

On 2 October 2015 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, three children look out of the window as refugees, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, board a train at a reception center for refugees and migrants in Gevgelija.

Protecting children on the move

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all children have the same rights



PROTECTING CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

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Globally, about 42,500 people a day were chased from their homes by war, violence and persecution in 2014 – a number expected to rise in 2015.¹ Of the nearly 60 million people in 2014, an estimated 30 million of them are children.²

Worldwide, nearly 232 million people have made homes in countries beyond the borders of their native lands, according to the most recent figures from 2013.³ Among them are nearly 35 million children – some with and some without adult care.⁴

In addition to those now arriving in Europe:

IN 2014, ABOUT

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WORLDWIDE NEARLY

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IN 2014

60 million
people

AMONG THEM ARE NEARLY

35 million
children, some without
adult care

AN ESTIMATED

30 million
children a year



In Syria, more than **7.6 million** people are internally displaced and many remain in danger.⁶

In Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, **1.4 million** children have been uprooted this year because of the armed group Boko Haram.⁸

1.07 million Syrian refugees live in Lebanon.⁵

More than **2 million** child refugees have sought shelter in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.⁷

1.3 million children are internally displaced in Iraq (as of September 2015).

2.3 million children are displaced and **573** have been killed in Yemen in the last six months.¹⁰

In South Sudan, over **a million** children have been displaced because of conflict.⁹

The children arriving on the shores and at the borders of European countries are the human faces of a global rise in the movement of people – a movement that is expected to impact communities, economies and nations for generations to come.

The refugee and migrant crisis in Europe is taking a significant toll on children. In the first nine months of 2015 more than 200,000 children applied for asylum in European Union countries, according to Eurostat data.¹ In Sweden alone, more than 2,000 unaccompanied children applied for asylum each week in October 2015.²

But not all make it. So far in 2015, nearly 700 children are believed to have died crossing the Mediterranean Sea in pursuit of a new life in Europe.³

“This is now a crisis for children.”

Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Special Coordinator for the European Refugee/Migrant Crisis.

Names not numbers

The staggering numbers help to underline the magnitude of the challenges, not just in Europe but elsewhere.

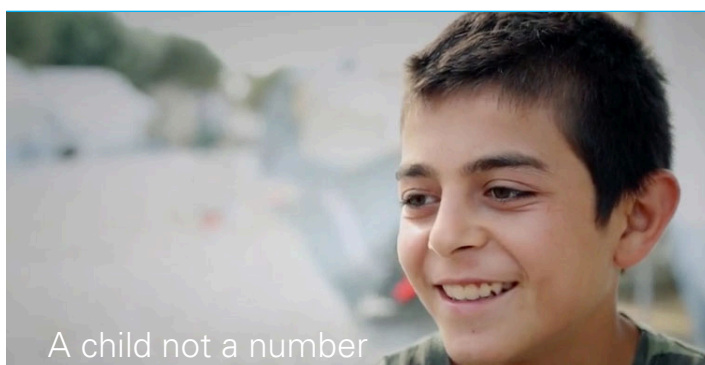
Worldwide, conflict affects 246 million children and many face forced displacement, rights violations, lack of access to basic services and chronic health and nutrition challenges. In addition, poverty drives the course of life for so many. Any of these children could at any time join the odyssey in search of safety and a fair chance in life.⁴ It is a crisis not seen since the end of World War II.

Behind the numbers are individual children, with individual needs and rights: a place to sleep, nutritious food and medical attention. They need protection from abuse, violence and exploitation. They need to learn and play.

These rights are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international agreements – agreements endorsed by many of the governments and leaders now charged with protecting the rights of children on the move.

The first principle is that no matter where they are and how they got there, children are children.

The European refugee crisis highlights the importance of making the best out of demographic changes. Refugee and migrant children have the potential to contribute significantly to the societies that welcome them.



A child not a number

One among the millions of children on the move is Mustapha.

Mustapha, 13, fled Syria when his home turned into a battleground where he lived through shelling and where men were “taken against their will.” He feared that his brothers would be the next.

“We were living well with each other,” he said. “But now it is all destroyed. Each one of us is in a different place.”

With members of his family, Mustapha embarked on a journey that took him by boat over the Mediterranean Sea to Greece, where he hoped to travel to Germany.

“I had some toys that I loved, but I couldn’t bring them with me,” he said.

One day, Mustapha wants to return to Syria, to his life, his school – to his toys. In the meantime, he worries about finding his way in a new land.

“I miss my friends, but what can I do,” he said. “And here I don’t understand the language or anything.”

“Who will I make friends with,” he asked. “There is no one.”

¹ Eurostat Asylum Data, <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>, accessed 6 October 2015.

² Swedish Migration Agency, www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.7c00d8e6143101d166d1aab/1446451028489/Inkomna+ans%C3%B6kningar+om+asyl+2015+-+Applications+for+asylum+received+2015.pdf, accessed 2 November 2015.

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), migrant/refugee response, http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php#_ga=1.8119218.1683179444.1444069195, accessed 30 October 2015. The figure for children is derived from calculating 20 per cent (the percentage of children) of the dead or missing in 2015.

⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund, *2014 Annual Results Report: Humanitarian Action*, UNICEF, New York, June 2015, p. 4.

Watch the video of Mustapha [HERE](#).

A lost home

For many of the children who embark on journeys from their homes, the danger of staying is greater than the danger of leaving.

In Syria, nearly five years of conflict have reduced infrastructure to rubble, depriving many millions of children of education, health care and basic services including water and electricity. One of four schools and two of three hospitals in the country have been destroyed.⁵

Depleted family resources drive children to leave school and take up poorly paid jobs. In Syria and neighbouring countries, a growing number of children are the breadwinners in their families. In Jordan, 47 per cent of Syrian refugee families say they depend on income earned by their children.⁶ Girls as young as 13 are forced into marriages because their families are unable to protect and provide for them.⁷

In other parts of the world too, children are being robbed of their childhoods by conflict and natural disaster.⁸ In addition, vast disparities in wealth, opportunity and the quality of education propels children – with and without adult care – to search for a better life at the other end of the voyage.

“What struck me was this extraordinary sense of humanity on the move – every age, every walk of life, new born babies, children with disabilities; all of them were tired, all of them were carrying big bags, some of them were carrying no bags. You could see that they have gone through a lot. They told us about their long journeys, long walks, taking trains, terrifying boat rides.”

Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Special Coordinator for the European Refugee/Migrant Crisis.



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⁵ United Nations Children's Fund, Children of Syria, <http://childrenofsyria.info/2015/10/01/the-syrian-conflict-and-europes-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>, accessed 19 October 2015.

⁶ United Nations Children's Fund and Save the Children, *Small Hands, Heavy Burden: How the Syria Conflict is Driving Children into the Workforce*, UNICEF and Save the Children Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, Amman, July 2015, p. 1.

⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, *Education under Fire: How Conflict in the Middle East is Depriving Children of Education*, UNICEF, Amman, 3 September 2015, p. 4.

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme, 'UNICEF and WFP launch mass nutrition screening as hunger threatens lives of children in South Sudan', News note, 29 October 2015, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_85970.html, accessed 30 October 2015.



The journey

Children and their families often face long, uncertain and often hazardous journeys when they leave.

For some, the difficulties begin with perilous border crossings, rough seas and treacherous terrain. Others are exposed to sickness, exploitation, and trafficking, and sexual abuse.

The number of refugees and migrants in Europe is not decreasing while the relative proportion of children on the move is increasing. And with winter descending on the Mediterranean the dangers are mounting.

In one day alone, Greek authorities reported five serious incidents in the waters between Turkey and Greece involving smuggler boats carrying refugees and migrants. Hundreds were rescued. But 15 people died including some children, 38 are missing and 15 children suffered from hypothermia.⁹

With the worsening weather conditions there are signs that the refugees are abandoning the water route in favour of the land route through Bulgaria.

But they still face snow, rain and freezing weather, many walking in the only shoes and clothes they have. Each day 700 children arrive in Europe, many of them exhausted, distressed and some in need of medical assistance.¹⁰ They need a safe place to rest as well as food and water, warm clothes, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

⁹ UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/5632551c6.html>

¹⁰ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Regional Humanitarian and Situation Report', number 1, UNICEF, Geneva, 12 October 2015.



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In many cases they are stopped at borders and held for hours, if not overnight, exposed to the weather. Many have not slept in a bed for weeks.

All have lost something when they left home: friends, family, schools and stability.

“With winter coming in full force now what really worries me, as a mother, is the small babies. I remember when I had my own babies myself, you are so anxious for them, every little breeze, you worry. You can just imagine how hard it is when you are on the move. I saw one baby that was just three days old. This is a most fragile group of children.”

Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Special Coordinator for the European Refugee/Migrant Crisis.

In addition the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has collected credible reports of abuse and sexual violence against women and children in locations where people on the move gather, including at reception sites, parks, roadsides and train and bus stations. Testimonies have included incidences of children engaging in ‘survival sex’ with smugglers to continue their journey.¹¹

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Press Briefing Note, 23 October 2015, Geneva.

Unaccompanied children

Unaccompanied children – traveling without the care of an adult, mostly adolescent boys – are among the most vulnerable groups on the move and their ranks are growing.

In 2014, 23,160 unaccompanied children sought asylum in the EU (four per cent or one in 25 of all asylum applications), according to Eurostat.¹² But that number is expected to be much higher this year. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the numbers of unaccompanied children and adolescents increased six fold from 932 in August 2015 to 5,676 in October.

In the first 10 months of 2015, more than 23,000 unaccompanied children and adolescents applied for asylum in Sweden alone.¹³ More than 30,000 unaccompanied children are expected to apply for asylum in Germany by the end of 2015.¹⁴

Unfortunately, there is little comprehensive data on unaccompanied minors and children separated from their families. The lack of information impedes the ability to comprehensively protect their rights and well-being. Unaccompanied children and adolescents are targets for trafficking and smuggling groups and criminal networks.¹⁵ Afghan, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Somali and Sudanese children, adolescents and young people have faced particular danger from brutal smuggling and trafficking networks.¹⁶

Unaccompanied children and adolescents are at particular risk of sexual abuse and violence especially if they are held in detention centres.¹⁷ In many countries the young people are exploited to pay smugglers the cost of their journey.

“The numbers of teenage Afghan boys were striking. They are dynamic, and energetic. They are determined to make a better life for themselves but their futures hang in the balance as they make their way through Europe.”

Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Special Coordinator for the European Refugee/Migrant Crisis.

¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World at War: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014, UNHCR, Geneva, 18 September 2015, p. 2.

¹³ Swedish Migration Agency, www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.7c00d8e6143101d166d1aab/1446451028489/Inkomna+ans%C3%B6kningar+om+asyl+2015++Applications+for+asylum+received+2015.pdf, accessed 2 November 2015.

¹⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Rapid analysis of the situation and response for refugee and migrant children in Germany’, Internal Report of a UNICEF visit to Germany, 29 September – 1 October, 2015, p. 4.

¹⁵ Global Migration Group, Migration and Youth: Challenges and Opportunities, UNICEF, New York, 2014, Chapter 4, p. 4.

¹⁶ Global Migration Group, Migration and Youth: Challenges and Opportunities, UNICEF, New York, 2014, Chapter 4, p. 9.

¹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Press Briefing Note, 23 October 2015, Geneva.



A dangerous journey

For Malak, the voyage from Syria to Greece is a sad tale to tell.

On the overnight boat ride across the Mediterranean, water sprayed into the boat and the dress she wore did not keep her warm. With the cold came fear.

Her suitcase, full of new clothing, was tossed overboard. Ultimately she made it to shore with the help of a fisherman who pulled the boat to safety after it ran out of fuel.

"I felt as if my mother and I might drown, that the boat might go down," she said.

Watch Malak's story [HERE](#).



UNICEF in action

UNICEF is focussing on the four most vulnerable categories of children – babies and small children, children separated from their parents or caregivers, unaccompanied children and adolescents, and those left behind because they do not have the means to seek refuge elsewhere.

In seven centres at country borders, UNICEF carves out safe spaces for children to play, providing an opportunity for children to be children. And it is an opportunity for social workers to assess the children they meet and offer emotional support and protection if required. At any time of the day or night up to 200 children can be found resting or playing in these centres.¹⁸

The centres are also a place for UNICEF to learn whether children are traveling without adult care or are separated from their families. Protection by the authorities is required to assure the safety of the children.

UNICEF also provides facilities for mothers and infants which offer safe spaces for breastfeeding and counselling. UNICEF also provides material assistance including water and water containers, hygiene kits for children, food and winter clothing. UNICEF is procuring supplies and equipment for its winterization programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, focusing on the procurement of winter clothing and footwear for children and adolescents, blankets, as well as equipment including heating devices to improve conditions in all UNICEF supported child-friendly spaces.

¹⁸ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Regional Humanitarian and Situation Report', number 1, UNICEF, Geneva, 12 October 2015.

The scale and complexity of the crisis is a unique challenge to governments and humanitarian agencies. With refugees and migrants transiting through countries in short periods of time, it has proven difficult to monitor and register them. In addition, there is a gulf between the number of people in need and the resources available to assist them.

In **industrialized** countries such as Greece and Germany, UNICEF stands ready to provide assistance requested by governments and has already undertaken a number of assessments to support local authorities facing unprecedented numbers of refugees and migrants. As these assessments are concluded, UNICEF is ready to provide further assistance as required, in line with its expertise.

In **countries of origin** such as Afghanistan, Syria and neighbouring countries hosting refugee and migrant children, UNICEF is carrying out one of its largest operations in history, supporting millions of children with lifesaving assistance and relief.

UNICEF is appealing for **US\$14 million** to support the needs of children and women affected by the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe until the end of 2016. Immediate UNICEF funding needs for the first six months of the response are estimated at **US\$6.5 million**. UNICEF has so far received **US\$3 million** and the current funding gap stands at **US\$10.891 million**. The existing funding gap for UNICEF response to the Syrian refugee crisis stands at **US\$457.5 million** as of September.

“The big challenge for UNICEF is how are we able to be creative, work with our partners to put in place protection measures for children on the move. The traditional way of doing things, whether children are moving with their families or without, is not really going to work because of the rate at which this is unfolding.”

Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Special Coordinator for the European Refugee/Migrant Crisis.



Protecting children, every step of the way

Children do not forfeit their right to a childhood when they cross borders. But children who arrive in new lands may not know where to turn to make sure their rights are respected. Most do not speak the language or know the rules and procedures for entering a country or the definitions of a refugee, a migrant or an asylum seeker. They only know they are hungry, cold, scared or alone.

They also may face discrimination, xenophobia and suspicion within their new communities.

Protecting the rights of children on the move requires commitment and cooperation. Listed below are critical steps that governments and local authorities in Europe can take to protect the rights, lives and futures of children – irrespective of their nationality, migration, residence, or refugee status.¹⁹

As winter approaches, accelerate efforts to meet the survival and welfare needs of children on the move

Consistent access to essential services including effective search and rescue operations at sea, shelter, winter items, child-friendly spaces, water and sanitation, interventions for children with disabilities, nutrition and psychosocial support, critical information to inform their journey, and access to protection and other services.

Coordinated efforts across countries are required to ensure that facilities are scaled up to assist children and families who are in transit in bad weather.

Prioritize children and place their best interests in policies and procedures

The challenges and opportunities of migration for children can be different than those faced by adults. The response to child refugees and migrants should take into account the specific situation of each child on a case-by-case basis. Children's best interest should guide decisions at all stages – reception, relocation, return and reintegration, as applicable.

In addition, the time it takes for cases to make their way through complex immigration systems can seem like an eternity for a child. It can prevent children from returning to school and starting to build a future. Registration, processing and relocation of qualifying children should be fast-tracked to reduce the stresses they face.

Rapid access to fair and comprehensive asylum proceedings offer a pathway to stability for children and their families. Providing guidance and support through the procedures helps them understand and participate in the process.

Establish children first systems that determine and protect their best interests

Child first systems offer a way to provide children with access to health, education, housing and protection services that don't discriminate against them. These systems take into account the needs of children first and put the protection of their rights at the forefront of concerns about migration and refugee policies.

The child first approach also needs to be adopted for children and families in transit. This should include crisis reception centres that meet minimum child protection standards – such as having staff who have been trained in child rights and child welfare, offering psychosocial support and accommodation that keeps families together, and providing procedures and systems to detect and prevent violence, abuse and exploitation.

Fully protect the rights of unaccompanied minors and separated children

It is critical to safeguard the family and to prevent family separation for children at all times and in all decisions taken. Protecting the rights of children who are alone or separated from families requires that authorities:

1. Identify, track and monitor unaccompanied minors and separated children to protect them from exploitation and abuse;
2. Provide unaccompanied children with guardians to assess their best interests and make sure they have access to services they need;
3. Make efforts – even across borders – to reunite children with family members, when it is in the children's best interest.²⁰

Do not criminalize or detain children because they are refugees or migrants

Children should not be criminalized because they seek asylum. Detaining children just because they are refugees or migrants violates their rights, and robs them of educational opportunities and the chance to realize their potential.²¹ Detention can expose them to dangers including abuse and exploitation. For most children, remaining with parents and relatives in family-friendly environments can provide a much needed sense of security and stability.

¹⁹ The details of these policy asks come from: United Nations Children's Fund, 'Children & International Migration: The Basics', internal paper by the Division of Data, Research and Policy, UNICEF, New York, September 2015.

²⁰ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Children & International Migration: The Basics', internal paper by the Division of Data, Research and Policy, UNICEF, New York, September 2015, p. 5.

²¹ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Children & International Migration: The Basics', internal paper by the Division of Data, Research and Policy, UNICEF, New York, September 2015, p. 6.

Alternatives to detention include community-based case management and check-in mechanisms that allow children and families to remain together.

Rigorously collect information about children on the move – including age, gender and nationality

Collecting data about children on the move – whether with family or alone – allows international organizations, non-governmental organizations and national officials to make sure children are protected. It gives governments and organizations the opportunity to coordinate efforts and intervene with the right support at the right time – support including counselling and learning opportunities.

Protect the rights and safety of children who return to their country of origin

Never return a refugee or migrant child or family to a country where there is a risk of human rights violation against them. Decisions to return children to their countries of origin must be the result of fair procedures that take into account the best

interest of the children and incorporate their voices and views. Any proposal for return of children to countries of origin should also depend on cooperation between countries and thorough assessment and planning; reintegration programmes should provide adequate support for children so they – and their families – are safe and protected and have informed and viable options for their future.

Help children feel safe in their new home communities

Stronger efforts are needed to promote the integration of refugee and migrant families into new communities when their journey comes to an end. This requires proactively tackling xenophobia, racism and discrimination by improving local knowledge and addressing negative images of refugees and migrants.

“The big question for us in Europe, for me as a European, is: are we ready for this, will we be able to give these children the future that they risked their lives for.”

Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Special Coordinator for the European Refugee/Migrant Crisis.



Much lost, much to give – what children have told us

For host communities, an influx of children on the move can seem like a flood of obligation and want. Certainly it is true that many arrive exhausted and scared. But children also come with great talent and energy; they arrive with much to give.

For a 14-year-old girl, the trip from her war-torn home meant leaving behind friends and possessions as she hunkered down on the floor of a bus, bullets flying on both sides.

A 17-year-old boy packed away his dream of one day starting a tech company to seek construction work and a home with his mother and brothers in a more peaceful land.

A 16-year-old girl separated from her mother and siblings on a trek that took her across the final border in the trunk of a car.

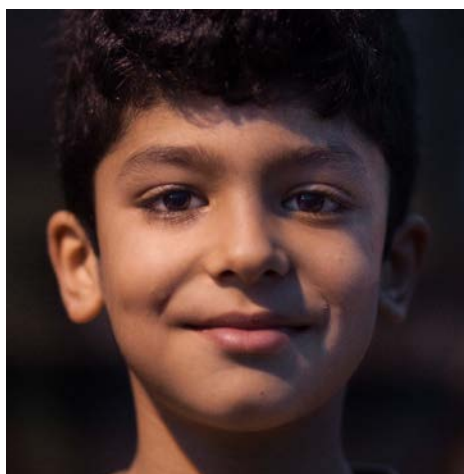
The 16-year-old was reunited with her mother after a year. Her goal is to be a dentist or a photographer. Perhaps she will give her neighbours reasons to smile.

For the 14-year-old who dodged bullets on the floor of a bus, a chance to pursue higher education will help her achieve her goal of becoming a doctor or engineer. Perhaps she will contribute to the health or infrastructure of the country where she ultimately makes her home.

The 17-year-old has already reduced the hours he works on a construction site so he can return to school. Perhaps one day he will start a tech company and fill his payroll with local talent.



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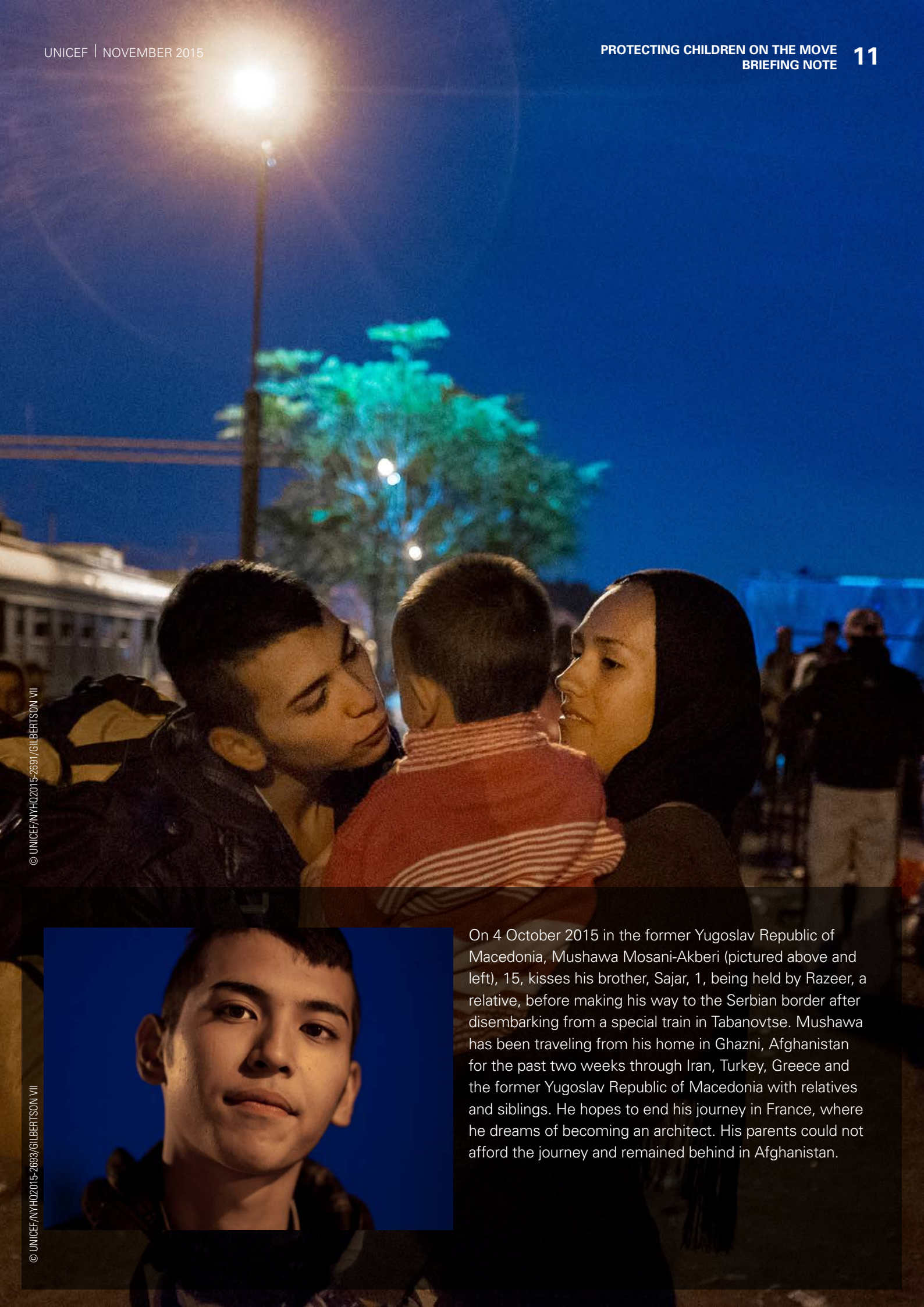
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FOOTNOTES FROM PAGE 2:

1. This figure is for 2014. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World at War: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014, UNHCR, Geneva, 18 September 2015, p. 2.
2. This estimation comes from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World at War: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014, UNHCR, Geneva, 18 September 2015, p. 2., which says that 51 per cent of 19.5 million refugees worldwide are children and from the Office of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/internally-displaced-and-refugee-children/>, accessed 30 October 2015, which says that 11.2 to 13.7 million children are internally displaced.
3. World Bank Group, Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016: Development Goals in an Era of Demographic Change. Advance Edition for 2016 publication. World Bank, Washington, D.C., p. 100.; and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Migration Stock by age and sex database, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesage.shtml>, accessed 30 October 2015.
4. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Migration Stock by age and sex database, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesage.shtml>, accessed 30 October 2015.
5. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World at War: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014, UNHCR, Geneva, 18 September 2015, p. 13; and the World Bank database, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL/countries/1W?order=wbapi_data_value_2014%20wbapi_data_value%20wbapi_data_value-last&sort=asc&display=default, accessed 16 October.
6. United Nations Children's Fund, Children of Syria, <http://childrenofsyria.info/2015/10/>, accessed 6 October 2015.
7. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World at War: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014, UNHCR, Geneva, 18 September 2015, p. 2.
8. United Nations Children's Fund, 'Over 1.4 million children forced to flee conflict in Nigeria and region', News note, 18 September 2015, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_85551.html, accessed 19 October 2015.
9. United Nations Children's Fund, 'UNICEF and WFP intensify efforts to defeat malnutrition in South Sudan', News note, 9 September 2015, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_83153.html
10. United Nations Children's Fund, 'Six months of violence in Yemen leave more than 500 children dead, some 1.7 million at risk of malnutrition', News note, 4 September 2015, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_85714.html, accessed 19 October 2015.



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On 4 October 2015 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mushawa Mosani-Akberi (pictured above and left), 15, kisses his brother, Sajar, 1, being held by Razeer, a relative, before making his way to the Serbian border after disembarking from a special train in Tabanovtse. Mushawa has been traveling from his home in Ghazni, Afghanistan for the past two weeks through Iran, Turkey, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with relatives and siblings. He hopes to end his journey in France, where he dreams of becoming an architect. His parents could not afford the journey and remained behind in Afghanistan.

For further information please contact:

Marie-Pierre Poirier

Special Coordinator, Refugee/Migrant Crisis in Europe
Regional Director, CEE/CIS
UNICEF, Geneva
Tel: +41 22 909 5502
Email: mppoirier@unicef.org

Afshan Khan

Director, Office of Emergency Programs (EMOPS)
UNICEF, New York
Tel: +1 212 326 7631
Email: akhan@unicef.org

Olav Kjørven

Director, Public Partnerships Division (PPD)
UNICEF, New York
Tel: +1 212 326 7160
Email: okjorven@unicef.org

Gerard Bocquenet

Director, Private Sector Fundraising and Partnerships Division (PPF)
UNICEF, Geneva
Tel: +41 229095701
Email: gbocquenet@unicef.org