



ChildPact Statement on Refugee Children and Unaccompanied Minors

September 2017

In the past few years, European states have been one of the main destinations for hundreds of thousands people confronted with the deteriorated life conditions in their home countries due to war and conflicts that create a permanent state of insecurity and economic deprivation. Children are most and worst affected by this unprecedented refugee crisis.

This issue of children in migration has been approached by a number of recent reports and statements by international institutions such as the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights¹, UN², or Unicef³. The issue of refugees is addressed also by the Council of Europe Action Plan⁴ on protecting refugee and migrant children adopted in May 2017 and a global initiative such as the Sustainable Development Goals⁵, specifically in its target 10.7, which explicitly refers to a commitment to *“facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”*.

Aware of these efforts, and based on our own experience, **we, ChildPact, together with our members - national coalitions for child protection - call on all stakeholders to increase their efforts to properly address the needs of all refugee children, including unaccompanied minors (UAM), who find themselves in an exceptionally vulnerable situation. Increased mobilization and coordination capacity are key to such efforts, but also prioritization of intervention targeting children as the most and worst affected group.**

Alarming numbers

The number of migrant and refugee children fleeing their home countries and moving across international borders in search of asylum has dramatically increased over the past two years. Many of them are unaccompanied - moving alone without family members. According to the European Commission, nearly 800,000 children applied for asylum in

¹ “Realising the right to family reunification of refugees in Europe” report: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-052917-gbr-1700-realising-refugees-160x240-web/1680724ba0>

² The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants: <http://refugeemigrants.un.org/declaration>

³ “A child is a child” Report, May 2017 : https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_A_child_is_a_child_May_2017_EN.pdf

⁴ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/47-european-states-agreed-on-an-action-plan-on-how-to-protect-children-in-migration>

⁵ <http://indicators.report/targets/10-7/>



Europe in 2015 and 2016, out of which 170,000 were unaccompanied and separated children. The large-scale movements of children seeking asylum are unlikely to end in the foreseeable future.

High Risks

Unaccompanied children are particularly vulnerable, facing grave dangers along migration routes – they are exposed to high risk of violence, exploitation, smuggling, and trafficking. Their plight does not end once they arrive to their destination as these children can spend years in refugee camps, lacking access to health care, education, and other essential services and suffering psychological consequences that will mark their entire life.

Unaccompanied minors are particularly at risk of neglect. Both asylum and non-asylum seeking unaccompanied minors are to be considered first and foremost as children, rather than migrants; the motivation of their journey is substantially irrelevant for the level of protection they should be accorded.

Required Response

Given the exponential growth in the number of asylum-seeking migrant children in the region, responding to immediate humanitarian needs has become a key priority for all actors involved, who have to work strenuously and in emergency conditions to support the most vulnerable. However, all stakeholders must think of long term solutions both for refugee children that have already arrived in Europe, and those that are still on the way or expected to arrive in the future.

States should be reminded of their responsibility to protect all children within their borders without exception, taking into account that migrant and refugee children require specific attention.

In particular, Governments are urged:

- To demonstrate more commitment to ensure protection of migrant and refugee children from violence, abuse and trafficking
- To make promptly available immediate access to the asylum procedure, prioritizing children
- To increase efforts towards facilitating family reunifications and enhance intergovernmental cooperation on this issue
- To provide adequate nutrition, accommodation, healthcare, psychosocial support, and education to all minors
- To prioritize access to education, in particular for those children who have remained out of school for a long time



- To make all efforts to develop a working mechanism that guarantees timely appointment of guardians and/or legal representatives to unaccompanied minors in all countries of the region
- To provide immediate access for children to translators, social workers, and providers of legal support.
- To refrain from the practice of institutionalization or detention of unaccompanied minors and establish a system of family-type centers, when necessary, and introduce mechanisms for family tracing and reunification;
- To improve cooperation and coordination at the national, regional or transnational levels in order to reduce the growing pressure on national protection systems

For improved response, Governments are also called upon:

- To adhere to the minimal common standards for protection of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children as well as to improve cooperation regarding certain tasks, such as identification and registration of children, family tracing and reunification, etc.
- To develop data collection and monitoring mechanisms, as well as to use universal record-keeping forms and to improve information exchange about children and available services
- To launch campaigns aimed at contrasting discrimination and xenophobia, as well as at raising awareness and making the public more sensitive to the vulnerable condition of migrant children and unaccompanied minors in particular
- To develop special mechanisms to prevent the disappearance of unaccompanied minors from the facilities that host them taking into account that the first 24 hours are considered fundamental to prevent that minors abandon relevant facilities, leaving them more exposed and vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Further on, considering that a significant part of unaccompanied minors arriving in the region are due to turn 18 within a few years, appropriate procedures should be established to facilitate their transition to adulthood.

We strongly believe that all relevant agencies and organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, should enhance cooperation and communication, while states should continue to work towards the development of inclusive national child protection systems



that offer all of their services to all children caught in the current crisis, also involving civil society organizations in these efforts.

We strongly believe that only by working together we can progress in acting in the best interest of the children!

Supported by

ChildPact – Regional Coalition for Child Protection

and its members:

United for Child Care and Protection (BKTF) - Albania

Child Protection Network from Armenia NGO Alliance for Children's Rights - Azerbaijan

National Network for Children - Bulgaria

Stronger Voice for Children - Bosnia and Herzegovina

Coalition for Children and Youth - Georgia

Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection (KOMF) - Kosovo

The Alliance of Active NGO's in the Field of Social Protection of Family and Child - Republic of Moldova

Federation of NGOs for Child - Romania

Network of Civil Society Organizations for Children (MODS) – Serbia

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