



Separated Children in Europe Programme

Statement Separated Children in Europe Programme

The entering into force of hotspots in Greece

The members of the Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP) would like to express their serious concerns regarding the many lives being lost in the Mediterranean and on the 'hotspots – relocation scheme for migrants in Greece. Whilst SCEP regrets any loss of life as a result of the current crisis we are particularly focused on the needs of children at this particular time. We call on all the EU Member States to respect the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), specifically in this instance the Child's right to Survival and Development (Article 6).

SCEP calls for:

- **Removal of the fence on the Greek-Turkish border** and in any case for all the necessary steps to be taken for ensuring safe access to the land Greek-Turkey border for separated children.
- **EU action** on the situation of separated children arriving in Greece and Italy which fulfils the rights that children hold under the CRC.
- Such European Action should be founded on **a rights based approach, taking into account the best interests of the child.**
- **Involvement of an independent guardian** in the relocation and residence procedures.
- **Clear and accessible criteria** on how separated children are selected for relocation.
- **Sufficient legal and procedural guarantees.**
- **Best interest assessment and determination** prior to the decision whether or not separated children should be relocated.
- **An end to the distinction based on nationality** with regard to the relocation scheme. Relocation should be possible for all separated children.
- **Significant increase of the number of separated children who can be relocated** provided the above conditions are met.

Hotspots

In October 2015, a first so-called hotspot has been opened in Greece in order to address the high numbers of arriving migrants. Other hotspots have been opened in Greece as well as in Italy. The hotspots are an initiative of the European Union, and they are designed to register and screen all incoming migrants, including separated children. The focus of the hotspots seems to be the distinction between refugees and economic migrants and the facilitation of the relocation process of asylum seekers to other Member States. Those deemed likely to qualify as a refugee, according to their

nationality, could subsequently be relocated to other Member States of the European Union. In this way, the burden on Greece and Italy will be eased according to the EU. Furthermore, migrants will be prevented from continuing their journeys to other Member States in an uncontrolled and dangerous manner and the inevitable risks of exploitation for separated children.

Concerns

SCEP has serious concerns with regard to the hotspots in Greece. In fact, there are limited real possibilities for relocation, since the number of those arriving is much greater than the number decided to be relocated. Asylum seekers who are to be relocated do not have an option or preference as to where they will be relocated.

Another point of concern can be found in the fact that the guardianship system in Greece is inefficient and the best interest of the child cannot be guaranteed. It is unclear how separated children are selected for relocation and what the specific criteria are. Relocation is also only currently possible for separated children from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Central African Republic and stateless children coming from these countries, whilst it might also be in the best interests of children from other nationalities to be relocated. It is worth noting that the majority of children entering Europe come from Afghanistan and the formula used in determining eligible nationalities for relocation excludes Afghans. In this respect, separated children from Afghanistan cannot be relocated and will inevitably continue their trip in an irregular manner as the great majority of them do not want to stay in Greece. Finally, the practice thus far in Greece indicates that there are serious issues with the identification and registration of separated children arriving in Greece.