



12.9.2017 – While all migrants and refugees are at high risk, children and young people trying to reach Europe face especially appalling levels of human rights abuses as 77% of young people traveling along the Central Mediterranean route report direct experiences of exploitation.



A new joint report, [Harrowing Journeys](#), by [UNICEF](#) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) sounds the alarm and also [reveals](#)

that children from Sub-Saharan Africa are targeted more than any other group, facing discrimination and racism at almost every step on their migration route. 65 % of Sub-Saharan youth compared to 15 % of migrants from other parts of the world face discrimination and

racism along the Eastern Mediterranean Route through Turkey, and 83 % of Sub-Saharan young people compared to 56 % of other migrants along the more perilous Central Mediterranean Route through Libya.

“We must fight normalization”, emphasized IOM Regional Director Eugenio Ambrosi during the report launch in Brussels. “We are getting used to the numbers of deaths at sea, and we need to fight cynicism. We need to continue to be shocked, sad and angry.”

The children who survive the journey, may experience rape, forced labour, captivity, child marriage, violence and other forms of abuse. 72 % of detected female victims suffer sexual exploitation, while 86 % of detected male victims suffer forced labour. However, abuse can be interlinked and countless victims remain undetected, the report states. The young migrants moving through irregular channels risk being detained and deprived of their freedom to move. They can be held by state agents, traffickers or armed groups, or even [traded in slave like conditions](#). Fear of being arrested and detained often drives young migrants and refugees underground.

The [joint Report](#) is based on the testimonies of some 22,000 migrants and refugees, including some 11,000 children and youth, interviewed by IOM. The Report calls on all concerned parties to prioritize safe and regular pathways, strengthening services protecting migrant and refugee children along the migration route, and work across borders to combat trafficking and exploitation as well as racism and discrimination. Significant proportions of children seeking asylum in Europe either embarked on their journey without their families or lost them along the way. Travelling alone makes adolescents and children acutely vulnerable – the presence of a family offers at least a measure of protection from exploitation.

“We also need to remember”, stressed Sandie Blanchet, UNICEF Brussels Director, “that every single EU country has ratified the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). The status of the child – whether he or she is a refugee or migrant - does not matter. On European soil, a child is always, first and foremost, a child.”

A recurring question in today’s migration debate is whether the majority of arrivals to Europe are, in fact, economic migrants rather than people seeking protection. The UN agencies stress that the matter is often far more complex, and according to [another UNICEF study](#), the children are often not even aiming for Europe to start with.

“According to current legal framework and the 1951 refugee convention, it is true that it is a lesser part that can be considered as “refugees””, said Ambrosi. “But the convention is almost 70 years old, and today’s reality is different. We see a different set of vulnerabilities that are not covered by the 51 Convention, such as trafficking, and conditions developed along the migration route that would entitle a person to seek protection. IOM advocates an approach that is a little less strict. We need a more nuanced approach.”

“We also need to keep in mind that the stories we hear are the stories of those who survived”, added Blanchet. “What we never hear, are the stories of the children who died along the way.”

* * *

Read the full report here: http://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/Harrowing_Journeys_Children_and_youth_on_the_move_across_the_Mediterranean.pdf

UNICEF / report data: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/harrowing-journeys/>

IOM Missing Migrants: <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>