

Report says 18,000 child migrants vanished across Europe in less than 2 years



A child migrant is seen waiting for a train to Serbia at Gevgelija, on the Macedonian-Greek border. (File photo by AFP)

London, April 23 (RHC)-- At least 18,000 unaccompanied child migrants have disappeared since arrival in European countries in a time span of shorter than two years, according to area reports. The Guardian, citing an investigation, reported that the 18,292 children had gone missing across the continent between January 2018 and December 2020 -- about 17 children a day.

In 2020 alone, 5,768 children disappeared in more than a dozen European countries, including Greece, Italy and Germany. According to available data, one in six was solo and under 15 years of age. Nearly 90 percent were boys. Most of the children came to Europe from Morocco, but Algeria, Eritrea, Guinea and Afghanistan were also among the countries of origin.

The investigation, which collected data on missing unaccompanied minors from all 27 EU nations, as well as Norway, Moldova, Switzerland and Britain, indicated that the true figures could be much higher. Spain, Belgium and Finland provided data only up to the end of 2019. Denmark, France and the UK provided no data at all.

In March 2019, a media report found that at least 60 Vietnamese children had disappeared from Dutch shelters. They had been reportedly trafficked into Britain to work on cannabis farms and in nail salons.

Children advocacy groups say the latest findings raise serious questions about the extent European countries were willing to protect unaccompanied child migrants.

Federica Toscano, head of advocacy and migration at the Missing Children Europe, said those kids were among the migrants most vulnerable to violence, exploitation and trafficking. "The high number of missing children is a symptom of a child-protection system that doesn't work."

"Criminal organizations are increasingly targeting migrant children," said Toscano, "especially unaccompanied ones and many of them become victims of labor and sexual exploitation, forced begging and trafficking."

Herman Bolhaar, the Dutch national rapporteur on human trafficking, said, "We cannot lose sight of these children." "They deserve our protection."

According to figures released by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than one million refugees reached European shores in 2015, while over 3,700 people either died or went missing in their perilous journeys to the continent.

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