

## Disappearance of migrant children in Europe

According to Europol, at least 10 000 migrant and refugee children have gone missing after arriving in Europe. Many of them are feared to be exploited and abused for sexual or labour purposes. The Parliament has on several occasions called on the Commission to address the disappearance of migrant children in the EU. The Commission is expected to make a statement in the March plenary.

### Background

According to [Missing Children Europe](#), migrant children are considered missing 'when they are registered with state authorities and go missing from the reception/accommodation centres provided for them'. While the majority among them are understood to be [unaccompanied minors](#), they also include [separated children](#) or children who were travelling with family. The [reasons](#) for disappearance include poor reception conditions, lack of child-friendly information, inefficient family reunification and guardian-appointment procedures, and fear of detention or deportation, as well as the desire to join family or friends in another country. According to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights ([FRA](#)), unaccompanied children missing from first reception facilities are a major concern in many EU Member States.

### EU action to protect children in migration

In February 2007, the European Commission adopted a [Decision](#) requiring EU countries to reserve the number 116 000 as a hotline to report missing children, including unaccompanied children of third-country origin. In April 2015, it proposed [10 principles](#) for the integrated protection of all children in all settings, including children in migration. In a response to the wave of migration in Europe, in its 2015 [European Agenda for Migration](#) the Commission announced a strategy based on the [action plan](#) to cover missing and unaccompanied children. Subsequently, in its 2016 [communication](#) it confirmed its commitment to the comprehensive approach, and listed ongoing [actions](#) contributing to the protection of children throughout the migration chain. To address the gaps in the current migration and asylum legislation, the Commission in its Common European Asylum [package](#) proposed several [child-specific provisions](#). In November 2016, it also organised a [forum](#) on the rights of the child, focused on protecting children in migration. Furthermore, EU Member States committed themselves in Decisions [1523/2015](#) and [1601/2015](#) to an emergency mechanism to relocate 160 000 people from Greece and Italy, whereby vulnerable applicants, including unaccompanied children, are to be prioritised.

### European Parliament position

Tackling the disappearance of migrant children has featured in several resolutions, especially since the refugee flows in Europe. In a 2014 [resolution](#), the Parliament stressed that many unaccompanied children disappear and abscond after their first arrival in the EU, and that much more needs to be done to ensure that the rights of migrant children are fully respected across the EU. In a December 2016 [resolution](#), the Parliament called on the Commission to ensure that unaccompanied minors do not disappear, and to design a strategy for that purpose and for identifying the whereabouts of missing children. In another December 2016 [resolution](#), the Parliament recommended that the existing tools for missing children be reinforced, including the hotlines for missing children, and recalled that children's rights, and the best interest of the child, need to be taken into account and assessed in all EU policies and actions, including migration and asylum. Moreover, several political groups have tabled oral questions ([O-000009/2017](#) and [O-000012/2017](#)) asking the Commission when it will present a comprehensive strategy to protect all children in migration, what measures it intends to take to prevent children from going missing from the asylum system and to improve the reporting of child disappearances, and how it supports Member States in relocating more minors from Greece and Italy.

See also December 2016 EPRS [briefing](#) on the vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated child migrants.

