

World Refugee Day: Focus on migrant children

In December 2000, in a resolution to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the UN General Assembly designated 20 June as World Refugee Day. UN estimates place the global number of forcibly displaced persons at 65.3 million. Nearly 21.3 million of these persons are refugees, over half of them under the age of 18.

Refugee flows to Europe

Since 2014, Europe has seen an unprecedented increase in migrant arrivals at its borders. The mixed migratory flows include a large number of refugees, as evidenced by the previously unseen volume of asylum applications: 1.3 and 1.2 million in 2015 and 2016 respectively, according to [Eurostat](#). More than half of the applicants came from war-torn regions of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2015 and 2016, around 30 % of them were children, an alarming proportion of whom were travelling alone. Children are particularly vulnerable to physical and psychological violence in [migration detention](#), which is why human rights organisations have argued that they should not be detained at all. Moreover, Europol has [confirmed](#) that at least 10 000 [unaccompanied minors](#) went missing in 2015 after arriving in Europe. These children are at [high risk](#) of falling victim to violence, trafficking and exploitation on their migratory journeys.

Calls to focus on children in EU migration and asylum policy

European Commission

In the context of an increasing number of migrant children arriving in Europe and on the basis of [reports](#) identifying their challenges, on 12 April 2017 the European Commission adopted a [communication](#) on the protection of children in migration. It states that child protection means upholding European values for human rights, dignity and solidarity, while enforcing EU and international law on human rights and rights of the child. This approach is consistent with the legal obligation set out in the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), calling to ensure the best interests of children in all actions concerning them. The Commission stresses that protection should extend to all children, regardless of their status or stage of migration.

Council of the EU

The Commission's call was echoed in the 8 June 2017 [conclusions](#) of the Council of the EU on the protection of children in migration. The Maltese Presidency called on Member States to move forward from debate to concrete action at national level, to provide migrant children with the specific protection they require. The conclusions also underlined the need to raise the awareness of local communities on this matter and to involve them in the protection of migrant children.

European Parliament

In its [resolution](#) of 12 April 2016 on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration, the Parliament dedicated a whole section to migrant children. The Parliament urged Member States to fully apply the Common European Asylum System provisions concerning unaccompanied minors, including those on their access to legal assistance, guardianship, healthcare, accommodation and education, and those on their right to be spoken to in a language they understand. The Parliament noted that effective guardianship and child-sensitive protection systems are essential to preventing abuse of children deprived of parental care. It reiterated that Member States should not detain children for the sole reason that they are migrants.

In its motion for a [resolution](#) of 15 May 2017 on making relocation happen, the Parliament noted that, out of 28 Member States, only Finland was systematically relocating unaccompanied minors, and called on all Member States to give priority to the relocation of unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable applicants.

