

Majority of children fleeing to Europe just want to get away, UNICEF reports

25 July 2017 – Facing violence and trauma in Libya and other countries, thousands of children decided to flee by themselves, seeking to get away but not necessarily aiming for Europe, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) today reported.

A new study of push-pull factors on child marriage showed that 75 per cent of children on the move decided to leave unaccompanied and that initially, they had no intention to come to Europe, UNICEF spokesperson Sarah Crowe told journalists in Geneva.

“What was striking in the new findings was that there were far more push factors, pushing children away from home – conflicts or violence at home – than there were pull factors [that lure them to Europe], and this went against the current narrative,” Ms. Crowe said.

She noted that of the children who arrived in Libya, 63 per cent of young people left the country because of the generalized violence and trauma they suffered or witnessed, making them more willing to take terrifying sea journeys.

“As one young Gambian boy said, ‘if you have a lion behind your back and a sea in front of you, you take the sea,’” said Ms. Crowe.

Among girls interviewed, one in five left because of forced child marriage at home.

For the first six months of the year, a total of 12,239 children had arrived to Italy, and 93 per cent were travelling alone – the majority of them teenage boys, according to UNICEF figures.

In Greece, however, the majority of children were actually being sent on the voyage by their parents, or were accompanied by their parents.

UNICEF said the study is important for policymakers to understand why the children are making the voyage and how best to help them once they arrive in Europe.

Deadly voyages increasingly expensive

Voyages through the so-called Eastern Mediterranean route and into the European Union now cost \$5,000 or more, according to the UN Migration Agency ([IOM](#)).

“With increased border controls, it has become harder to reach Europe,” noted Livia Styp-Rekowska, IOM’s Border Management Specialist in Vienna. “One constant, however, is the increase in sums demanded.”

She noted new data released today that shows "the cost of getting into Europe [has increased significantly](#) when compared to 2016, the routes have changed, and different countries of destination are being prioritized."

People arriving from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan are charged the most, [according to IOM](#).

The most popular destination up to June 2016 was overwhelmingly Germany, but migrants now seek to get to France, Sweden, Italy, Norway, Austria and Denmark as well, with Greece used as a popular transit country.