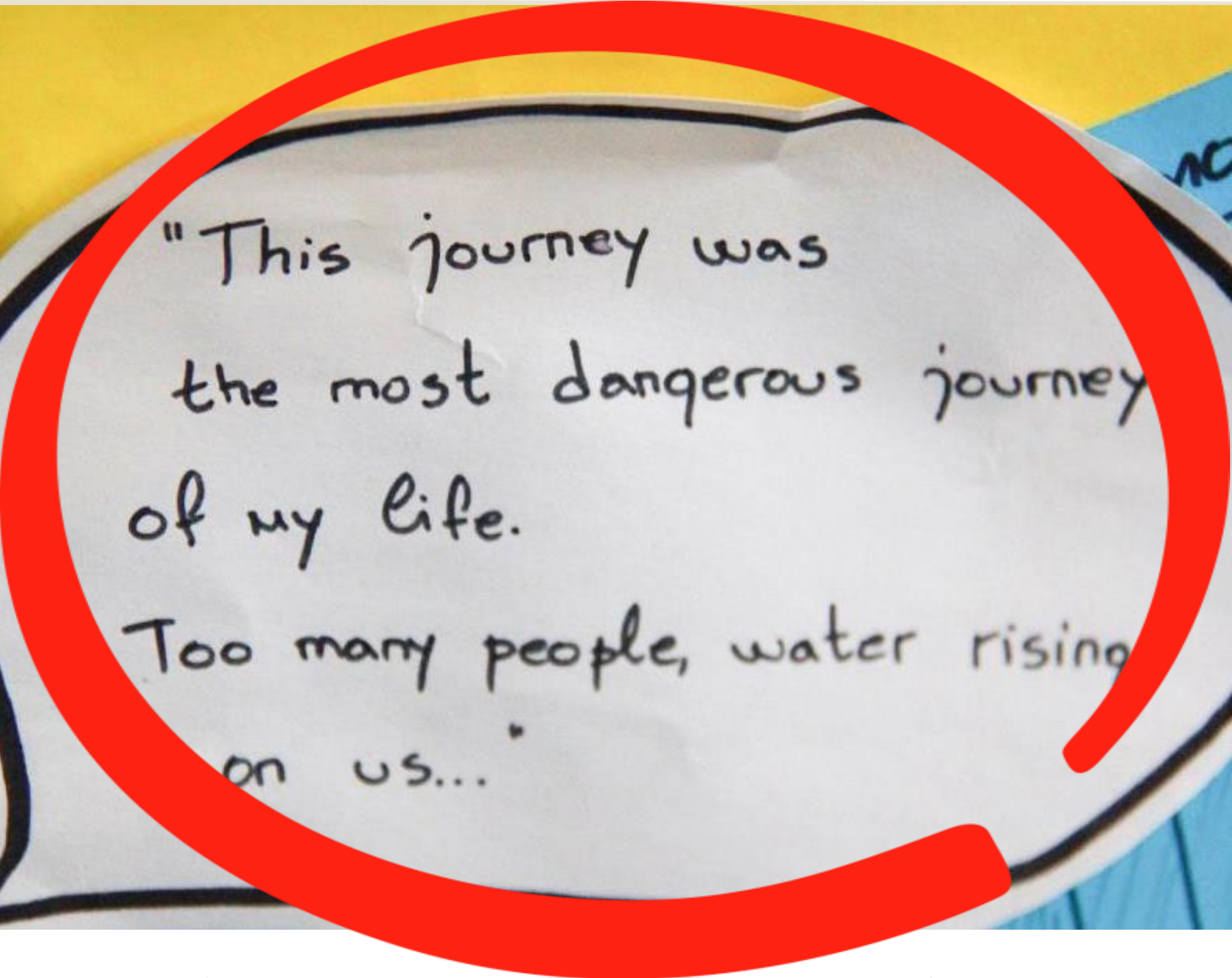


# Girls on the Move in the Balkans



"This journey was  
the most dangerous journey  
of my life.  
Too many people, water rising  
on us..."

# The Girls on the Move Initiative: Background

- **Where are the girls?** Present in migration flows, absent in research and data collection.
- As girls' experiences remain untold, **programmes and policies fail to adapt to their needs and protect their rights.**
- Research for evidence-based strategies to **improve programming and policy for Girls on the Move.**

## Girls on the Move in the Balkans

- Greece, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Participatory research with 94 girls (+47 adults)
- Desk review of existing literature and interviews with family members and key stakeholders



# The Girls on the Move Initiative: overarching findings

- **Girls on the Move fall between the cracks in research, policy and programming.** *Intersectional and holistic approaches are needed to account for their reality.*
- **Girls on the Move are diverse.** *”One size fits all” interventions will fail to protect their rights.*
- **Girls on the Move are neither victims nor victors.** *Address risks, but also strengthen girls’ own agency.*



# Girls on the Move in the Balkans: Pre-migration

- **Gender inequalities** - a clear **push factor for migration**
  - Gender-based violence against the girls and/or their mothers, directly motivated migration. *2/3 of Iranians in Serbia listed GBV.*
  - Mothers often acted as allies, helping daughters to escape situations of gender-based violence. The mother-daughter bond is a strong protective factor throughout migration.
  - Having daughters in itself served as an additional push factor for families to leave, to prevent forced marriages or ensure access to education for girls. *50% of parents in BiH said this influenced.*
- Girls reported having **little information** about the journey ahead of time and were generally unaware of the risks they would face.
- **Less girls reach Serbia and BiH than Greece**, including a lower proportion of unaccompanied girls, suggesting risk aversion but also **inadequate identification of unaccompanied girls.**

- Greece: 42.7% of all children are girls, 7% of UASC
- Serbia: 18-33% of all children are girls, 1-2% of UASC
- BiH: 16% of all children are girls, 1-2% of UASC

“The reason we are here is my father (...). He wanted to sell us, me and my sister, to somebody who was much older, who already had his own family and kids (...). We spoke with my mother and we made the decision. One night we escaped.”

*Moska, Afghanistan*

“I was raped and could not stay there. My mother would tell me I should leave, go somewhere secure.”

*Asal, Afghanistan*

# Girls on the Move in the Balkans: the Journey

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“...From Turkey to Greece it was very hard...very hard. Six times we tried to cross from Turkey to Greece...we tried, we tried...and we didn't make it, we stayed four days in the snow. The second time, three days it was raining, we stayed in the rain. (...) Because we were a large group of people, the police caught us. (...) All the things we had with us, they found them, they took them...they took us back to the river, at the border between Turkey-Greece and burned our things in front of us (...) They were wearing masks so we could not see their faces (...) they told us to keep our heads down, whoever moved, they beat (...) The days in the snow were so hard. Imagine being four-five days in the forests, in the snow, with no food, nothing. The last night, when I woke up, I lost my senses.”

– Massah, 17, Afghanistan

# Girls on the Move in the Balkans: the Journey

- **Girls face multiple risks during the journey** – some of which can be fatal
  - **Average duration:** Greece 8.7 months; Serbia and BiH 24 months. Extreme risks, limited access to learning and uncertainty of the future is likely to have a detrimental impact on development and wellbeing.
  - **Extreme physical risks:** Harsh weather conditions and sense of powerlessness – many indicate being close to dying.
  - **Family separation**, experienced by some of the girls.
  - **Sexual violence** permeates every aspect of transit as a constant threat *and* lived reality for girls on the move and their mothers.
  - **Border crossing and pushbacks:** violence, seizure of valuables, body searches by male officers. Also some positive encounters.
  - Relationships with **smugglers** often entailed extreme risks and danger, including sexual violence, family separation, exploitation.
- The girls struggled to articulate their stories, expressed detachment from their journey and showed a **sense of disorientation** and loss of memory.
- Girls and their families mostly relied on the **information from other refugees and migrants or smugglers**. No one mentioned official institutions or NGOs are relevant information sources.
- Girls develop **protection strategies:** friendships, strong bonds with mothers and sisters, group travel.



# Girls on the Move in the Balkans: the Arrival

- Girls do not perceive the Balkans as their final destination: **lack of durable solutions** prevent girls from investing in their present lives.
- **The type of accommodation** impacts the notion of permanence - girls living independently with their families are more likely to imagine their future in Greece.
- Girls report **dire conditions** at overcrowded reception centres, with poor safety and limited services. Mixed sleeping areas, no doors or lack of locks for wash facilities increase risks of sexual violence. *46% did not feel safe (Greece).*
- Unaccompanied girls in Greece reported being detained in **protective custody** or accommodated in **safe zones**, not complying with minimum standards.
- Continued risks of **sexual violence**, combined with a fear/reluctance to report.
- **Access to education** is not guaranteed with a noticeable gap of activities and schooling for older girls, informal education mostly targeting younger children.
- The acute **lack of interpreters and access to information**, resulted in girls feeling alone and afraid.

“When we reached Samos, they took me to the camp. Sleep and food were awful. First, I was in a tent, then in a container. There were police outside but no security. People opened the door in the middle of the night. We were 15 girls in one container.”  
– Itimad, Kuwait

“I want to go to school, but I don’t, because I am 17 years old.”  
- Zahra, Iran.

# Girls on the Move in the Balkans: Recommendations

## Core recommendation:

**Listen to, and learn from, girls themselves**

## To invest in, promote and improve:

- Ensure **data collection** is disaggregated by, at minimum, age and sex and strengthen intersectional gender analysis
- Ensure effective access to gender and age-sensitive **asylum procedures**, including asylum for gender-based prosecution.
- Improve **access to services**, including education, mental health and psychosocial support, particularly for older girls
- Ensure provision of **age and gender-sensitive information** about support services, legal options and children's rights
- Strengthen the procedures to **prevent, identify and respond to gender-based violence**, including increased security and girl-friendly accommodation facilities
- Improve gender sensitive and age appropriate **child protection procedures** upon identification at the borders
- Improve **identification of unaccompanied girls**



- Build on **girls' own resilience and agency**, including peer-to-peer support and intergenerational solidarity



**THANK YOU!**



**Save the Children**