

Remarks by Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos at the press conference on protecting children in migration and relocation and resettlement

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Dear all,

I'm very glad to present to you today, – together with my colleague Vera Jourova – the priority actions for the protection of all children in migration.

Children are a very vulnerable group, but they are not a marginal group in the context of the current migratory situation in Europe.

Today, one in three asylum seekers in Europe is a child.

They need special protection wherever and whoever they are.

The best interests of the child should prevail at all times.

We want to ensure and improve the protection for ALL children at ALL stages of migration.

Every child is entitled to adequate treatment and protection, no matter what his or her legal status is.

We are of course not starting from scratch: both Member States and the EU level have put in place a strong migrant child protection framework in the past years.

But we need to shift gears – collectively. The protection of migrant children starts already before they arrive to the EU. The external and internal dimensions go hand in hand.

Over the past 2 years, we included migration in all our dialogues with third-countries but also at regional and global level. We are and will continue to invest in projects to protect migrant children outside Europe to ensure that they have access to healthcare and education.

We also have to protect children in migration more effectively at all stages inside the EU. We have to ensure that they are not at risk of being abused, that they are not exploited and do not go missing. We also have to avoid that children are drawn into criminal activities or radicalisation.

Our objective is that Member States give their endorsement to these actions over the coming months and that we work together to implement them.

The Commission will ensure that the funding available for the protection of the child is being fully used and that the EU agencies provide technical support to Member States.

Among the key actions, Member States have to ensure that the relocation and resettlement schemes work especially for unaccompanied minors.

This leads me to another point on today college agenda. Today we also adopted the 11th relocation and resettlement report.

We have already relocated more than 16,000 so far in total, of which more than 2,400 in the last reporting period.

With this, Member States, even though not all of them are participating, have set a new record on relocation.

Right now, we have around 14,000 eligible applicants in Greece and around 3,500 in Italy that are registered and ready to be relocated.

If Member States step-up the number of relocations, it is absolutely possible to relocate all those eligible in Greece and Italy by September.

To reach this objective our report today includes a number of recommendations for Member States. Now is the moment to sustain this progress, especially as regards the minors.

I am pleased that Austria will resume relocation and start with 50 vulnerable migrants including children from Italy.

On resettlement, we managed to resettle over two thirds of the 22,500 people to whom we committed to offer a safe legal path to Europe in July 2015. This is welcome news.

We are delivering on our commitment to share responsibility with third countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. We need to pursue our efforts to propose a viable alternative to irregular migration.

Finally, today we are also presenting our 6th monthly report on the Security Union. It comes in the aftermath of what is unfortunately yet another deadly terrorist attack on the European soil – Stockholm. Another attack which shows how urgently we must step-up our efforts to deliver a genuine and effective Security Union.

The emphasis of this report is on actions to combat organised crime – an area of criminal activity with frequent links to terrorism, drugs and firearms trafficking, migrant smuggling, cybercrime.

These are all priority policy areas with tangible impacts on the lives of our citizens.

Our work on organised crime and migrant smuggling is of course also closely linked to the protection of all children in migration.

I would like to pass the floor now to Vera, who will tell you more.