Fate of 10,000 missing refugee children debated in Civil Liberties Committee
[21-04-2016 - 18:06]

How to protect unaccompanied minors and cooperate across borders to find missing children fast were the key issues in an emotional Civil Liberties Committee debate on Thursday about the fate of 10,000 refugee children who have gone missing in Europe.

Representatives of the Europol law enforcement agency, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the NGO Missing Children Europe briefed MEPs on the numbers and reasons why the children are believed to have gone missing.

It is feared that some of these children are being exploited by criminal gangs, due to the often close ties between human smugglers, who facilitate travel for around 90% of the migrants, and criminal networks. These children may be sexually exploited, used for begging or forced to commit crimes. However, children may also disappear in search of friends or family in other EU countries or out of sheer desperation caused by cumbersome asylum procedures or detention in reception centres.

MEPs quizzed the invited speakers for facts and stressed the need to step up protection of unaccompanied minors so as to ensure their safety, as well as improving cross-border cooperation to find children who have gone missing and might have travelled on to another country.

Note for editors

According to the UNHCR, 35% of migrants entering the EU since 1 January 2016 are children. Many travel unaccompanied by an adult. In 2015, 85,482 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in the EU, which was three times the 2014 figure. Half of them were from Afghanistan, and 13% from Syria.

More than 90% of migrants travelling to Europe use intermediaries, according to a report on migrant smuggling published by Europol in February. These services are mostly provided by criminal groups.

Further information

• Europol report on migrant smuggling (22 February 2016) : https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/migrant-smuggling-eu
Contact

Rikke ULDALL
BXL: (+32) 2 28 42976
STR: (+33) 3 881 72033
PORT: (+32) 498 98 32 57
EMAIL: libe-press@europarl.europa.eu
TWITTER: EP_Justice

Estefania NARRILLOS
BXL: (+32) 2 28 31324
STR: (+33) 3 881 73661
PORT: (+32) 498 98 39 85
EMAIL: libe-press@europarl.europa.eu
TWITTER: EP_Justice