



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

UNHCR Representation for Northern Europe

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RE: Relocation of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children

Madam,

On 4 March 2020, the Justice and Home Affairs Council released a statement on the situation at the EU's external borders, in which the Council reiterated its solidarity with Greece and other Member States on the EU external border, and expressed its commitment to "further develop the EU's response to needs expressed by Greece". At the Council meeting, the European Commission presented its Action Plan for immediate support to Greece. Subsequently, the Commission also called for the voluntary relocation of unaccompanied children to other Member States, as well as sustainable solutions for those who remain in Greece.

UNHCR has been repeatedly urging to address the untenable situation of asylum-seekers on the islands and to accelerate transfers to the mainland. In the same vein, UNHCR welcomes the commitment of the European Commission and that of certain Member States to help unaccompanied children and other particularly vulnerable individuals in Greece through relocation and reunion with family members elsewhere in the EU.

European solidarity is urgently needed to address the severe overcrowding and living conditions on the islands and to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable, in particular children. Currently, more than 5,400 unaccompanied refugee and migrant children are residing in Greece, of which more than 2,000 are living on the Aegean islands. The majority of them are living in precarious conditions and facing protection risks, such as exploitation, violence and human trafficking. EU and Member State support is crucial to ensuring their immediate protection, as well as their longer-term health and well-being.

UNHCR therefore wishes to express its support for the proposed relocation exercise in line with the best interests of the children and by taking existing family links into account.

Ms Monica Mæland
Minister of Justice and Public Security
Ministry of Justice and Public Security
Norway



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UNHCR would like to encourage Member States to step forward and commit to the reception of unaccompanied children and other very vulnerable profiles from Greece, as a concrete and tangible measure of solidarity and responsibility sharing in Europe.

UNHCR remains available to offer technical support and advice to States in this regard, making use of the experience gained through its operational involvement in the relocation scheme implemented in Greece in the years 2015-2016, as well as in the "Dubs" programme relocating unaccompanied children from Greece to the UK.

Your sincerely,

Henrik M. Nordentoft

Representative

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