

Media Update

21 April 2017

UNICEF

Press Release

EMBARGOED TO 00:01 GMT, 21 April 2017

More than 150 children estimated to have died taking Central Mediterranean migration route this year - UNICEF

NEW YORK / GENEVA, 21 April 2017 – According to UNICEF estimates, more than 150 children have died crossing the Central Mediterranean from North Africa to Italy so far this year. Yet the true number of child casualties is almost certainly higher given that many children on the move are unaccompanied, so their deaths often go unreported.

Since the start of the year, nearly 37,000 refugees and migrants, 13 per cent of whom are children, have reached Italy by sea via the Central Mediterranean – an increase of 42 per cent when compared to the same time period in 2016. This increase comes despite the grave risks involved in traveling one of the most perilous migration routes in the world. At least 849 people have been lost at sea along the route since January.

“It is deeply concerning that vulnerable people, including thousands of children, are risking their lives to reach Europe’s shores using this incredibly dangerous route,” said Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe. “This is further evidence that when safe and legal pathways to migration are cut off, desperate children and families will do whatever they can to flee conflict, poverty and deprivation.”

Even over the past few days, calmer waters and warmer weather in the Mediterranean have been accompanied by a surge in refugees and migrants attempting to cross. During the Easter weekend alone, more than 8,300 people were rescued from the sea between Libya and Italy.

More attempted crossings bring more death, with eight migrants reported to have drowned over the weekend. The fatality rate for the Central Mediterranean migrant route currently stands at 3 per cent for 2017.

The number of unaccompanied and separated children risking their lives on the Central Mediterranean has also dramatically increased, with 1,875 arriving in Italy during January and February this year – a 40 per cent increase over 2016.

Download multimedia content here: <http://uni.cf/2oqS8sd>

Notes to Editors:

UNICEF's GLOBAL POLICY ASKS FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

1. Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence
2. End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating
3. Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status
4. Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services
5. Press for action on the underlying causes of large scale movements of refugees and migrants
6. Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination

About UNICEF

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit www.unicef.org.

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