apofaseis/prosfugesmetanastes/kentra_filoxenias_autopsia.pdf)

by the deplorable living conditions can increase their levels of risk.<sup>46</sup> A volunteer working in a camp in Athens noted that “While I’m working in the camp, I see young children playing alone far away from their tents or containers, without any adult supervising them. This is very risky, because you never know when a riot will start or if someone will approach the kids for other [sexual] purposes. Especially now when everyone knows that these incidents are commonplace in the camps, children should be monitored by their parents for their own safety.” Instead, children are frequently left unsupervised or may even be mistreated by parents struggling with their own traumas of loss, despair, and uncertainty.<sup>47</sup> “A mother had just received a negative answer from the asylum service and she became aggressive to her kids. The kids started crying, but she left, leaving the kids crying. She needs support, but children require attention and protection,” explains a psychologist working in a camp.

“A father, whose wife and one of their daughters reside in another EU country, had become addicted to drugs and began to behave aggressively towards his under-age son. Following the intervention of the networks for Children’s rights, the Prosecutor for Minors removed the boy from the camp and placed him in a hostel for children for his protection”

–Network for Children’s Rights<sup>48</sup>

During such humanitarian emergencies, habitual protective patterns break down and new family dynamics emerge, exacerbating preexisting factors that contribute to violence.<sup>49</sup> As in the incident with a mother’s aggression towards her children just cited, adults and caregivers under pressure may themselves ignore the needs of their children or become unable to meet them, a situation that can result in elevated levels of abuse.<sup>50</sup> “We often see parents beating or slapping their children. We try to explain to them that this behavior is not acceptable in this society, but we see this every day. We believe that there are many cases of abuse that we don’t know about,” reports a psychologist working in a camp. Even though the use of corporal punishment is accepted in many countries, severe stress can lead parents to push it to an extreme, without appropriate parental awareness of the devastating potential impact of on their children.

46 ECPAT, *Protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual violence in disaster and emergency situations*, March 2006, Ratchathewi, Bangkok: ECPAT International.

47 See also ΕΕΔΑ (NCHR), “Οι συνθήκες διαβίωσης στα κέντρα υποδοχής και φιλοξενίας μεταναστών και προσφύγων,” December, 2016. Available at: [http://www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/apofaseis/prosfuges\\_metanastes/kentra\\_filoxenias\\_autopsia.pdf](http://www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/apofaseis/prosfuges_metanastes/kentra_filoxenias_autopsia.pdf)

48 H. Emmanouilidou, et al., “Conditions in refugee camps: the case of Schisto.” p9.

49 Save the Children. *Physical violence and other harmful practices in humanitarian situations. Minimum standard for child protection in humanitarian action: CPMS 8.*

50 ECPAT, *Protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual violence in disaster and emergency situations.*

## Sexual violence

Weak or non-existent protective and legal structures inside camps exacerbate the risk of violence among migrants. Children's inherent vulnerability and dependency on others, places them at a heightened risk for sexual violence. Cases of sexual assault of children have indeed been documented in many camps around Greece; in addition, many international actors and NGOs, such as UNHCR,<sup>51</sup> the International Federation of Red Cross, Red Crescent Societies, and Médecins Sans Frontières, point to a rise in allegations of sexual assault against children.<sup>52</sup> Even though the prevalence of the phenomenon is difficult to quantify, our informants indicate that, though clearly widespread, the phenomenon remains under-reported, as victims are afraid to come forward. "We suspect that sexual violence exists, but we get to know about a case only when it results in a serious injury and when the victim comes to the doctor for medical care. Otherwise, they never talk, as they are afraid of reprisals," notes a doctor working in a camp.

"We suspect that sexual violence exists, but we get to know about a case only when it results in a serious injury..."

-Research participant

According to the informants, most offenders are male adults who prey on unsuspecting migrant children and take advantage of those without proper adult supervision. They either act independently or as a part of criminal gangs active inside the camps. "The parents are still in disbelief over what happened. A man from one of the 'mafia' groups asked their seven-year-old daughter into their tent to play games on his phone and then zipped up the tent. She came back with marks on her arms and neck. Later, the girl described how she was sexually abused."<sup>53</sup> Many times children do not comprehend the sexual nature of their offender's behaviors and intentions and are not able to react,<sup>54</sup> which makes them even more vulnerable to offenders.

Unaccompanied children are at a heightened risk, as they can be victimized by adults and, for those held in detention facilities, by other unaccompanied children.<sup>55</sup> The co-existence of dozens of children of various ages from different cultures and ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds creates significant power differentials. Research on sexual violence has shown that violence is a commonly used method to assert power and dominance in a social setting.<sup>56</sup> According to one of the volunteers working in a camp, "Violence is generated among children of different ethnicities or different social classes

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51 The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, acknowledged the phenomenon, stating that "Unaccompanied minors are extremely exposed to exploitation of many kinds and in particular sexual exploitation. There is a lot of survival sex that is happening, there is sexual harassment and sexual abuse. I think that this is something we cannot tolerate, in particular in the European Union."

52 Mark Townsend, "Sexual assaults on children at Greek refugee camps," *The Guardian*, August 13th, 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/13/child-refugees-sexually-assaulted-at-official-greek-camps>

53 Ibid.

54 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines on gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings: Focusing on prevention of and response to sexual violence in emergencies*, September, 2005, Geneva: Inter-agency Standing Committee.

55 One case of sexual assault of a minor by minors has already been documented by the police, while the participants of the study talked about the increased violence among minors.

56 Jane Warburton, "Preventing the sexual exploitation of children: A mapping of practice and interventions," *ECPAT International Journal*, 11, (2016): 4-24

within the same ethnicity. It is exactly what we see in adult populations.” A doctor from Médecins Sans Frontières further notes, “It’s really hard for the unaccompanied children—16- and 17-year-olds—to survive. It’s the survival of the fittest in there [...]”<sup>57</sup>

Even though only few cases of sexual violence have been reported in the camps, considering the deplorable living conditions and vulnerability of the children, it is highly likely that many more incidents have occurred. The most common reasons for not reporting this kind of violence are fear of re-victimization and reprisals. A camp psychologist reports: “When a case like this is reported to us, it takes some time before the victim is transferred to a safer place and the offender is prosecuted. They do not want to report it, because they are afraid that the offender will take revenge on them. They also do not believe that the police can help them.” As a result, some children feel immense shame and isolate themselves, others blame themselves for their victimization. “They do not want to talk about this. Sometimes, we suspect that something has happened and we try to help them, but they isolate themselves even more,” notes another psychologist working in a camp.

In cases when a child is accompanied, there may be a range of reactions from the family and community. “We had a case of a 4-year-old girl who was raped. The mother did whatever was possible to report it. She was devastated and enraged,” says a psychologist working in the camps in Athens. According to another psychologist, “In one of the camps, an adult married to a child raped another female child. When the incident was reported, the refugee community reacted extremely violently against the offender. He was beaten so badly and we [NGOs] were afraid for the life of his wife, as we didn’t have time to protect her.” However, at other times, the community remains uninvolved because of fear of reprisals by the criminal gangs or because of the stigma and blame associated with this type of violence. “Especially in the camps where criminal gangs thrive, people do not want to talk, even though they know who the offender is, because they are afraid that, at night, their kids can become the next victims. This is why, in many cases, it is difficult to identify the offenders,” indicates a stakeholder working with children.

Having endured the risks of sexual violence or having experienced sexual violence during their journey, migrant children suffer from the fear of sexual abuse in a place that should have guaranteed them safety and protection. This fear generates mistrust in the protection systems and legal paths to migration and may eventually force migrants to seek new and dangerous paths to a safer destination.<sup>58</sup>

“It’s really hard for the unaccompanied children...to survive. It’s the survival of the fittest in there[..]”

-MSF Doctor <sup>57</sup>

“We had a case of a 4-year-old girl who was raped. The mother did whatever was possible to report it. She was devastated and enraged.”

-Psychologist working in a camp

<sup>57</sup> Anna Chiara Nava of Médecins Sans Frontières, interview conducted by Mark Townsend in “Sexual assaults on children at Greek refugee camps.”

<sup>58</sup> UNICEF, Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe, The right of the child to family reunification, May 2016. Available at: [data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=1169](https://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=1169)

## Child marriage

Displacement and the harsh circumstances of life in refugee camps increase migrant girls' vulnerability to child marriage. The breakdown of supportive social networks and the dramatically increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation are among major factors that aggravate this vulnerability.<sup>59</sup> Previous research on child marriage in Syrian refugee communities in Jordan shows a rapid increase in the number of registered marriages for girls under the age of 18. Between 2011 and 2014, the percentage of child marriages nearly tripled, from 12 percent to almost 32 percent.<sup>60</sup> In Greece, convincing evidence of this phenomenon has not yet been documented. However, many doctors have raised concerns about its emergence.

“A mother asked me to treat her daughter’s acne as in one week she was planning to engage her. The girl was no more than 15. When I told her about child marriage and that it is illegal here, she told me that she was aware and that she will just engage her and not marry her. However, she didn’t convince me.”

–Pediatrician working in a camp

Several interviewees mentioned that they had noticed many migrant men married to girls under 18 y. o. In December 2016, the Greek Minister of Migration spoke about the phenomenon of “unaccompanied brides,” noting that 70 cases of minor girls married to adult migrants had been documented among the migrant population in the Greek camps.<sup>61</sup> Previous research indicates that male adults resort to marriage to facilitate their entrance into Jordan,<sup>62</sup> partly driven by their belief that family units can more easily secure asylum or receive better treatment. Moreover, the belief that marriage can provide a greater security for girls in an insecure environment may make many families, especially single mothers traveling with their children, more inclined to marry off their daughters at a young age.<sup>63</sup> This feeling of urgency and the focus on trying to protect their daughters from sexual violence obscure the risks that girls may face inside their new family unit, at the hands of an adult male. “There was a very young girl staying with an older man and she told me that he was her uncle. However, she was very scared and not comfortable talking about this family relationship. I suspected child marriage, but I couldn’t prove it, as she didn’t want to talk,” reports a pediatrician.

“There was a very young girl staying with an older man and she told me that he was her uncle...she was very scared...I suspected child marriage, but I couldn’t prove it...”

–Pediatrician working a camp

59 Girls Not Brides: The global partnership to end child marriage, “Child marriage in humanitarian crises,” June 2016, Available at: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Child-marriage-and-humanitarian-crisis-June-2016.pdf>

60 UNICEF, *A study on early marriage in Jordan*, 2014. Available at : [https://www.unicef.org/mena/UNICEFJordan\\_Early\\_MarriageStudy2014\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/mena/UNICEFJordan_Early_MarriageStudy2014(1).pdf)

61 “Migration: The new phenomenon of ‘unaccompanied brides’ that was analyzed by the Mouzala.” December 28th, 2016. Available at <http://www.kathimerini.gr/889628/article/epikairothta/ellada/metanasteytiko-to-neo-fainomeno-asynodeytes-nyfes-poy-anelyse-o-moyzalas>

62 UNICEF, *A study on early marriage in Jordan*, 2014.

63 Ibid.

Since Greece is still considered a transit country for all these migrants and child marriage is illegal, it is expected that any migrant child marriage will not be registered before the couple reach their final destination and resettle. “They will never admit that they intend to marry off their children, but, if you observe their everyday life, you will see that there is a lot of movement between the tents,” notes a pediatrician.

## Psychological violence

Physical and sexual violence are often accompanied by psychological violence. Many participants noted that migrant children routinely fall victim to the influence of migrants engaged in criminal activities and gangs. “They [mafia gangs] take humiliating photos of children and then threaten the children with sending the photos to their families back home. This could be even worse than a violent act itself. Even if children survive physical or sexual abuse at their hands, the prospect of having their families know about this is even more devastating,” notes a research participant working in a camp. Another psychologist highlights the fact that blackmail is very common inside the camps, affecting both adult and child migrant populations. “They try to accept the situation and hide it from their families and then someone threatens to humiliate them back home, in one or another way. How can they overcome this threat? They have to obey them [the perpetrators] to reduce the risk of blackmail. But this never stops. It is a vicious cycle.” This kind of violence damages the already fragile mental health of children, turning them into easy prey for further physical and sexual violence and exploitation.

Children gravitate towards dangerous and illegal activities to pay smugglers, including theft, drug dealing, and transactional sex.

## 2.4 Commercial sexual exploitation of children

Delays and inefficiencies in the legal paths to migration that continue to force migrants to live in risky and untenable conditions for extended periods of time have led to an increase in the demand for smugglers to facilitate passage to other countries. In 2015, over 90 percent of all migrants reaching the EU used the services of the smuggling network. These services generated an estimated 5-6 billion dollars for the smuggling industry.<sup>64</sup> Europol expects this number to grow, as, according to the available evidence, smugglers have nearly tripled their fees.<sup>65</sup> Living in limbo for periods longer than eight months and having drained all their financial resources, migrants start seeking alternative ways—whether legal<sup>66</sup> or illegal—to earn money either to survive or to pay smugglers for their onward journeys. Given the very limited income generating options available to them, children gravitate towards dangerous and illegal activities to pay smugglers, including theft, drug dealing, and transactional sex.

64 *Migrant Smuggling Networks, Executive Summary*, Joint Europol-Interpol report, May 2016. Available at: <https://emnbelgium.be/publication/migrant-smuggling-networks-joint-europol-interpol-report>

65 “Latest Trends in Migrant Smuggling: Nearly 7000 Suspected Smugglers Reported, Increased Exploitation, Higher Prices.” *Europol*, 27 June 2016. Available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/latest-trends-in-migrant-smuggling-nearly-7000-suspected-smugglers-reported-increased-exploitation-higher-prices>

66 After the first registration, adult migrants receive work permission and are eligible to work legally in Greece.

Transactional sex is described as “a commoditized relationship in which sexual acts are exchanged for goods, cash, or benefits, often linked to economic survival, educational achievement, enhancing one’s economic opportunities, or boosting one’s social status”. When transactional sex involves an exchange of sexual activities for basic needs, food, clothing, or shelter, it is referred to as survival sex.<sup>67</sup> Transactional child sex is considered to be one of the worst manifestations of abuse in a society.<sup>68</sup> From the perspective of international law, all children engaged in transactional sex (or child prostitution),<sup>69</sup> whether by consent or not, are victims of sexual exploitation, as they are not considered legally capable of providing genuine consent.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the involvement of children in sexual acts is always evidence of a failure of child protection systems.<sup>71</sup> In situations like those of migrant children in Greece, the risks of child commercial sexual exploitation are considerable.

### Prevalence of the phenomenon and common places of sexual exploitation

Though the current extent of child sexual exploitation in Greece is difficult to ascertain, in part because of its clandestine and illegal nature, key informants in our study indicated that it was widespread in both rural and urban settings. Child migrants themselves communicated to service providers in the island camps that they knew of networks explicitly engaged in facilitating the participation of migrant children in the sex industry.

“In Athens, you can see it happening. In smaller places, you suspect it. I have escorted unaccompanied children under the age of 15 to the park [as a recreational activity outside the camp] and I have seen older people approaching children in a suspicious way. Older children [over 15 years old] can leave the center without escorts. I don’t want to think what can happen to these children who walk around the city without protection or escorts,” notes an island camp worker. According to another worker, “You don’t have to see it. You know that it exists. As long as children walk around the city alone, without protection, and given the current circumstances, they run the risk of being victimized at any moment. If you are close to them, they tell you that they have ways to find money and continue their journey. They never state clearly what these methods are, but they imply it.”

In Athens, the sexual exploitation of refugee children has been witnessed by locals and documented through direct testimonies of migrant children. In an interview with a

“I never thought I’d have to do something like this. When the money ran out, I had to learn to do this.[..]. It was the first time I do this, I had no experience.”

-Ali, aged 17<sup>72</sup>

67 Susanna Greijer & Jaap Doek, *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*, Luxembourg: ECPAT International. June 2016, p. 32. Available at: <http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/terminologyguidelines.pdf>

68 Natalie Thorburn & Irene de Haan, “Children and survival sex: A social work agenda,” *Aotearoa New Zealand Social work*, (2014): 14-21.

69 Though the term “child prostitution” is widely used to describe this phenomenon, its use should be avoided as it may imply complicity on behalf of the child and therefore fail to recognize his or her victimization within this phenomenon. Chris Goddard, “The rapists’ camouflage: ‘Child prostitution,’” *Child Abuse Review*, 14, (2005): 275-291.

70 United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, supra 1, Article 34 and OPSC, supra 2, Article 2.

71 Natalie Thorburn and Irene de Haan, “Children and survival sex: A social work agenda.”

migrant child victim of the sex trade shared his story with a journalist: “I never thought I’d have to do something like this. When the money ran out, I had to learn to do this [...]. It was the first time I did this, I had no experience.”<sup>72</sup>

Victoria Square, one of Athens’ main squares, and Pedion tou Areos, the largest public park in Athens, are two areas well-known for the sexual exploitation of migrant children. Due to its proximity to what used to be the main departure area for buses traveling towards the northern borders of Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYRoM), Victoria Square has been an epicenter of migrant smuggling during this humanitarian crisis. Pedion tou Areos, or “Field of Ares,” is a large, 65 acre, public park where drug trafficking and other illegal activities have thrived for years. “There is a reason why these two places have been chosen. They have been key centers for the drug and sex trade for years now; the new situation has aggravated an already worrying phenomenon. The only difference is the age of the people involved. Before, you wouldn’t see children. Now you do,” noted one of our key informants, a social worker in the area. The size of the park and its dense foliage allow the sex trade to flourish undisturbed, while its reputation dissuades innocent Athenians from entering or intervening.

Aerial photograph showing a section of Pedion tou Areos



Source: Vasilis Triantafyllou, 360cities.net

### **Demographics of the migrant children involved and reasons for victimization**

Research participants working with this population noted that the children involved in the sex trade are typically young males. To avoid being forced into the child protection system, they claim to be over 18, but many are likely to be younger.<sup>73</sup> According to a social worker working in the area, Afghanis make up the largest subset, while a smaller number of the children come

<sup>72</sup> Ali, 17, Afghanistan. Interview conducted by Daniel Howden, “Refugees Deeply, Refugees caught up in child prostitution in Athens,” July, 14th, 2016. Available at: <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2016/07/14/refugees-caught-up-in-child-prostitution-in-athens>

<sup>73</sup> See also Bhabha et al., “Children on the Move: An Urgent Human Rights and Child Protection Priority.”

from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Bangladesh. According to our informants, every migrant child, regardless of his or her origin, faces the risk of becoming a victim of the sex trade. “Child victims stay in the camps around Athens or in the shelters. They come to the square or the park for the trade and then they return to the shelter. There are buses and trains that facilitate the commute. Every single child has access to these areas,” notes one research participant.

According to our respondents, the main cause of child migrant sexual exploitation is the children’s lack of financial resources. Another contributory factor is the failure of the child protection and welfare system to act as a safety net for these children. An additional precipitating cause is the prolonged exposure to inhumane living conditions and a protracted and overly burdensome path to legal status. Migrant children who find themselves trapped in oppressive and apparently endless temporary situations become desperate for exit strategies. Securing the funding to pay smugglers presents itself as a promising way to address this otherwise untenable situation. Many “decide to leave and pursue what they believe is better for themselves,” said a psychologist we interviewed. According to another research participant, “They talk to friends who arrived and made it to other countries. They do not really care about the travel conditions or risks their friends endured. They just want to leave.” As smugglers increase prices<sup>74</sup> and migrants run out of financial resources, many are easily lured into the sex trade, believing it to be their only hope.<sup>75</sup> As one of the children notes, “I told myself, ‘Look at yourself—you came to Europe, what was your aim?’ I am not doing this because I like it. If I wanted to do something I like, I would date a girl. [But] because I don’t have the money, I don’t have a choice.”<sup>76</sup>

However, as time passes, “you see children who get engaged in the sex trade without the hope of collecting enough money to leave Greece, but simply to survive. The sexual exploitation leads them to the drug trade. This is a very important qualitative change of scope,” says a social worker closely monitoring migrant children. A migrant child concurs: “I wanted to make progress, I wanted a future,” he says. “With the drugs [...] and what I’m doing [transactional sex], I’m not going anywhere. My mind is destroyed.”<sup>77</sup>

### Mechanisms of trade and recruitment

Technology plays a crucial role in the recruitment of migrant children into the sex trade. “You are not able to control their communication through phones. They have ‘friends’ who inform them that in Athens they can sell sex and get money. They are focused on

“I told myself, ‘Look at yourself – you came to Europe, what was your aim?’ I am not doing this because I like it. If I wanted to do something I like, I would date a girl. [But] because I don’t have the money, I don’t have a choice.”  
-Migrant child <sup>76</sup>

“I wanted to make progress, I wanted a future,” he said.  
“With the drugs ... and what I’m doing [transactional sex], I’m not going anywhere. My mind is destroyed.”  
-Ali, 17 <sup>77</sup>

74 “Latest Trends in Migrant Smuggling: Nearly 7000 Suspected Smugglers Reported, Increased Exploitation, Higher Prices.” *Europol*, 27 June 2016.

75 Caplan, G. M. “The facts of life about teenage prostitution,” *Crime and Delinquency*, 1 (1984): 69-74.

76 Quoted in Arwa Damon, Barbara Arvanitidis, and Clayton Nagel, “The teenage refugees selling sex on Athens streets,” *The CNN freedom project*, 30 November 2016. Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/29/europe/refugees-prostitution-teenagers-athens-greece/>

77 Ali, 17, Afghanistan. Interview conducted by Daniel Howden, “Refugees Deeply, Refugees caught up in child prostitution in Athens.”

what they think they need and ignore the consequences. They only see going to Athens and making money,” reports a research participant working on the islands. Peer influence is also an important factor in recruitment. “If one of the kids does it and gets some money, then he will tell the others. They may not get involved immediately, but they know what to do, when they need to,” says another informant.

According to an informant social worker, fellow migrants act as intermediaries between children and migrant child sex purchasers, facilitating their transaction: “A migrant in the park had told me ‘children are fresh meat.’ He speaks the language, he knows the potential customers, he can be the middle person.”

Another research participant who works closely with unaccompanied children highlights the role of manipulation as a mechanism of recruitment: “One of the children reported that he was told he could get more than 100 euros by being involved in the sex trade. This is not true. The prices are extremely low. However, all these ‘friends’ manipulate children by promising a fake reality.”

### **Purchasers, the prices, and ways of approach**

According to our key informants, the purchasers of migrant child sex are generally males over the age of 35, with the majority being older men. As noted by one of our informants, “Elderly men offer food and shelter to children. They are willing to satisfy the children’s basic needs in exchange for sexual services, but the children want money.”

When a purchaser approaches a child, a discussion regarding price and location of the “exchange” ensues. According to our informants who had received first-hand accounts of these interactions from migrant children, the prices are negotiable, but rarely exceed 15 euros per exchange.<sup>78</sup> At these rates, collecting the amount necessary to pay smugglers quickly becomes unrealistic. One child said he had “given up the hope of finding a way out of Greece, but other boys are still trying to collect the money to leave.”<sup>79</sup>

As to location, according to our informants, some purchasers of migrant child sex ask children to accompany them to their homes or meet at a hotel, while others insist on having sex in the park. An important facilitating factor seems to be the indifference of the local community witnessing these occurrences. As one of our research participants notes, “The neighbors see these activities in Victoria Square every day. But they very rarely react by saying something to the exploiters and, as a result, nothing changes.”

“A migrant in the park had told me ‘children are fresh meat.’ He speaks the language, he knows the potential clients, he can be the middle person.”

-Social worker

“The neighbors see these activities in Victoria Square every day. But they very rarely react...”

-Research participant

78 See also: Daniel Howden, “Refugees caught up in child prostitution in Athens.”

79 Ali, 17, Afghanistan. Interview conducted by Daniel Howden, “Refugees Deeply, Refugees caught up in child prostitution in Athens.”

## The impact on migrant children

Previous research has linked child sexual exploitation to a host of detrimental physical, psychological, and behavioral outcomes.<sup>80</sup> Pediatricians interviewed for this report anticipated an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, particularly because the exploiters dictate the level of protection to be used.

Depression and a deep sense of shame are the most common emotional side effects among sexually exploited children. According to one child, “I never thought I’d have to do something like this [...]. The first time I did it, I felt very ashamed, but over time you start to get used to it [...].”<sup>81</sup> A social worker also highlights the children’s emotions: “This has a huge emotional impact on children. They rationalize their experience and try to give it meaning; otherwise, they cannot stand it.” As mentioned earlier, this kind of exploitation can also make children more vulnerable to self-harming behaviors, including drug and alcohol abuse. While it is difficult to link the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) solely to the experience of sexual exploitation, in view of the amount of pre- and post-migration trauma that many of these children endure, previous research has related PTSD to these situations.<sup>82</sup> Implicated children are also likely to experience community ostracism and other forms of social stigmatization that hinder their social integration and healing.<sup>83</sup>

“The first time I did it, I felt very ashamed, but over time you start to get used to it[..]”

-Ali, aged 17<sup>84</sup>

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80 Natalie Thorburn & Irene de Haan, “Children and survival sex: A social work agenda.”

81 Ali, 17, Afghanistan. Interview conducted by Daniel Howden, “Refugees Deeply, Refugees caught up in child prostitution in Athens.”

82 Dorais, M., & Corriveau, P. *Gangs and girls: Understanding juvenile prostitution*. Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, (2009).

83 ECPAT, *Protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual violence in disaster and emergency situations*.

84 Ali, 17, Afghanistan. Interview conducted by Daniel Howden, “Refugees Deeply, Refugees caught up in child prostitution in Athens.”

# Preventing Physical and Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: Gaps and Practices

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Several international human rights instruments target the prevention of physical and sexual violence and exploitation of children as their key goal. These instruments include the very widely ratified 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC); and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol).<sup>85</sup> The European Union has also adopted a series of far-reaching measures to address child sexual exploitation and trafficking.<sup>86</sup> Greece has ratified all these instruments.

Despite these measures, however, migrant children in Greece continue to be highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In part, this is a consequence of the widely recognized detrimental impact of humanitarian crises on the ability of states to protect vulnerable populations. The risk of sexual violence during emergencies is frequently underestimated<sup>87</sup> by responsible agencies and, as a result, adequate resources are rarely allocated to its prevention.<sup>88</sup> As one of our government informant notes, “When you ask the [Greek] government about their efforts to prevent child sexual exploitation, officials claim that, if the phenomenon exists at all, it is isolated; clearly, there is considerable ignorance and a serious failure of responsibility towards vulnerable populations.”

Effective measures to ensure the prevention of child sexual exploitation or robust responses to it require multi-sector coordinated mechanisms involving stakeholders from a variety of sectors, including health, child protection, social services, and security. They also depend on active engagement of migrant and local communities themselves.<sup>89</sup> A comprehensive and successful response to violence and abuse must include efforts that aim (1) to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children before it actually occurs (primary intervention

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85 United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* Arts. 34 & 35 of the CRC, Art. 9 of the OPSC and Art. 9 of the Palermo Protocol.

86 European Commission, *The EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012–2016*. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/antitrafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eu\\_strategy\\_towards\\_the\\_eradication\\_of\\_trafficking\\_in\\_human\\_beings\\_2012-2016\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/antitrafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eu_strategy_towards_the_eradication_of_trafficking_in_human_beings_2012-2016_1.pdf)

87 UNHCR, UNFPA & WRC, *Initial assessment report: Protection risks for women and girls in the European Refugee and migrant crisis*. 19 January 2016. Available at: [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resourcepdf/EuropeMission\\_Protection\\_Risks\\_19\\_Jan\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resourcepdf/EuropeMission_Protection_Risks_19_Jan_Final_0.pdf)

88 Inter-agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines on gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings: Focusing on prevention of and response to sexual violence in emergencies*.

89 Ibid.

efforts);<sup>90</sup> (2) to immediately respond to the phenomenon after it occurs (secondary intervention efforts); and, finally, (3) to promote long-term healing and resilience of victims (tertiary prevention efforts).

### **3.1 Preventing abuse and exploitation: Existing practices and gaps**

In emergency situations such as those currently occurring in Greece, all migrant children should be considered to be at a high risk of being victimized. Despite some valiant efforts by both government and non-governmental actors in Greece, a number of gaps in the legal and institutional structure enable migrant child sexual exploitation to thrive.

#### **Capacity, safety, and living conditions**

##### *Existing practices*

Living conditions in the camps vary considerably. Some camps have good lighting and safe spaces for children. In camps that mainly host families, single women, and children, the risks of violence and sexual exploitation of children are reduced. In the camps with small numbers of predominantly family group residents, migrants create a sense of community that allows them to control the environment and reduce the risks that expose them or their children to danger. The relevance of camp size is highlighted by a psychologist working in one small camp: “The camp has a small number of people, mostly families. They come to know each other and create a community. They try to make this place a home for themselves and their children and to make it safe. By working together for this outcome, they generate a sense of community.”

Specialized community-based facilities for children and families are considered to be among the best primary intervention efforts for the prevention of violence against children. These community-based shelters host a limited number of migrants and ensure that most of their basic needs are met and that their rights are protected. During the last months of 2016, UNHCR was able to secure 20,367 places for vulnerable populations<sup>91</sup> while EKKA,<sup>92</sup> the National Center for Social Solidarity, a state organization responsible for providing social support services and care to populations experiencing crisis situations or in need of emergency social aid, was able to establish 43 shelters, providing care for 1,200 unaccompanied children.<sup>93</sup> However, despite these efforts, more than a half of the migrant population, including families and children, remain stranded in camps waiting for spots in one of these facilities.

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90 The Lucy Faithfull foundation, “Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse (ESCA),” 2013. Available at: [http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/ecsa\\_eradicating\\_child\\_sexual\\_abuse.html](http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/ecsa_eradicating_child_sexual_abuse.html)

91 UNHCR, Weekly accommodation and relocation update, December, 19th, 2016. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/>

92 EKKA, A brief account of the National Center for Social Solidarity. Available at: <http://www.ekka.org.gr/EKKA!show.action?lang=en>

93 UNHCR, “Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe: January to December 2017.” December 2016.

## Gaps

Migrant children accommodated in the Greek camps are extremely vulnerable to sexual predators because of the layout of the camps, inadequate night lighting, and a serious shortage of security personnel. As one of our informants notes, “If we want to talk about social justice, we should prioritize the improvement of the living conditions inside the camps. However, after so many months, inhumane conditions still exist and children’s basic human rights continue to be violated.” A report from the National Committee for Human Rights<sup>94</sup> also highlights the poor living conditions in many of the camps and the inadequate efforts of the government and NGOs.

“...As soon as night falls we all shut ourselves inside the container because we are afraid. We don’t even dare to go to the bathroom because it is very dark and dangerous. There is no way I would allow my wife and children to go. There have been many attacks there...”

– Testimony of a refugee to the CPU team  
of the Network for Children’s Rights <sup>95</sup>

Lack of security continues to be a critical factor responsible for the ongoing violence against vulnerable migrant populations. According to the testimony of one female migrant, “I didn’t sleep at night. There is no key to the tents, and the men kept entering into women’s tents. Even the toilets for men and women were not separated, making women unwilling to eat to avoid using them and risking sexual assault, which happens often in the camp [...].”<sup>96</sup> The presence of police inside the camps is limited and they generally fail to intervene, even in cases of distress. One participant working in the camps illustrated the role of the police by noting: “You will see a few policemen for hundreds of migrants in the camp. They don’t have the requisite manpower to intervene. Also, they know that, every time they interfere, they increase the risk of a more severe riot, because migrants do not like the police.” Another respondent spoke about the risk of child sexual abuse: “When instances of child sexual exploitation in one of the Athens camps were publicized, the police stationed a car outside that camp. This did not stop the exploitation—it merely shifted it to a different, more distant, site within the camp”.

“...when instances of child sexual exploitation in one of the Athens camps were publicized, the police stationed a car outside that camp. This did not stop the exploitation – it merely shifted it to a different, more distant, site within the camp”

-Research participant

These risks are aggravated by the lack of capacity in specialized facilities designed to house migrant children, an accommodation and staffing shortage that prolongs the children’s exposure to high-risk conditions and increases the risk of child abuse and

94 ΕΕΔΑ (NCHR), “Οι συνθήκες διαβίωσης στα κέντρα υποδοχής και φιλοξενίας μεταναστών και προσφύγων,” December, 2016.

95 H. Emmanouilidou, et al., “Conditions in refugee camps: the case of Schisto.” p7.

96 Henriette Johansen, “The Greek refugee camps and the reality of migration,” *Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations Publications*, 4 November 2016. Available at: <https://www.clingendael.nl/publication/greek-refugee-camps-and-reality-migration>

exploitation. As mentioned above, almost 50 percent of unaccompanied children, the most vulnerable group of migrant children, are still awaiting allocation of a space in a specialized facility. Funding delays thwart efforts to create new facilities. An employee of EKKA explained: “This humanitarian crisis has become a crisis with borders everywhere. There are borders between the hotspots and the camps, between the camps and the safe houses and other facilities, there are borders everywhere.”

“A mother who reported her husband following an incident of domestic violence was denied immediate intervention by the police authorities responsible for law and order in the Schisto camp because, they said, they did not have clear guidelines on how to respond to such matters and were therefore hesitant to do so. Besides, both at the police station where the offender had been transferred and at the Criminal Court there was no interpreter.”

-Network for Children’s Rights <sup>97</sup>

“This humanitarian crisis has become a crisis with borders everywhere. There are borders between the hotspots and the camps, between the camps and the safe houses and other facilities, there are borders everywhere”

-Research Participant

### Psychosocial interventions

Psychosocial support can make a critical difference during humanitarian crises triggered by war and conflict, as migrants carry with them significant pre-migration psychological trauma compounded by post-migration trauma brought on by violence, loss, and destitute living conditions. Although a number of efforts have been made to offer psychosocial support in the camps, the majority of the respondents note that fundamental institutional gaps prevent migrant children from obtaining the support they need.

### Existing practices

It should be noted, however, that, in some of the camps, psychosocial services are provided in more effective ways. For instance, Child and Family Support Hubs (“Blue Dots”), supported by UNICEF, offer areas for children to access recreational activities, and obtain psychological support and legal counseling. Eleven “Blue Dots” have been established supporting a total of 17,000 children.<sup>98</sup> However, these Hubs exist only in eight locations around Greece.<sup>99</sup> In some of the smaller camps, where migrants have created their own communities, children have opportunities to engage in recreational activities organized and supervised by their families.

Additionally, over 60 international and national NGOs provide full-time informal educational and recreational activities in almost 80 percent of the accommodation

97 H. Emmanouilidou, et al., “Conditions in refugee camps: the case of Schisto.” p7.

98 UNHCR, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe: January to December 2017.

99 UNICEF, *Refugee and migrant crisis in Europe: Humanitarian situation report #18*, 15 December 2016. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/ceecis/sitrep18a.pdf>

sites,<sup>100</sup> complementing broader efforts by the Greek Ministry of Education to gradually integrate all migrant children into the Greek educational system. Among others, these activities include teaching children their mother tongue, creative recreational activities, and psychosocial support. The Greek Ministry of Education has helped 2,500 migrant children attend public schools<sup>101</sup> and declared in March 2017 that it hopes to triple this number in future months.

## **Gaps**

The lack of adequately trained practitioners interacting with children suffering from severe trauma was highlighted by many participants of this study. “This crisis has created a need for many specially trained practitioners. Many of the people hired to work with migrant children do not have appropriate training and knowledge. A certificate or attendance at a seminar does not qualify someone to work with children suffering from trauma,” notes a psychologist working in a camp. Even trained practitioners, dealing with the complex trauma and risks that children face on a daily basis can find the circumstances overwhelming and challenging. “We have worked on trauma for many years now, but this is completely different. Supporting children’s resilience requires time, patience, and a protective environment. We have no time, a risky environment, and no one has patience. Even for very experienced people, this is a challenge,” notes a psychologist working in a camp.

Many of our respondents criticized the manner in which psycho-social- and trauma-related care is provided in the camps. A psychologist explains: “The way we are asked to provide support is ineffective. It is based on protocols and guidelines that do not apply in every humanitarian crisis.” Another psychologist notes: “we have a checklist, we ask some questions and collect some answers. How can you help children with a checklist?”

Positive parenting programs offer another method to build and reinforce a protective environment for children and to reduce the risks of violence. Many parents and caregivers managing their own states of high stress, uncertainty, and anxiety, are liable to become violent or neglectful towards their children,<sup>102</sup> thereby increasing the children’s risk of victimization by others. Regrettably, organized efforts to help parents manage these emotions through counseling have not yet been established. “We always think of offering programs targeting the majority of parents and adults [under the supervision of NGOs], but we never do it. We talk to parents only when an incident of violent behavior towards the child has occurred. We do not prevent harm. We try to alleviate it, unsuccessfully most of the times, after it has occurred,” notes a psychologist.

“Many of the people hired...do not have the proper training and knowledge. A certificate or attendance at a seminar does not qualify someone to work with children suffering from trauma...”

-Psychologist working in a camp

100 UNHCR, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe January to December 2017.

101 European Commission, “2500 Refugee and Migrant Children Now Attending Greek Schools,” *European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations*, 3 March 2017. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/news/2500-refugee-and-migrant-children-now-attending-greek-schools\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/news/2500-refugee-and-migrant-children-now-attending-greek-schools_en)

102 Save the Children, *Physical violence and other harmful practices in Humanitarian Situations, Executive Summary*. Available at: [http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/tdh\\_pvohp\\_formatted.pdf](http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/tdh_pvohp_formatted.pdf)

## Child protection system

### *Existing practices*

Several efforts have been made to strengthen the child protection system in Greece by both governmental and non-governmental entities. According to one research participant, “Despite our many and complex child protection decrees, in the end, children in Greece remain completely unprotected. There is no comprehensive legal framework and the guardianship system does not operate efficiently. NGOs are trying to translate all Greek child protection instruments into English to get a better grasp of the system.” Efforts are also underway to improve coordination, institutional capacity, and legal representation, as well as to strengthen the legal guardianship system, but considerable challenges remain.

### *Gaps*

The absence of a comprehensive and adequately resourced child protection system<sup>103</sup> exacerbates the risks faced by children. Institutional capacity and resources in Greece are severely limited. Increased processing times, bureaucratic delays for asylum seekers, the slow pace of relocation, and lengthy and inefficient family reunification procedures, compounded by inhumane living conditions and the detention of children for their own protection, encourage migrant children to avoid the child protection system and attempt onward journeys from Greece without any safeguards or adult protection. According to UNICEF, between August and October 2016, 2,500 children, among them 1,160 unaccompanied, were intercepted while trying to cross from Greece through to Bulgaria.<sup>104</sup>

As noted earlier, these journeys and the absence of an effective child protection system present enormous hazards for migrant children, including the pressure to earn smuggling fees by selling sex, and, for some, the serious risk of long term exposure to sexual exploitation as low earnings trap them in oppressive situations, sometimes for years.

### **3.2 Responding to the phenomenon after it occurs: Existing gaps**

The efforts described in this section aim to address the short-term consequences of abuse and risk of re-victimization<sup>105</sup> by protecting survivors and focusing on increasing their resilience.

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103 Ibid.

104 UNICEF, *Refugee and migrant crisis in Europe: Humanitarian situation report #18*.

105 ECPAT, *Protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual violence in disaster and emergency situations*.

## Services that target exposure to sexual violence and case management for victims

Camps offer very limited services in the immediate aftermath of cases of sexual abuse.<sup>106</sup> According to our informants, staff members working with children do not always have sufficient expertise to properly evaluate a case of abuse, while higher-ups in the chain of command may also lack necessary knowledge. A research participant working in one of the camps notes: “When I asked my supervisor what we should do in cases of sexual abuse in the camp, he didn’t know and referred to the guidelines and checklists. Guidelines offer general guidance and are not always appropriate for specific situations. Of course, you need to follow a process, but you need to be flexible and able to adapt to specific situations. By contrast, here we talk about strict adherence to some guidelines with no flexibility, which shows the lack of knowledge and expertise of those responsible for working on these cases.”

“Despite our many and complex child protection decrees, in the end, children in Greece remain completely unprotected.”

-Research Participant

Moreover, the referral pathway connecting victims to services is slow and not always functional. A child protection officer explains: “If you suspect a case of abuse (victims do not usually ask for help), you first need to verify the abuse, inform the Public Prosecutor for minors [in case of unaccompanied minors], contact EKKA to ask for an available place in a safe shelter, and then wait. During this time-consuming process, the victim remains in the same place with the perpetrator and runs the risk of being re-victimized or suffering from retaliation. This is a major reason why victims do not seek help.”

“Two identified female adult victims of trafficking have not been transferred to a safe house from the islands for two months now because two very important NGOs could not agree on who will manage the case.”

-Research participant

Many of our informants highlight the lack of coordination and problematic case management as key gaps in current intervention efforts against sexual abuse. According to one participant working with victims, “We have serious problems with the referral partners. We have trainings in an effort to ‘speak the same language,’ but the process doesn’t work. During the most crucial time, you realize that you are not able to communicate.” Another respondent highlights the ineffective contribution of many of the NGOs involved.

Local public hospitals also lack capacity to respond effectively to cases of child migrant sexual abuse.<sup>107</sup> There are no clear protocols for managing cases of sexual abuse and

<sup>106</sup> See also UNHCR, UNFPA & WRC, Initial assessment report: Protection risks for women and girls in the European refugee and migrant crisis.

<sup>107</sup> Save the Children, *Physical violence and other harmful practices in Humanitarian Situations, Executive Summary*.

medical staff lack the necessary training in dealing with these cases.<sup>108</sup> “Camps exist all over Greece. Many sites are located in remote areas and the small clinics and hospitals close to them are not able to assist in cases of sexual abuse. Unlike big hospitals in main cities, they lack protocols and expertise,” notes a doctor working in the camps.

Yet another gap identified by our research participants is the lack of properly trained translators. “The translators are not always trained. You ask something, they ask something else and translate incorrectly. Moreover, the lack of female translators has an impact on the services provided in cases of sexual abuse involving girls,” a psychologist explained.

### **Available housing for victims**

As already noted, the lack of institutional capacity negatively affects the provision of emergency housing for victims. This is a major concern for the victimized population: during the period while they are waiting transfer to a shelter, victims have to remain in the same environment where their abuse and exploitation occurred.

“An unaccompanied minor who was a victim of sexual abuse and should have been instantly transferred to a hostel for his own protection remains in the camp where the abuse took place because he suffers from tuberculosis and scabies. As a result, he avoids making an official accusation. There are no alternative shelters for minors suffering from infectious diseases, even in the cases of vulnerable abused children”.

-Network for Children’s Rights <sup>109</sup>

“During this time-consuming process, the victim remains in the same place with the perpetrator...This is a major reason why victims do not seek help.”

-Psychologist working in a camp

### **Lack of reliable evidence on abuse against children and the failure of authorities to take this into account**

The lack of reliable information on the prevalence of child migrant sexual abuse creates a serious challenge for the government and humanitarian agencies trying to address the issue, while reinforcing the false perception that sexual abuse cases are limited and, therefore, are not a high-priority need of this humanitarian crisis.<sup>110</sup> Greece does not seem to follow the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Gender Based Violence Guidelines which state: “Waiting for or seeking population-based data [...] should not be a priority in an emergency due to safety and ethical challenges in collecting such data [and that] all humanitarian personnel ought to assume GBV is occurring and threatening

108 See also UNHCR, UNFPA & WRC, Initial assessment report: Protection risks for women and girls in the European refugee and migrant crisis.

109 H. Emmanouilidou, et al., “Conditions in refugee camps: the case of Schisto.” p10.

110 See also UNHCR, UNFPA & WRC, Initial assessment report: Protection risks for women and girls in the European refugee and migrant crisis.

affected populations [...].”<sup>111</sup> As noted by one of our informants, “As long as data do not exist because victims themselves prefer to be hidden, the [Greek] government benefits by sweeping the problem under the carpet. No ‘known’ incidents mean no problem exists. No government wants to admit that children are being abused under its protection.”

### 3.3 Conclusions

Taken together, the results of this study underscore the complex and multifaceted risks and dangers faced by migrant children in Greece. The findings confirm that the hidden and criminal nature of the exploitation of migrant children complicates prevention efforts, jeopardizing traditional safety nets and aggravating the deficits of an already inadequate child protection system.

Our findings complement previous research on sexual violence and exploitation during humanitarian crises. We document the interplay between institutional, legislative, individual, family, and societal-level factors that increase migrant children’s risks of abuse and exploitation. Specifically, we draw attention to the lengthy asylum process, long wait times, inadequate accommodation facilities for vulnerable children, inhumane living conditions, lack of security, and ineffective humanitarian and child protection services.

We also document the critical importance of giving full consideration to the agency of child migrants themselves and the strong compulsion many of them feel to continue their journeys to freedom or self-fulfillment despite the extensive legal impediments they face. We point out that this pressure generates a powerful—and often unsatisfied—need for substantial financial resources to meet the demands of smugglers. We document the way in which this income need exacerbates migrant children’s risk of commercial sexual exploitation and exposes the serious failure of the Greek child protection system. We also reveal the enduring impact of exploitation and abuse on the psychological health of migrant children, and show how these result in a cascade of socio-psychological symptoms with profoundly deleterious impacts on children’s resilience, self-esteem and long-term well-being.

Finally, we note that, despite considerable evidence of serious abuse and risk, significant gaps in the governmental and non-governmental response to child migrant sexual exploitation continue to exist. We point out the disparities between different interventions and comment on the failure of many camps to provide basic amenities, such as night lighting, gender differentiated sanitation, appropriate healthcare services, and other case management services.<sup>112</sup> We also draw attention to the lack of properly trained staff able to identify and adequately respond to cases of abuse and exploitation, together with the overall lack of coordination between stakeholders and agencies involved.

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111 Inter-agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines on gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings: Focusing on prevention of and response to sexual violence in emergencies*.

112 See also UNHCR, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe, January to December 2017.

# Recommendations

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The literature on violence and exploitation in humanitarian emergencies includes comprehensive guidelines and protocols to prevent child sexual exploitation and protect survivors; international legal norms also address this issue. Overall the framework depends on well-designed, timely and adequately supported implementation mechanisms for its success. In view of the proliferation of child migrant exposure to violence and sexual abuse in Greece, there is an urgent need to institute such systems. Specific recommendations to the national and international actors responsible for the care and wellbeing of migrant children are suggested below.

## 4.1 Greek Government

The Greek government has a critical responsibility to ensure the protection of migrant children in Greece, a responsibility that it has so far failed to discharged adequately. The following recommendations addressed to the Greek government focus on 4 main areas: child welfare services, data collection mechanisms, integration and resilience services, and awareness raising.

### *Improve child welfare services*

- Incorporate risk factors identified in this study into existing risk assessment practices and implement dynamic feedback mechanisms to ensure timely intervention as new risk factors are identified;
- Immediately put an end to the detention of migrant children in closed facilities, a current practice that is in direct opposition to the best interest of children;
- Increase the number of community-based apartments hosting migrant children and families, putting an end to their exposure to dangerous living conditions inside the camps;
- Create additional specialized shelters to host migrant child victims of abuse and exploitation, in order to help them escape abusive environments and start the process of healing and recovery;
- Ensure that children have full access to and receive accurate, timely, and comprehensible information regarding their rights, and the protection and other supportive resources

available to them. In crafting this information, the authorities must take due note of age, language, and cultural factors to maximize the usefulness of the information imparted. Relevant authorities need to pay special attention to migrant children's concerns about their future options, including to the children's attraction to dangerous and self-harming strategies to promote their desired migration alternatives;

- Improve the legal guardianship system and urgently appoint well-trained guardians to protect and safeguard the best interests of migrant children;
- Establish an independent mechanism to oversee, regularly monitor, and assess NGOs whose activities directly target vulnerable migrant child populations. As NGOs rely on brand recognition and reputation to provide their services, they may be reluctant to report incidents of violence or abuse in the camps they operate in to avoid drawing negative attention (and funding cuts), a reluctance that can jeopardize victim care;
- Establish, and require all NGOs to adhere to, common guidelines for case management and reporting of instances of abuse and exploitation.

#### *Strengthen mechanisms for data collection*

- Establish a dedicated communication network to facilitate regular and confidential information sharing between social services, law enforcement, healthcare workers, camp management and NGOs;
- Conduct regular and systematic data collection on the exact number of migrant children in locations throughout Greece, allowing for accurate monitoring of cases of disappearance or "loss" of migrant children to quickly implement measures to forestall and disrupt further disappearances;
- Secure the necessary funding to comprehensively and regularly collect and share data on violence and exploitation of migrant children with national and international stakeholders to identify underlying trends, design appropriate and timely interventions, and evaluate long-term efficacy of prevention efforts.

#### *Provide social integration and resilience services*

- As an urgent priority, integrate all migrant children into the formal Greek educational system (from pre-school onwards) to help re-establish their sense of normality, security and belonging, acquire useful language fluency and engagement with the local community, and develop long-term skills and knowledge;
- Ensure that migrant children with disabilities have access to education tailored to their specific needs;
- Appoint well-trained and independent translators to camps and shelters hosting migrants, as well as to local hospitals, police, coast guard forces, and other social institutions that come in contact with vulnerable migrant populations to facilitate

effective communication and access to services;

- Ensure access to legal identity and, for those born in Greece, access to nationality, birth registration, and identity documentation.

#### *Raise the awareness of the local population*

- Increase local efforts to enhance the acceptance and inclusion of migrants and decrease racist and xenophobic attitudes;
- Promote campaigns against violence and abuse of migrant children to help mobilize local communities to act when witnessing cases of violence and abuse;
- Promote community-based activities and interventions that build and foster relationships between the migrant and local population to facilitate faster and more effective integration;

#### **4.2 Camp coordination and management sector**

As camp managers, administrators and coordinators assume the responsibility of protecting the safety of migrants inside camps and facilities, they should:

- Address structural factors identified in this study that increase the risks of violence against and abuse of vulnerable populations living in camps, such as artificial lighting and separate and safe sanitation facilities;
- Transfer children and families away from the general adult population to a safe and separate area within the camps in cases where immediate transfer to shelters or community-based apartments is not possible;
- Create child-friendly spaces in every camp to offer migrant children a safe and protected space for study, recreation and rest;
- Encourage community building among migrant populations in the camps by implementing recreational interventions that foster and build upon their social identities and motivate cooperation among and participation of all migrants.

#### **4.3 National law enforcement officials**

- Increase the presence of specially trained police officers inside the camps, focusing on conflict resolution and community-building techniques to foster a sense of security, community, and access to justice among the migrant population;
- Train police officers working in migrant-rich communities outside the camps to 1) identify victims and migrant children at high risk of victimization and 2) build trust within these communities;
- Train police officers to adopt a child-centered approach when engaging with victims

or potential victims, focusing on the best interest of migrant children at all times;

- Implement immediate and coordinated efforts to prosecute agents/exploiters involved in the sexual exploitation of migrant children and to increase and strengthen channels of communication that facilitate information exchange on child migrant sexual exploitation;
- In cooperation with the government and child protection services, establish, staff, and publicize telephone hotlines for victimized migrant children willing to receive help and unable to do so in person.

#### **4.4 Health practitioners**

A number of local and international agencies, institutions, and stakeholders provide health and psychosocial support to vulnerable migrant populations in Greece. The recommendations outlined below are geared towards these groups.

- Train health practitioners to respect cultural, religious, and social norms and values of migrant children and their families and help build healthy, trusting relationships with them when providing care;
- Ensure that health practitioners are rigorously trained on how to work with traumatized children and their families to avoid potential re-victimization during treatment;
- Ensure that health and psychosocial services are provided in a child-friendly and protective environment.

#### **4.5 Child protection actors**

A number of local and international actors employ child protection officers to provide care and services to vulnerable migrant populations in Greece. The recommendations below are geared to the groups employing child protection officers.

- Ensure systematic, comprehensive, and ongoing screening and training of staff in direct contact with migrant children so that child protection officers are trained to:
  - Identify migrant children at high risk of exploitation, paying particular attention to cultural practices and social norms that increase the risks of sexual and physical abuse and exploitation of migrant children, such as child marriage or gender-based exclusion from educational activities;
  - Identify migrant children who are potential victims of abuse or exploitation;
  - Design interventions to raise awareness of violence against migrant children;
  - Warn migrant children about the risks of sexual exploitation and the tactics

used to lure them into labor or sexual exploitation;

- Ensure migrant children are aware of available protective resources in cases of abuse and exploitation;
- Encourage and support migrant parents to promote their children's right to education and integration.

#### 4.6 Frontline and immigration officials

- Establish screening protocols to enable immigration officials, both at the border and in post entry interviews, to identify signs of abuse and exploitation<sup>113</sup> among new migrant children arrivals;
- Train border control personnel to sensitively and carefully verify family relationships of new arrivals to prevent the common occurrence of non-familial adults escorting migrant children.

### Epilogue

National efforts to address the emergency within an emergency that this report documents will not be enough. A much broader concerted coalition of forced is required to effectively address the dramatic failure of protection affecting significant numbers of child migrants and refugees within Europe today. While a discussion about the complex and multifaceted elements of the task ahead is beyond the scope of this report, it is clear that municipal, national, regional and international action within migration, child welfare and state security institutions is urgently needed. From the perspective of Greece, a significant contribution to addressing the grave problems addressed here would be for the international community, including EU member states, to fulfill their commitments to relocate eligible refugees, including children in particular, as a matter of urgency. As the political climate in Europe and other parts of the world tilts towards an increasingly anti-migrant and xenophobic outlook, national and international stakeholders should come together to provide the necessary resources to fund adequate prevention and protection measures, and to ensure effective legal paths to migration, for the hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants displaced by this crisis.

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113 Council of Europe, "Special report Protecting children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse," March 13th, 2017. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806fcdcb>.

# Appendix

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The interviews conducted for the needs of this assessment were guided by the following goals:

- Identify the factors rendering migrant children at a higher risk of abuse and exploitation;
- Identify the gaps in the Greek child protection and welfare systems contributing to child migrants' increased vulnerability;
- Document cases of physical and sexual abuse in camps and their impact on migrant children;
- Collect information on the occurrence of riots and other incidents of physical violence in camps and their impact on migrant children;
- Assess the phenomenon of migrant child commercial sexual exploitation in Athens;
- Identify the pathways and causes leading to child commercial sexual exploitation;
- Identify the fears and thoughts of children engaged in child commercial sexual exploitation through the people working with them;
- Assess the efforts of the Greek government and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to prevent abuse and exploitation of migrant children.

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