



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

OSCE PA Vice-President Isabel Santos
Remarks to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 13: Rights of Migrants
(Warsaw, Tuesday, 18 September 2018)

Excellencies, dear Guests

Unaccompanied and separated children have been at the centre of the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and its Ad Hoc Committee on Migration.

The PA has adopted a number of resolutions which call upon OSCE countries

- to **better co-ordinate and harmonize procedures**, notably with respect to guidelines for assessing the ‘best interests of the child’ and age determination methods,
- to protect **family unity and the right to family life**, by preventing the separation of children and their relatives at border controls and during other procedures,
- and to by implementing functioning **family reunification programmes**.

The resolution on “Minors on the Move” adopted last July in Berlin urges OSCE states to accommodate unaccompanied minors in **adapted reception frameworks** which take into account their specific needs, with preference to foster care or smaller facilities.

They should also be provided with **quality and comprehensive information** and a qualified legal guardian at the earliest stage possible.

States should consider **granting a special protection status** to unaccompanied minors who do not qualify for asylum until a durable solution can be found.

The PA has also agreed that, **as a principle, the detention of unaccompanied and separated children should be avoided**.

The Parliamentary Assembly has called on OSCE participating States to provide **free primary and secondary education to all children regardless of status, including instruction in the official language(s) of the state**. Indeed, there are tragic consequences due to the lack of access to education of entire generations of children.

I would also like to touch upon the **role of civil society in safeguarding migrants’ rights**. Sadly, we are witnessing increased restrictions in a number of OSCE States on the activities of non-governmental organizations and volunteers working with asylum seekers and migrants, with some going so far as to criminalize their activities.

As we see in the Central Mediterranean, the criminalization of NGOs engaged in search and rescue work has been accompanied by a rise in the number of migrants arriving in Spain along the Western Mediterranean route as well as an increase drownings in proportion to arrivals in Italy.

The resolution on “*Strengthening civil society institutions in the OSCE region*” adopted in 2013 puts forth a number of recommendations on how to enhance dialogue and co-operation between state and civil society actors.

The PA in its 2016 **Tbilisi Declaration** has also called upon OSCE parliamentarians to mobilize their governments and civil society to more effectively manage migration flows.

Excellencies, dear guests,

It is no use pretending that we do not see or try to hold the wind with our hands. Migratory movements constitute a constant mark in the history of mankind and it will never be possible to stop those who are driven by the despair generated by persecution or by war nor those nourished by the hope of a new opportunity of life with safety and dignity.

The only question is whether we will be able to meet together the challenges that the migration flows of the last years bring and continue to honor the commitments made globally.

Thank you to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Chairmanship for convening this important event.