



# Understanding the humanitarian needs of unaccompanied migrant children

*IOM adopts a comprehensive approach to address drivers and vulnerabilities*

**13 October**—“All I wanted was to help my father by contributing to the expenses of my two sisters’ marriages. If I didn’t have sisters, I wouldn’t have gone on that boat,” explains an Egyptian child who was one of 132 unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) rescued on August 26, 2015.

That day, a boat carrying 183 Egyptian migrants was rescued south of the island of Crete. The overwhelming majority of those aboard were the migrant children, reflecting an increasing trend of irregular migration of Egyptian UMCs IOM has observed over the past five years.

In 2014, 2,007 (49 per cent) of the 4,095 Egyptians arriving in Italy were UMCs in comparison to only 28 per cent in 2011. In 2015 this upward trend continues. Egypt holds the highest proportion of UMCs among irregular migrants out of all countries of origin, and in August 2015 Egypt was the top sending country of unaccompanied children, with 495 UMCs reaching Italy.

After the rescue, IOM Egypt immediately deployed a team of experts to meet with and assist these children and others in six protective shelters in Athens, Volos and Thessaloniki. The children told of setting sail from Baltim, Egypt with the intention of reaching Italy, having arranged to pay the smugglers upon arrival in Europe. Most reported physical and verbal abuse from the smugglers, as well as scant food and water throughout the journey.

Many of the children said that they were the main breadwinners of their families. Some decided inde-

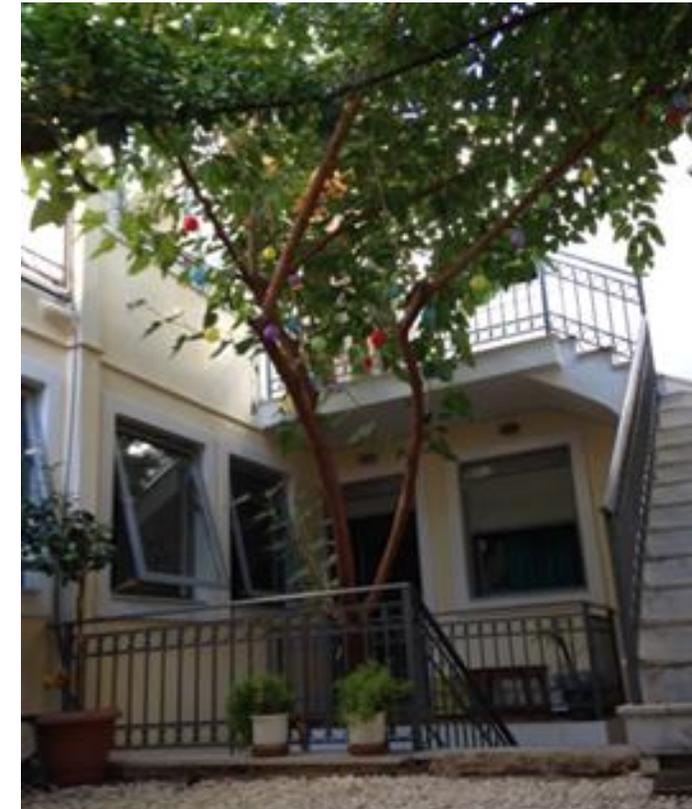
pendently to move, while others made the decision to migrate irregularly in conjunction with their family, as they did not see any economic future for themselves in their communities of origin. Given their very poor background, most children had been forced to drop out of school and work to help their families.

For those UMCs wanting to return home, best interest determination (BID) procedures are often lengthy. In response to the particular vulnerabilities of UMCs, IOM organized a two-day workshop from 29 to 30 September 2015 in Cairo, Egypt, attended by 45 Egyptian government officials and media representatives to discuss national and international legal frameworks for the protection of unaccompanied migrant children. The workshop will enable the Egyptian government to establish and streamline procedures to ensure that the immediate humanitarian needs of vulnerable migrants – including UMCs – are met.

Amr Taha, Head of Office at IOM Egypt, welcomes the new Egyptian anti-smuggling law, which was drafted with the support from IOM Egypt, and recently endorsed by the National Security sub-Committee for Legislative Reform. It is now pending prime ministerial endorsement. “The law will continue to strengthen the protection of irregular migrants and enable the prosecution of smugglers in line with international standards.”

Through its programming, IOM Egypt takes a comprehensive approach to address irregular migration that is in line with the [IOM Response Plan for the Mediterranean](#). These activities include shelter and healthcare, as well as durable solutions either through local integra-

tion or through Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), which requires additional funding given the large numbers of Egyptian UMCs arriving in Europe. In parallel, the Mission addresses the drivers of irregular migration by enhancing employability and livelihood opportunities for Egyptian youth.



A look inside one of the new protective shelters for migrants in Greece. ©IOM 2015

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