

ENHANCING SUPPORT FOR UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN IN BOSNIA AND SERBIA: ADDRESSING CRITICAL CHALLENGES

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UASCs face severe challenges on migration routes through BiH and Serbia. These vulnerable children, fleeing conflict or poverty, encounter restrictive borders, exploitation, and abuse. Due to prolonged stays in these transit countries, they experience a lack of adequate protection and support amidst growing violence along the Western Balkan route.

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Info Park is a Serbian NGO providing essential support, information, and protection to migrants, including refugees

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the growing challenges faced by Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) along the Western Balkan route, highlighting gaps in protection and the urgent need for improved support systems.

OBJECTIVE

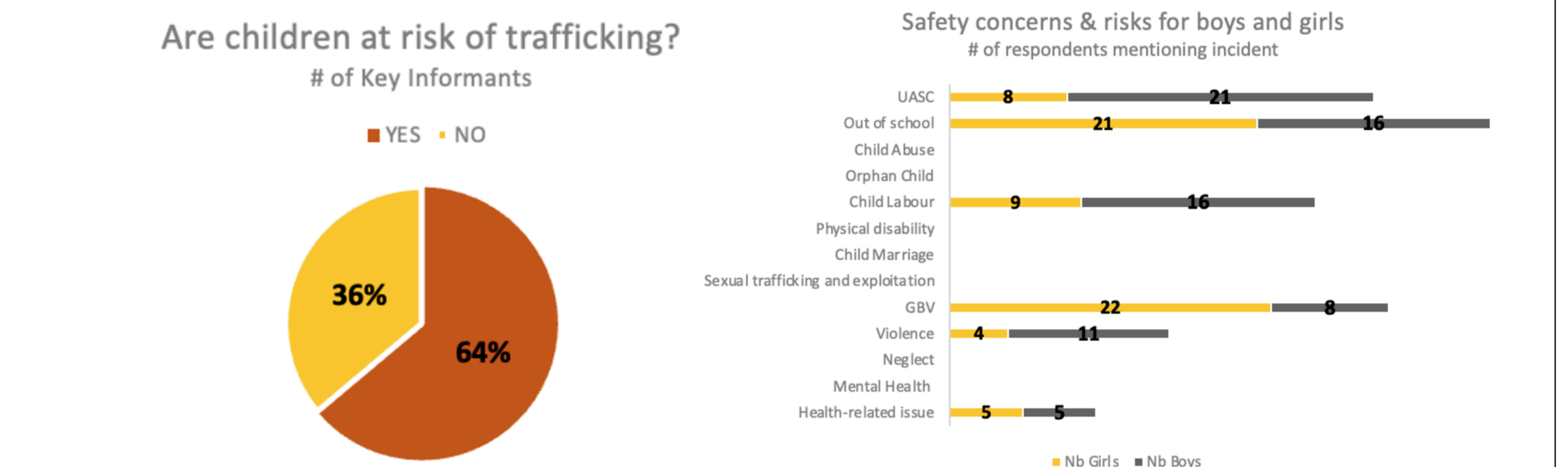
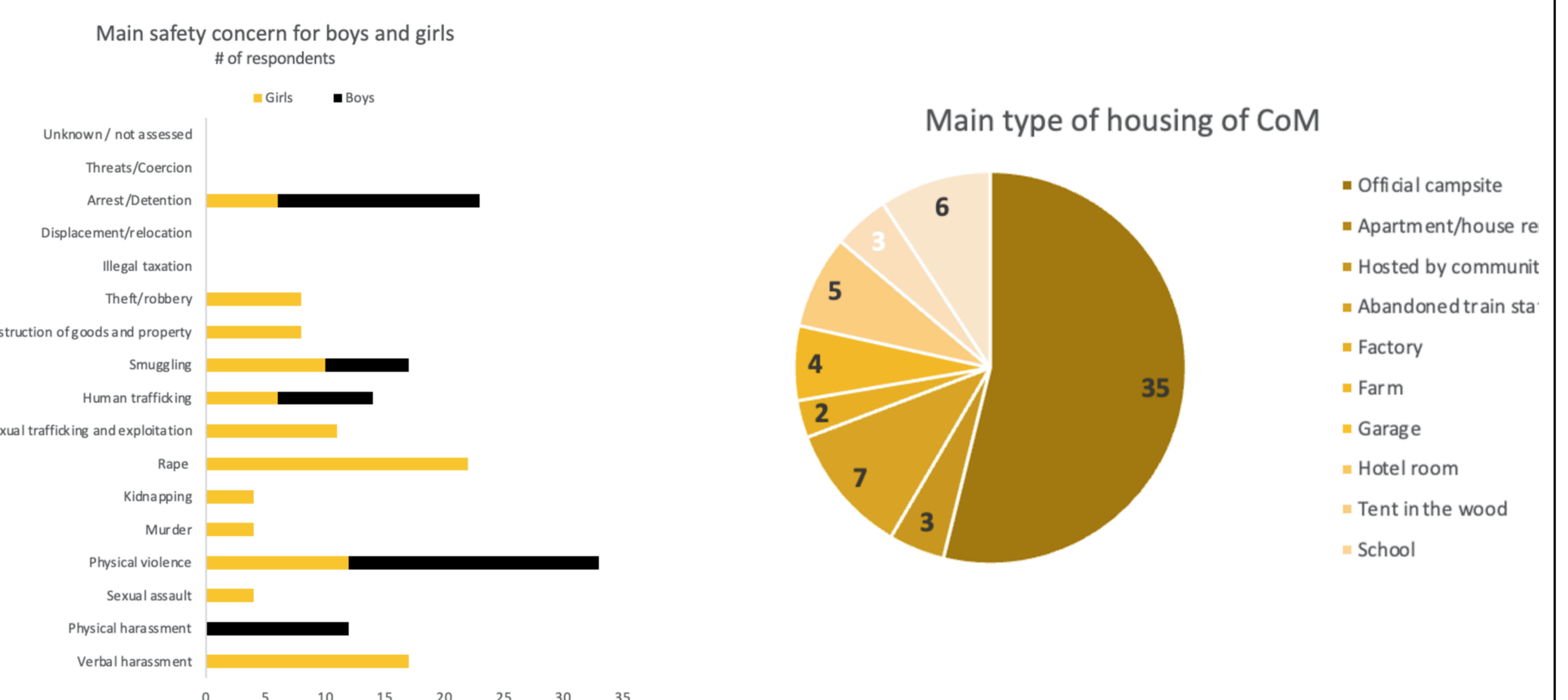
The research objective was to explore and address the systemic challenges faced by UASCs in Serbia and Bosnia, with a focus on improving their protection, support, and access to essential services.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews, document analysis, stakeholder engagement, and thematic analysis using process tracing to identify key issues.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

- **Transit as an Excuse:** States along the Western Balkan route often use the "transit" status of migrants, including UASC, as a rationale for providing minimal support, leading to gaps in protection and essential services.
- **Unsafe Route:** The Western Balkan route has become increasingly dangerous for UASC, with heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse, especially in border areas with limited oversight and protection mechanisms.



- **Increased Border Control:** The new EU agreement between Serbia and Frontex, increasing surveillance and presence at borders, has had swift consequences for refugees, particularly UASC. This heightened border monitoring makes it even more difficult for UASC to move safely across the Balkan Route.
- **Deteriorating Conditions for Refugees:** Refugees and migrants face deteriorating conditions in borderlands, including lack of access to essential services, with many avoiding formal camps. UASC often refuse camp accommodation, preferring to stay in transit areas, despite hazardous conditions.
- **Consolidation of Services:** Northern reception and asylum centers in Serbia have closed, leaving southern centers and Info Park as the only significant providers of support to refugees in Belgrade. This has resulted in limited options for UASC, many of whom wait in Belgrade before attempting to move westward, often via dangerous border crossings.
- **Increased Violence and Exploitation:** Violence, abuse, and exploitation have been consistent themes, especially for UASC. The conditions along the Western Balkan route have become more perilous, with reports of violence perpetrated by border officials and smugglers.

ANALYSIS

The analysis focused on indemnification of patterns and root causes of the vulnerabilities faced by UASC through thematic analysis, tracing the systemic challenges that hinder effective protection and support in Serbia and Bosnia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations call for enhanced legal protections, improved access to services, and stronger collaboration between governments, NGOs, and communities to ensure the safety and well-being of UASC.

CONCLUSION

The research highlighted the urgent need for enhanced protection and support for UASC, especially along the increasingly unsafe Western Balkan route. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among governments, NGOs, and communities to create safer and more supportive environments for children on the move.



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