

"CHILDREN REMAIN INVISIBLE"

JOINT OPEN LETTER

TO

**THE GREEK PRIME MINISTER, KYRIAKOS MITSOTAKIS
MINISTER OF MIGRATION AND ASYLUM, NOTIS MITARAKIS
ALTERNATE MINISTER OF MIGRATION, GEORGE KOUMOUTSAKOS
SPECIAL SECRETARY FOR THE PROTECTION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS, IRINI AGAPIDAKI
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, DAVID SASSOLI
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, CHARLES MICHEL
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, URSULA VON DER LEYEN**

Athens, 16 March 2020

The humanitarian, child protection and human rights organizations co-signing this letter have been actively involved in the refugee field for many years. In view of recent developments at the country's borders, in particular those concerning people who have been in Greece since March 1st, first residing in a military naval ship at the port of Mytilene and then being transferred to the mainland, we would like to express our deep concern regarding the fact that among the newcomers, there are families with children, and (according to all indications) unaccompanied minors for whom we have no information. In addition, we express concern for those children living alone, without any protection, and in conditions of unacceptable negligence in Skala Sikamias (Lesbos), whose fate is also neglected. Therefore:

We would like to ask you to answer to the following questions:

- Have the necessary identification and registration processes and the necessary provision of special care and protection children are entitled to, been implemented?
- Are these children at risk of being detained and deported as it was announced for everyone who arrived after the 1st of March?
- Are there plans to process potential family reunification cases that are amongst them?
- Have all the necessary protection, care and psychosocial support measures following the outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic been taken, in accordance with the [guidelines of the World Health Organization](#)?

It should be noted that according to the most recent data from the National Center for Social Solidarity (15th February 2020), there are 5,424 unaccompanied minors in the country, of whom 490 are under 14 years old, while 1,092 alone children are reported to be 'living in insecure housing conditions, such as living temporarily in apartments with others, living in squats, being homeless and moving frequently between different types of accommodation'.

Since the commitments enshrined in the "No Child Alone" program have not been implemented yet (i.e. to create an adequate amount of long-term accommodation facilities with the necessary services and provisions for the 4,000 children outside of the official child protection system) - our concern for new arrivals is constantly increasing.

Based on the above we would like to kindly request:

- Information on the exact number and the condition of unaccompanied minors who have entered the country since the beginning of March, and the relevant child protection measures that you have taken, especially for their protection and psychosocial support during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Information on the existence of a long term plan and timeline for the management of new child arrivals and all relevant issues regarding child protection for all children on the move that are currently in Greece.
- The withdrawal of the recent Emergency Legislative Decree (ELD- Government Gazette A '45 / 2-3-2020) via which “asylum applications from people that have been illegally crossing borders since March 1st are suspended”, that also includes unaccompanied minors. We are requesting the immediate registration of all asylum requests, giving priority to unaccompanied children, families with children and all vulnerable cases. [As recently stated by the EU commissioner for home affairs, Ylva Johansson](#): “Individuals in the European Union have the right to apply for asylum. This is in the treaty, this is in international law. This we can’t suspend.” Applying such a regulatory provision violates the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, and incurs international responsibilities for Greece and endangers human lives.
- To avoid deportations of unaccompanied minors back to countries where their lives and freedom are at risk, facing the risk of torture or any other inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

We also kindly reiterate our appeals to:

- Receive information on the beginning of implementation of the new regulatory framework for guardianship of unaccompanied children in accordance with the relevant provisions of Law 4554/2018 that was supposed to take effect on March 1st, 2020.
- End the detention of unaccompanied minors in Greece. Protective custody has already been ruled by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to be contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights. During the last year ECHR has condemned Greece several times for detaining minors.

We also call upon the member states of the European Union to show solidarity, follow the promising example of France, Germany, Portugal, Finland and Luxembourg and move forward with a fair relocation of unaccompanied children, while taking the necessary steps towards family reunification, and creating a long-term integration strategy for Europe.

Concluding, we would like to recall that European Parliament President David Sassoli, following his recent visit to Evros, made a special reference to unaccompanied children, stressing the need “to show commitment and to create a long term inclusion strategy to protect thousands of children that arrive alone on Europe's shores.”

As aid, human rights and child protection organizations, we will continue to provide services to children found in our country alone, driven by dangerous conditions in their country of origin and travelling via extremely hazardous routes. We are ready to assist your work whenever this is deemed necessary.

List of Signatories

ARSIS – ASSOCIATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF YOUTH (Greece)
CESIE (Italy)
DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL (DRC) (Greece)
DAY CENTER BABEL (Greece)
DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL (Greece)
DIOTIMA (Greece)
GREEK COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES (Greece)
HELP REFUGEES / CHOOSE LOVE (Greece, UK)
HIAS (Greece)
HUMANRIGHTS360 (Greece)
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE (IRC) (Greece)
INTERSOS (Greece)
INTERSOS (Italy)
MELISSA NETWORK (Greece)
NETWORK FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS (Greece)
PRAKSIS (Greece)
REFUGEE LEGAL SUPPORT (Greece)
SOLIDARITY NOW (Greece)
STATE OF CONCEPT (Greece)
STIL - UTRECHT (Netherlands)
TERRE DES HOMMES (Greece)
THE HOME PROJECT (Greece)

* The foregoing organizations also co-sign the relevant letter of 6 March 2020:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/greece/protect-our-laws-and-humanity-open-letter-85-organizations-enl>