

Protecting all children in migration: Commission outlines priority actions

While EU and Member States' legislation provide a solid framework for protection, the recent surge in arrivals has put national systems under pressure and exposed gaps and shortcomings. This is why the Commission is today setting out actions to reinforce the protection of all migrant children at all stages of the process. It is necessary to ensure that migrant children are swiftly identified when they arrive in the EU and that they receive child-adequate treatment. Trained personnel need to be available to assist children during their status determination and children should be provided with sustainable long-term perspectives through better access to education and health care. Child protection is a central priority in the European Agenda on Migration and the Commission will continue to support Member States' efforts through training, guidance, operational support and funding.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"The number of children arriving in the EU with or without their families has increased dramatically. We need to make sure that children who need protection actually receive it. And we need to do it now. This is our moral duty as well as our legal responsibility. Children should be our top priority as they are the most vulnerable, especially when they have nobody to guide them. That is why today we are setting out a number of concrete actions to better protect, support and take care of the best interests of all children who are arriving in the European Union."*

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"One in three asylum seekers in Europe is a child. Children are the most vulnerable migrants and ensuring their protection from the moment they leave their home countries should be mainstreamed in our migration policy. This means that we need a comprehensive and stepped-up response. Today we propose concrete actions to support our Member States in addressing the needs of all children at all stages of migration: to improve the identification of children, to train involved personnel, to step up relocation, but also to ensure swift family tracing in countries of origin and measures to enhance early integration. Both the Commission and our EU agencies stand ready to move forward to implement these actions."*

Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra **Jourová** added: *"When speaking about child migrants, we should never forget that first and foremost they are children. Their best interests must be taken into consideration at all stages of the migration process. Child migrants, especially those who are unaccompanied, should be supported by guardians or foster families, as early as possible. The integration of these children into our societies depends on how fast they can go back to a more stable life. We will continue to support Member States to give these children the childhood they deserve."*

Drawing on expertise from all relevant policy areas, the Commission is

proposing a number of priority areas for Member States to focus on, supported by the Commission and EU Agencies, to improve the protection of children in migration and ensure a closer link between the asylum and child protection services:

- **Swift identification and protection upon arrival:** A person responsible for child protection should be present at an early stage of the registration phase and in all reception facilities hosting children and **child protection officers should be appointed in each hotspot**. Member States should put in place the necessary procedures to systematically report and exchange information on all **missing children**.
- **Adequate reception conditions for children:** The needs of each child must be assessed as early as possible upon arrival and all children need to have **access to legal assistance, healthcare, psychosocial support and education** without delay and regardless of their status. For unaccompanied minors, the possibility of **foster or family-based care** should be provided. Everything must be done to provide **alternatives to administrative detention** for children.
- **Swift status determination and effective guardianship:** The role of **guardians** for unaccompanied minors should be strengthened. To this end, the Commission will establish a **European guardianship network** to exchange good practices. To support the implementation of **reliable age-assessment procedures** by all Member States, EASO will update its guidance shortly. Concerted efforts should also be made to **speed up family tracing and family reunification procedures**, within or outside the EU. In all procedures related to the migration process, cases with children should always be given priority. This goes for **relocation of unaccompanied migrants** from Greece or Italy as well.
- **Durable solutions and early integration measures:** The Commission will further promote the integration of children through **funding and the exchange of good practices**. Member States are called upon to **step up resettlement** of children in need of protection and to ensure that **family tracing and reintegration measures** are put in place for those children who are to be returned.
- **Addressing root causes and protecting children along migrant routes outside the EU:** The EU has stepped up its work with partner countries on mainstreaming child protection in migration under the **Migration Partnership Framework**. Further efforts are needed to support partner countries in strengthening national child protection systems and in **preventing child trafficking**. A timely follow-up to the recently-renewed **EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child**, including in countries of origin and transit, should be ensured.

A **determined, concerted and coordinated follow-up** to the key actions set out in this Communication is required at **EU, national, regional and local level**, also in cooperation with civil society and international organisations. The Commission will closely monitor this process and report regularly to the Council and European Parliament.

Background

In the context of the migration crisis, the number of child migrants arriving

in Europe has increased significantly. In 2015 and 2016, 30 percent of asylum applicants in the EU were children.

As children in migration are exposed to high risks of violence, trafficking or exploitation along migration routes or may go missing, or become separated from their families, they require a specific protection. Children have the right to be protected, in line with relevant provisions of EU law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and with international law on the rights of the child. The **child's best interests** must be the primary consideration in all actions or decisions concerning children.

This Communication follows up on the [European Agenda on Migration](#) and the [Communication on the State of Play of Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration](#). It builds on progress made under the [Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors \(2010-2014\)](#) as outlined in the Staff Working Paper accompanying the Communication.

It also builds on the 10th European Forum on the rights of the child organised by the Commission in November 2016 and on the [“Lost in Migration”](#) conference from January 2017, which have underlined the need for urgent targeted actions to better protect children in migration.

For more information

Communication: [The protection of children in migration](#)

Commission Staff Working Document: [Implementing the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors \(2010-2014\)](#)

Questions & Answers: [Protecting Children in Migration](#)

[Factsheet: Actions for the protection of children in migration](#)

[All press material on the European Agenda on Migration](#)