Input by civil society organisations to the Asylum Report 2026

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Dear Colleagues,

The production of the Asylum Report 2026 is currently underway. The annual Asylum Report presents an overview of developments in the field of international protection in Europe.

The report includes information and perspectives from various stakeholders, including experts from EU+ countries, civil society organisations, researchers and UNHCR. To this end, we invite you, our partners from civil society, academia and research institutions, to share your reporting on developments in asylum law, policies or practices in 2025 by topic as presented in the online survey (**'Part A' of the form**).

We also invite you to share with us any publications your organisation has produced throughout 2025 on issues related to asylum in EU+ countries (**'Part B' of the form**). These may be reports, articles, recommendations to national authorities or EU institutions, open letters and analytical outputs. Your input can cover information for a specific EU+ country or the EU as a whole. You can complete all or only some of the sections.

Please note that the Asylum Report does not seek to describe national systems in detail but rather to present key developments of the past year, including improvements and challenges which remain.

All submissions are publicly accessible. For transparency, contributions will be published on the EUAA webpage and contributing organisations will be listed under the Acknowledgements of the report.

All contributions should be appropriately referenced. You may include links to supporting material, such as analytical studies, articles, reports, websites, press releases, position papers. Some sources of information may be in a language other than English. In this case, please cite the original language and, if possible, provide one to two sentences describing the key messages in English.

The content of the Asylum Report is subject to terms of reference and volume limitations. Contributions from civil society organisations feed into EUAA's work in multiple ways and inform reports and analyses beyond the Asylum Report.

NB: Similarly to last year, this year's edition of the Asylum Report will be leaner and more analytical, with streamlined thematic sections. The focus will be on key trends in the field of asylum rather than on individual developments. For this reason, information shared by respondents to this call may be incorporated in the Asylum Report in a format different than in the past years. It will also feature prominently as info boxes in the [country overviews](#).

Your input matters to us and will be much appreciated!

Please submit your contribution to the Asylum Report 2026 by Friday, 9 January 2026.

Contact details

* Name of organisation

> Missing Children Europe

Name and title of contact person

> Senior Programmes Officer

* Email

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☑ I accept the provisions of the EUAA [Legal and Privacy Statements](#)

General observations

Before sharing information by thematic area, please provide your general observations on asylum developments as indicated in the following three fields:

What areas would you highlight where important developments took place in the country/countries you cover?

What are the areas, where only few or no developments took place?

Would you have any observations to share specifically about the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum in the national context of the country/ countries you cover?

PART A: Contributions by topic

Please share your reporting on developments in asylum law, policies or practices in 2025 by topic. Kindly make sure that you provide information on:

- New developments and improvements in 2025 and new or remaining challenges;
- Changes in legislation, policies or practices, or institutional changes during 2025.

1. Access to territory and access to the asylum procedure (including first arrival to territory and registration, arrival at the border, application of the non-refoulement principle, the right to first response (shelter, food, medical treatment) and issues regarding border guards)

2. Access to information and legal assistance (including counselling and representation)

3. Provision of interpretation services (e.g. introduction of innovative methods for interpretation, increase/decrease in the number of languages available, change in qualifications required for interpreters)

4. Dublin procedures (including the organisational framework, practical developments, suspension of transfers to selected countries, detention in the framework of Dublin procedures)

5. Special procedures (including border procedures, procedures in transit zones, accelerated procedures, admissibility procedures, prioritised procedures or any special procedure for selected caseloads)

6. Reception of applicants for international protection (including information on reception capacities – increase/decrease/stable, material reception conditions - housing, food, clothing and financial support, contingency planning in reception, access to the labour market and vocational training, medical care, schooling and education, residence and freedom of movement)

7. Detention of applicants for international protection (including detention capacity – increase /decrease/stable, practices regarding detention, grounds for detention, alternatives to detention, time limit for detention)

8. Procedures at first instance (including relevant changes in: the authority in charge, organisation of the process, interviews, evidence assessment, determination of international protection status, decisionmaking, timeframes, case management - including backlog management)

9. Procedures at second instance (including organisation of the process, hearings, written procedures, timeframes, case management -including backlog management)

10. Issues of statelessness in the context of asylum (including identification and registration)

11. Children and applicants with special needs (special reception facilities, identification mechanisms/referrals, procedural standards, provision of information, age assessment, legal guardianship and foster care for unaccompanied and separated children)

12. Content of protection (including access to social security, social assistance, healthcare, housing and other basic services; integration into the labour market; measures to enhance language skills; measures to improve attainment in schooling and/or the education system and/or vocational training)

13. Return of former applicants for international protection

14. Resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes (including EU Joint Resettlement Programme, national resettlement programme (UNHCR), National Humanitarian Admission Programme, private sponsorship programmes/schemes and ad hoc special programmes)

15. National jurisprudence on international protection in 2025 (please include a link to the relevant case law and/or submit cases to the EUAA Case Law Database)

16. Other important developments in 2025

PART B: Publications

1. If available online, please provide links to relevant publications produced by your organisation in 2025.

1) Missing Children Europe (2025, June). Policy Brief EU Pact for Migration and Asylum: Safeguarding Children in Migration at Risk of Going Missing, https://missingchildreneurope.eu/download/policy-brief-eu-pact-for-migration-and-asylum-safeguarding-children-in-migration-at-risk-of-going-missing/?wpdmdl=6818&refresh=695b96813a57e1767609985
2) As part of the EU-funded Guard Up project, the consortium has produced a Good Practices Guide, showcasing effective practices collected from six EU countries https://missingchildreneurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2.2.-Good-Practices-Guide_-FINAL-DRAFT.docx.pdf
3) DATA Missing Project (2025) Recommendations for improved data collection mechanisms for missing children in Europe, https://missingchildreneurope.eu/download/recommendations-for-improved-data-collection-mechanisms-for-missing-children-in-europe/?wpdmdl=7108&refresh=695b97304d3951767610160

2. If not available online, please share your publications with us at: Asylum.Report@euaa.europa.eu or upload your file using the functionality below (max. file size 1MB).

Please upload your file

The maximum file size is 1 MB

3e91ed76-6ae3-40e3-9c36-62cb6c348e53/MCE_2025_Submission_EU_Asylum___Migration_Strategy. docx

3. For publications that due to copyright issues cannot be easily shared, please provide references using the table below.

	Title of publication	Name of author	Publisher/Organisation	Date
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Useful links

EUAA Asylum Report 2025 (https://euaa.europa.eu/asylum-report-2025)

Executive Summary -Asylum Report 2025 (https://euaa.europa.eu/asylum-report-2025-executive-summary)

Sources on Asylum 2025 (https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/sources-asylum-2025)

National asylum developments database (https://euaa.europa.eu/national-asylum-developments-database)

International Protection in Europe: a Year in Review (https://euaa.europa.eu/international-protection-europe-year-review)

Background Documents

Word template to submit input to the 2026 Asylum Report.docx

Contact

Contact Form

Missing Children Europe

Submission for the consultation on Five-year European migration and asylum strategy

OCTOBER 2025

Each year, over 250,000 children are reported missing in Europe, that's one child every two minutes[1]. Among them, children in migration are among the most vulnerable. Between 2021 and 2023, more than **50,000 unaccompanied migrant children went missing** across Europe, almost triple the number recorded between 2018 and 2020. In 2023 alone, over **250,000 asylum applications involved children**[2], with **20,687 of them being unaccompanied minors**.[3] These children face a far higher risk of going missing, particularly when reception systems fail or protection gaps emerge. According to data from the 116 000 hotlines, only 43% of missing children in migration cases reported in 2020 were resolved, with more than half still unresolved even a year later.[4] In 2024, the same hotlines reported that children most often went missing because of poor reception conditions, lack of access to education or employment, absence of shelter, or attempts to reunite with family members. These trends demand urgent and coordinated responses. Missing Children Europe supports the Commission's efforts to create a unified EU strategy, but stresses that **children's rights must be mainstreamed**, not marginalised, in all policy responses. In this consultation response, we have aligned our comments with the key elements of the Strategy as outlined in the European Commission's Call for Evidence document, highlighting where stronger safeguards for children are needed.

Internal Aspects

- **Reception conditions: Ensuring applicants have access to adequate reception facilities.**

Reception conditions also play a critical role in whether children remain safe or disengage from the system. Across Member States, reception facilities frequently lack trained child protection staff, effective guardianship structures, access to education, or psychosocial support.

Children who arrive unaccompanied should be **assigned a guardian as early as possible** to reduce the risk of them going missing during registration or the initial stages of their arrival.

The current push for accelerated border procedures and fast-tracked asylum processing also risks undermining children's rights. Children may be rushed through legal and administrative processes without sufficient support or psychosocial evaluation, while **age assessments remain inconsistent and**

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[1] European Commission (2013) - Missing Children in the European Union
[2] Lost in Europe (2024) - Data Explained
[3] European Commission (2025) - on the progress made in the European Union in combating trafficking in human being
[4] Missing Children Europe (2021) - Figures and Trends

unreliable. According to the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), misidentification of children as adults remains widespread, leading to wrongful placement in detention facilities or adult reception centres where they are more vulnerable to harm.[5]

In 2024, the **116 000 hotlines recorded 428 cases of missing migrant children**, up from 356 in 2023.[6] These numbers represent only the visible part of the problem, as **underreporting remains widespread** due to **mistrust of authorities, fear of repatriation**, and poor coordination between migration and child protection services. Adequate care must also be ensured during border procedures, where children can be held for up to 40 days in crisis situations, often in unsuitable conditions.

To prevent these violations, the **Strategy must ensure that every child has access to independent guardianship, legal aid, and child-sensitive evaluations**. **Screening procedures must therefore be designed with children's needs in mind**, with properly trained staff on the various vulnerabilities that put children further at risk of going missing.

- **Respect for international law: Ensuring compliance with international and EU obligations, in particular for individuals rescued at sea**

Respect for international and EU law is another essential pillar. Obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[7], the 1951 Refugee Convention[8], and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights[9] must be non-negotiable, including in the context of rescue at sea. When these obligations are not upheld, **children are pushed into irregular movements,** exposing them to greater risks of trafficking and disappearance. The Strategy must **guarantee that children's rights are systematically enforced in all procedures** and at every stage of their journey.

- **Secondary movement: Implementing measures to deter and prevent the unauthorised movement of non-EU nationals across Member States.**

A particularly urgent issue pertains to secondary movements. Many children attempt to reunite with family members in other Member States, but when family reunification procedures are slow or inflexible, they undertake these journeys on their own. This greatly increases[10] (AMMR) and [11] framework acknowledge the importance of identifying family links, yet in practice children often do not disclose this information during procedures. The **Strategy must ensure that family reunification is prioritised and adapted to children's needs**, allowing safe and regulated movement for family contact.

Return procedures present further risks. Too often, children are returned without sufficient safeguards or reintegration support, only to migrate again under more dangerous circumstances or fall victim to trafficking networks. While the European Commission acknowledges that returns must be child-sensitive, national practices continue to prioritise enforcement over protection. **The Strategy should make clear that no return decision involving a child can be issued without a thorough best interest assessment** and guarantees of safe and adequate care in the country of return. Moreover, the proposed system of mutual recognition of return decisions raises serious concerns, as **protection**

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[5] Fundamental Rights Agency (2023) - Children in Migration: fundamental rights at European borders
[6] Missing Children Europe (2024) – Figures and Trends
[7] UNCRC (1989) - Convention on the Rights of the Child
[8] UN Refugee Agency (1951) – The 1951 Refugee Convention
[9] European Parliament (2000) - EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
[10] European Parliament (2024) – Asylum and Migration Management Regulation
[11] European Parliament (2024) - EURODAC

statuses are not harmonised across the EU. A child deemed irregular in one Member State may have a legal right to stay in another. Without harmonisation, mutual recognition risks creating more undocumented and vulnerable children.[12]

Beyond asylum and return, **the integration of children who remain in Europe** is equally vital. Integration measures must go beyond legal status to ensure that children can thrive socially, educationally, and emotionally. Schools, healthcare systems, and communities must be equipped to include migrant and refugee children, while addressing issues such as social exclusion, discrimination, and bullying. **Integration policies should be linked to Member States' Action Plans** under the European Child Guarantee, ensuring that no child is left behind in access to housing, education, health, and protection systems.

External Aspects — Preventing Disappearance Beyond EU Borders

The EU Strategy must urgently address the persistent gap in legal and regular migration pathways. While the Pact on Migration and Asylum has focused almost exclusively on deterrence, prevention of entry, and efficient returns for those not qualifying for asylum, it has neglected alternative routes for admission and regularisation. This omission leaves children and young people, particularly those transitioning into adulthood, without durable solutions, pushing them into precarious situations where the risks of going missing, trafficking, and exploitation increase. Secure residence status, coupled with adequate support, is essential to reduce these risks and uphold child protection obligations.

The Strategy should therefore include a clear and ambitious plan for regular pathways to balance the current emphasis on deterrence and rapid return. In a world marked by protracted conflicts, climate change, natural and man-made disasters, and worsening socio-economic vulnerabilities, a variety of safe pathways must be available. At the same time, Europe's ageing population underscores the need for a forward-looking approach that combines protection and support mechanisms with broader social and economic objectives.

Finally, efforts to combat migrant smuggling must not be confused with combating trafficking. The two crimes are distinct under international law, and failure to differentiate them risks criminalising children who are seeking safety or family reunification. Enforcement measures must never override protection obligations, and agencies must draw clear distinctions between protective and punitive roles.

Exploitation and Trafficking — A Growing Threat to Children

Children in migration face overlapping risks of disappearance, exploitation, and trafficking, with the EU's Asylum and Migration Strategy as a critical opportunity to address these vulnerabilities. For the Strategy to succeed, child protection must be embedded at every stage, from border management and reception to returns, integration, and external partnerships.

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[12] PICUM (2025) – EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

Between 2021 and 2022, there were **17,231 registered victims of trafficking in the EU**, a 20.5% increase compared to the previous reporting period.[13] **Sexual exploitation** remains the most common form, making up nearly half of all cases; **92% of these victims are female**, and **24% are girls**. [14] **Labour exploitation**, accounting for 33% of cases, often targets **unaccompanied boys**, many of whom remain invisible to authorities due to weak inspection systems and the absence of child-friendly complaint mechanisms. Between 2021 and 2022, 46% of registered victims were EU citizens and 54% were third-country nationals. Despite these realities, only 17 out of 27 EU Member States currently have dedicated child-specific anti-trafficking strategies. [15] The Strategy must respond decisively to these risks. Preventing trafficking requires **early detection, robust child protection systems, and specialised support services.**

Unaccompanied minors are particularly at risk. Without family or guardians to protect them, they are isolated, fearful of authorities, and often distrustful of systems that they see as threatening them with return. This makes them extremely vulnerable to trafficking networks, which exploit their lack of protection and their immediate needs. Many unaccompanied children have no access to money, shelter, or education, and are therefore easily lured by traffickers with false promises of work, safety, or family contact.

Every unaccompanied child should be assigned a trained guardian immediately upon arrival, ensuring that they have someone to trust and turn to when approached by traffickers. Reception systems must be strengthened to offer **safe accommodation, access to education, healthcare, and psychosocial support**, not only as protection but also as a means of **reducing the incentive to disengage and disappear**. Integration is also critical, whereby who feel safe, supported, and included in schools and communities are far less likely to run away or fall prey to false promises.

Every missing child represents not only a personal tragedy but a collective failure of protection. The EU Migration Strategy must go beyond managing movement — it must ensure that every child on the move is seen, heard, and safeguarded. This requires a coordinated, child-centred approach where protection measures are embedded across all stages of migration, from arrival and registration to integration and return. Systems must be designed to respond to children's needs with care, consistency, and respect for their rights. Placing child protection at the heart of migration policy is both a legal duty and a reflection of Europe's fundamental values. No child should disappear in search of safety, and no strategy can be considered complete until that goal is met.

Recommendations

- **Mandatory Child-Specific Risk Assessments at All Stages of Migration**
  All procedures should include child-sensitive risk assessments to identify vulnerabilities, prevent disappearances, and ensure that protection measures reflect each child's best interests.
- **Investment in Guardianship Systems and Child Protection Staff**
  Every unaccompanied or separated child should have a trained guardian. Member States must strengthen guardianship structures and ensure adequate child protection staff in all facilities.

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[13] European Commission (2025) - on the progress made in the European Union in combating trafficking in human being

[14] European Commission (2025) - on the progress made in the European Union in combating trafficking in human being

[15] European Commission (2025) - on the progress made in the European Union in combating trafficking in human being

- **Legal Pathways for Children to Access Protection Without Relying on Smugglers**
  The EU should expand safe and legal migration routes, including family reunification and resettlement options, reducing children's reliance on smugglers and irregular travel.
- **Enforcement of Anti-Trafficking Laws with Dedicated Child Protection Measures**
  Anti-trafficking policies must include child-specific safeguards, ensuring early identification, specialised support, and coordination between migration and child protection authorities.
- **Create Safe and Regular Pathways for Children**
  The Strategy should balance border management with child-centred migration options, providing regularisation pathways for minors transitioning to adulthood and ensuring long-term stability.
- **Invest in Training and Capacity-Building**
  All actors involved in migration and asylum processes must receive training on child protection, trauma-informed care, and cross-border cooperation to ensure consistent, rights-based practices.