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World Day against Trafficking in Persons: solutions to protect migrant children

Migrant children at risk of trafficking: Tdh takes action!

The number of unaccompanied and separated [migrant children](#) is constantly rising on the new Balkan route and they are highly exposed to dangers such as trafficking or exploitation. Terre des hommes' (Tdh) Children and Youth in Migration Programme has been exploring the situation of children who are victims or at risk of trafficking in human beings along this migration corridor to find solutions to protect them.

Despite a very limited number of people on the Balkan route having been officially identified as victims of trafficking in human beings, the [Trafficking along Migration Route to Europe](#) project, a research we conducted together with [the International Centre for Migration Policy Development \(ICMPD\)](#), succeeded to uncover specific information and indications of trafficking and exploitation. This helps us better understand current dynamics along this route and equip frontline professionals to protect children at risk against this scourge.



The forms of trafficking

The main forms of trafficking affecting children and adults emerging from the research are:

- **sexual exploitation**, mainly affecting sub-Saharan Africa girls and woman, but also boys and men, particularly Afghani boys subjected to sexual exploitation through bacha bazi (a form of child prostitution);
- **labour exploitation**, whereby people are in a desperate situation and in many cases do not have the legal right to work;
- **forced criminality**, which is a form of trafficking that does not appear in the official statistics. Cases include exploitation in petty crime, drug dealing and migrant smuggling.

Lack of care as a main risk for children

People travelling along the Balkan route and having reached their intended destination face risks including legal status issues like receiving a negative decision in the asylum or family reunification procedure, long waiting periods and related difficulties with income generation. Specifically for unaccompanied and separated children, delays in the appointment of a guardian can cause harm.

Many unaccompanied or separated children are not provided with adequate care and placement, for reasons including flawed age assessment procedures and limited capacity at child reception facilities. A considerable number of them are reported as having disappeared from care and thus find themselves outside the child protection system. Travelling alone, they are exposed to violence and trauma, have a lack of awareness of their rights, the local language or country-specific knowledge.

“All in all, children - whether they are trafficking victims, migrants in a regular or irregular situation, seeking asylum or not, unaccompanied, separated or accompanied - should be treated as children first and foremost, and exercise their rights on an equal basis with national citizen children,” explains Pierre Cazenave, Senior Advocacy Advisor for Tdh Children and Youth in Migration Programme. Thanks to this research, Tdh is now taking action to make this pledge come true, by working with frontline professionals to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to identify, refer and protect migrant children who are victims or at risk of trafficking.