

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council N°1091
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EU Statement on Unaccompanied Migrant Children

The European Union and its Member States would like to respond to comments made by the Russian Delegation during the last Permanent Council. We welcome all constructive and good-faith dialogue on issues of common concerns.

We are very much aware of the risks faced by unaccompanied minors during and after their journeys through the Middle-East, North-Africa and Europe.

There is unfortunately strong evidence that the ongoing migration and refugee crisis is being exploited by criminal networks involved in human smuggling and trafficking, targeting the most vulnerable, in particular women and children. Europol indicates that there is a strong crossover between those smuggling refugees across borders and gangs ensnaring people for exploitation in the sex trade or forced labour.

Determined efforts are already being deployed by European institutions and agencies and EU Member States, and we will be working intensively over the next months to increase their joint impact. The European legislation on asylum, immigration and trafficking in human beings includes specific provisions on the protection of the interests of unaccompanied minors. The Common European Asylum System provides for representation of unaccompanied minors throughout the asylum process, and for appropriate reception conditions, for example placement with adult relatives, foster families or appropriate accommodation centres, and for their welfare and specific needs to constantly be taken into account. The EU further funds projects on children's rights and capacity building of lawyers of children in migration.

In May 2010, the European Commission announced an Action Plan on Unaccompanied minors containing a common strategy focused on improving data collection, preventing unsafe migration and human trafficking, improving reception and procedural guarantees and finding durable solutions. A mid-term report

regarding the implementation of this Action Plan has already been published and a final report is being finalised during spring 2016. As is mentioned in the European Agenda on Migration, the Commission will develop a comprehensive strategy to follow up on the Action Plan.

It is important to recall that fortunately, not all unaccompanied minors who disappear end up in the hands of traffickers. Many search for shelter or apply for asylum, and many hope to reunite with their family members once they have settled as minors. We will continue to pay special attention to unaccompanied minors. Special attention to the most vulnerable is to be fully integrated into the processing of persons through the so-called hotspots, and is built also into the relocation process.

It is also essential that all actors cooperate and coordinate their actions to protect children in migration, also in terms of addressing the phenomenon of their going missing.

The ongoing migration and refugee crisis we are facing is a global phenomenon that calls for intense cooperation of all and not only those directly affected. We regret that there was no consensus at the OSCE Ministerial Meeting in Belgrade on a draft decision on the refugee and migration crisis, including on fighting against impunity of traffickers in human beings. We will welcome all sincere efforts of OSCE participating States, partners and relevant executive structures, to contribute to the management of this crisis, with full respect for human rights and international obligations.