



# Protecting children in migration

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**Věra Jourová**

*Commissioner for Justice,  
Consumers and Gender Equality*



*Directorate-General for  
Justice and Consumers*



**One in four people currently seeking asylum in the EU are children.** 96,000 of them arrived unaccompanied, without their parents or other carers. Children in migration are more vulnerable than adults. They face a stronger risk of becoming victims of violence, physical or sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Many also go missing or are separated from their families during the migration journey. All children in need of international protection have a right to care and protection under international and EU law. The best interest of the child should be the primary consideration in all procedures applicable to unaccompanied minors – EU legislation contains specific provisions on their protection which all Member States are obliged to comply with.

## What is the EU doing to protect children in migration?

**EU legislation:** Child protection along the migration route is a top priority for the Commission and is central to the EU's asylum and migration legislation which contains strong safeguards for migrant children who seek international protection in Europe. The EU Common European Asylum System provides for the appointment of a representative, the tracing of family members as soon as possible and for the welfare of children to be taken into account at all stages of the process. The European Agenda for Migration puts a particular emphasis on the need to protect children and the Commission is now working to develop a comprehensive strategy to follow up on the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors adopted in 2011.

The Commission has also proposed to reinforce guarantees and safeguards for children in its proposals to reform the [Common European Asylum System](#), including the reinforcement of guardianship systems in Member States, assessment and determination of the best interests of the child, the definition of family, the criteria for obtaining international protection and quicker access to education.

**EU funding:** The European Commission provides a wide range of funding and grants, both specifically for children in migration and as part of the EU's funding on migration, justice systems, education or prevention of violence against women and children, health, humanitarian aid and protection programmes for children inside and outside the EU (see [note on funding](#) for full details).

The Commission recently [awarded direct grants](#) to strengthen the protection responses for children in migration to the International Organisation on Migration (€749,999), UNICEF - the United Nations Children's Fund (€955,809) and Save the Children Sweden (€ 888,381). The Commission is also making €3 million available for [projects on guardianship and foster care for unaccompanied children](#).

Finally, the Commission wants to ensure that data on the issue is widely available and regularly compiles [data and media reports on children in migration](#).

### What are the challenges the children face?

- **Inadequate reception** – Some reception facilities where children first find shelter are inadequate and unsafe for minors. Staff may not be qualified or trained and reception conditions may not be monitored.
- **Access to basic services** – Children in migration often have inadequate access to health and psycho-social care, legal assistance and education.
- **Family separation** – Children may be separated from their families, for example when travelling in large groups of people, if borders are closed or due to deliberate actions by smugglers.
- **Protracted family reunion and transfer procedures** – There are often long delays or no access to family reunion or transfer procedures.
- **Support for victims of abuse** – Many children have arrived in Europe with obvious signs of injury, trauma or physical, sexual and psychological abuse incurred on their way, sometimes including on EU territory.
- **Guardianship systems** – EU law already provides for the appointment as soon as possible of guardians for unaccompanied children, but children may have to wait a long time before being allocated one. Also, guardians may have far too many children to take care of or may not be adequately trained.

### What needs to be done?

#### *Child protection and child safeguarding measures*

- Encourage the establishment of integrated national child protection systems in the EU Member States and beyond;
- Improve cross-border cooperation between authorities in charge of protecting children;
- Implement child protection and child safeguarding measures at the hotspots and in all reception facilities;
- Extend the use of family-based or foster care;
- Improve access to education and adequate healthcare, including psychosocial care;
- Protect children against the risk of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking in reception and detention centres, as well as along the route;
- Invest in alternatives to detention, such as community-based foster care;

### ***Prevention of and responses to children going missing and child trafficking***

- Improve the quality of reception capacities and propose a range of options that focus on care and protection, including family-based care;
- Give specialised care to traumatised (unaccompanied) children on arrival who had no access to care during their journey;
- Ensure adequate training for people working with and for children in migration;
- Improve cross-border cooperation between authorities in charge of protecting children;
- Provide reliable information, advice and access to child-specific information in a child-friendly manner;

### ***Child-friendly practices***

- Ensure, in accordance with EU legislation, that specific standards are in place for the reception of children;
- Ensure individual determination of the child's best interests at all stages and for all decisions taken, including for return decisions;
- Respect the urgency principle for all proceedings involving children;
- Avoid invasive age assessment methods with imprecise results and reliability;
- Provide quality and timely guardianship to unaccompanied children;
- Monitor the use of EU funds to ensure they are targeted at actions that are in line with the best interest of the child.

### ***What action will the Commission take?***

- Seek commitment and support from EU Member States for the protection of children in migration, including for a swift negotiation of the proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) to improve the protection of children seeking asylum;
- Reinforce coordination and cooperation among all authorities and actors involved in child protection including on cross-border aspects;
- Provide support to Member States dealing with large numbers of migrant children, including in particular for the provision of suitable reception conditions;
- Promote and support actions aiming to ensure migrant children have early access to childhood education and care as a way of ensuring their integration in the host societies;
- Continue and step up support to civil society actors involved in child protection actions;
- Compile and share good practices by national and local authorities, international and non-governmental organisations, as well as the private sector, on the protection of children in migration in all phases of migration;
- Work together with Member States to find ways to improve data collection on migrant children.

In the Conclusions of the Forum on the rights of the child, the Commission will transform these actions into specific initiatives, for instance a handbook and recommendations to move forward, both at the EU and national levels.

### **For more information**

[> 10th European Forum on the rights of the child: the protection of children in migration](#)

[> Background paper](#)