

Europe: new Roadmap to improve the situation of unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children

Joint UNHCR/UNICEF/IRC Press Release

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, UNICEF, and IRC, the International Rescue Committee, today issued a Roadmap for action to improve the situation of refugee and migrant children arriving and staying in Europe without their parents or care givers.

The [Roadmap](#) highlights the need to identify children, register them through child-friendly procedures, and build a relationship of trust with them as early as possible. Ensuring that a well-trained guardian takes immediate responsibility for the child, engaging cultural mediators, and mobilizing members of host communities are critical measures that can help build a trusting relationship and protect children from smugglers, traffickers or family pressure.

The document provides recommendations developed in a broad consultative process led by the three organizations, with input from 100 practitioners, including guardians, psychologists, social workers and lawyers, as well as relevant authorities from several European states and the European Union, and refugee and migrant children across the continent.

The findings show that although a solid legal framework for child protection exists in many countries, complex, costly, and bureaucratic procedures have meant that all too often the best interests of unaccompanied and separated children are not taken into account, resulting in severe consequences for their well-being and their future.

Efficient and harmonized processes would help children understand procedures and access protection and solutions in accordance with their best interests, as outlined in the Roadmap.

“Many of these children have experienced terrible violence, sexual abuse, trafficking and emotional and psychological pressure not only during their journey but in Europe itself. They deserve better protection and care from Europe. All actions and decisions must have the child’s best interests at heart. We can all make this happen and the Roadmap shows us how,” said Diane Goodman, Deputy Director of UNHCR’s Europe Bureau.

“Refugee and migrant children travelling alone to Europe have taken paths marked by danger, bureaucratic backlogs and uncertainty at every step of the way – even at their destination,” said David McLoughlin, UNICEF’s Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia. “This Roadmap plots the way forward for these children to be given the same level of care, trust and protection as national children.”

The situation for unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children has worsened since the increase of arrivals to Europe back in 2015, with a broadened use of detention and large scale institutional care, limited family reunification opportunities, and rising concerns over deportations.

The Roadmap also recommends stronger emphasis on providing safety, proper care arrangements and services, and long-term solutions to these children based on their specific needs.

“The children that we interviewed clearly stated the importance of being heard and empowered,” said Annalisa Brusati, the IRC’s Child Protection Senior Technical Advisor. “These children have hopes, dreams and an incredible energy to fulfil them. Through education, peer groups, sports and training, they can start their own projects and overcome the hardships they’ve endured, if supported and given the chance.”

See here:

- [Roadmap “The Way Forward to Strengthened Policies and Practices for unaccompanied and separated refugee and migrant children in Europe”](#)
- [Call to action](#)

ENDS

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