There is a striking discrepancy between the importance of the topic of violence against children in migration and the scarcity of data. More research on the epidemiology of violence against children in migration is needed. Such evidence will support the development and adaptation of effective, tailored, and child-sensitive prevention and intervention programs for children in migration, as well as advocacy interventions aiming for improvement in key policies and procedures to address violence against children and provide adequate protection for children on the move.

Through qualitative research, involving children in both research and advocacy activities and publishing a policy paper, the study will contribute to better protection of refugee and migrant children by:

- Sensitizing the general public, key actors and policymakers through evidence-based advocacy and campaigning on the topic of the child-rights violations against migrant/refugee children arriving in Europe through the Balkans migration route;
- Empowering migrant/refugee children to actively participate and act as agents of change.

Since 2018, the Western Balkans route has become the most used route for refugees and migrants, children and adults, trying to reach safety. The route is travelled by thousands of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, and the countries of North Africa. The Balkans countries are seen as countries of transit where refugees and migrants do not expect to find the support and opportunities for building their lives and they thus try to continue their journey towards the Western European countries. Approximately one-third of refugees and migrants are children, including thousands of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Unaccompanied children on the move are especially vulnerable to risks related to migration and displacement, such as risks of violence, including sexual violence, other forms of abuse, and exploitation. Maltreatment of children can include physical or psychological abuse, and can be caregiver-perpetrated acts, stranger- and peer-perpetrated violence. Such acts can occur anywhere, in their country of origin, in transit, or in their destination country. The smugglers control the journey, determine the means of transport, allocate the resources, even when it comes to eating or drinking. Violence, including sexual violence by smugglers, is very common. In addition, refugee and migrant children often testify about violence, including physical violence, and pushbacks at borders in the region, their valuables and personal items being taken away or destroyed and explicit requests for asylum ignored. Violence against refugee and migrant children is a serious violation that results in far-ranging psychological, social, physical, and economic consequences, affecting children’s health and wellbeing and taking them away from their childhood and their future.

**PROJECT AIM:**

The aim of the project is to identify solutions for violence against children arriving in Europe through the Balkans migration route, and, in a larger sense, contribute to the respect for the principles and provisions of international human rights and refugee law for refugee and migrant children arriving in Europe. The research will focus on issues migrant and refugee children are facing in those countries in terms of violence, to better understand the forms of violence against migrant children arriving in Europe. The research will be used to address the issue by increasing the visibility of the child-rights violations against migrant/refugee children traveling the Balkans migration route and to empower key actors to take appropriate action through evidence-based advocacy. Children will be active participants and agents of change by contributing to the creation of a child-friendly report of the research findings and subsequent advocacy towards relevant decision-makers.

**STUDY CONTRIBUTION:**

There is a striking discrepancy between the importance of the topic of violence against children in migration and the scarcity of data. More research on the epidemiology of violence against children in migration is needed. Such evidence will support the development and adaptation of effective, tailored, and child-sensitive prevention and intervention programs for children in migration, as well as advocacy interventions aiming for improvement in key policies and procedures to address violence against children and provide adequate protection for children on the move. Through qualitative research, involving children in both research and advocacy activities and publishing a policy paper, the study will contribute to better protection of refugee and migrant children by:

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