

# The Role and Responsibility of the Paediatrician and Other Paediatric Healthcare Providers in Caring for Migrant Children

A Declaration of the European Academy of Paediatrics

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## Introduction

The European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP) is dedicated to promoting the health of all children within Europe or wherever European paediatricians and paediatric healthcare providers are active in caring for children. In 2016 100,264 children arrived in Europe via Greece, Italy, Spain, and Bulgaria. Among those arriving 33,806 (34%) were unaccompanied or separated children (UASC). This is double the number that arrived in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Interpol estimates that at least 10,000 children have gone missing after their arrival in Europe, with the fear that many of them are being exploited and abused for sexual or labour purposes.<sup>2</sup>

In keeping with the United Nations ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (1989) and the International Organization for Migration’s Background Paper ‘Ensuring the Rights of Children to Healthcare: The Response of Hospitals and Health Services’ (2009), the EAP declares that it is the role of paediatricians and paediatric healthcare providers to provide healthcare to all children regardless of their country of origin, social or ethnic origin, legal status, religion, race, political or other opinions, or any other attribute.

Paediatricians and paediatric healthcare providers have the following responsibilities to children who are outside the territory of the state to which they are nationals or citizens; children who do or do not enjoy refugee or naturalised person status; and/or children who are either accompanied, unaccompanied, or separated from their parents or recognised guardian:

1. to provide healthcare to the migrant child to the fullest extent possible, addressing the physical and mental health needs of the migrant child;
2. to provide healthcare that fully respects the dignity and integrity of the migrant child, as well as their physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being;
3. to respect and support the role of the migrant child’s parent(s) or other recognised guardian in caring for and furthering the health of the migrant child;
4. to ensure and promote a safe and hygienic environment for providing healthcare to the child;
5. to ensure the highest standard of care with regard to the diagnosis, treatment, prophylaxis, follow-up, or other intervention when caring for the migrant child;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/greece/refugee-and-migrant-children-including-unaccompanied-and-separated-children-europe>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_ATA\(2017\)599292](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA(2017)599292)

6. to take into consideration the living situation of the migrant child in the provision of healthcare and to advocate on behalf of the migrant child for a living situation that is conducive to good health;
7. to ensure that the migrant child is not exploited for medical research, while also ensuring that diseases and health conditions specific to migrant children are the subject of biomedical and public health research, as appropriate.
8. to refuse to support or cooperate in any health-related interventions that could jeopardise the present or future health of the migrant child;
9. to refuse the provision of health services that limit the migrant child's freedom or the migrant child's ability for self-determination;
10. to report any criminal or unfair practices that threaten the health of the migrant child, including the practices of sexual or labour exploitation; and
11. to be an advocate for the health of the migrant child, including advocating for nutrition, medicines, housing, living circumstances, education, play, sports, and leisure that are needed to protect and promote the health of the migrant child.

Governments, health services, hospitals and clinics, refugee organisations and workers, and security forces and detention centers have a duty and an obligation to facilitate and support paediatricians and paediatric healthcare providers access to migrant children as well as their provision of full healthcare services to migrant children.

The EAP invites all European paediatric professionals and their associations to adopt this Declaration without prejudice. The EAP also calls on all European governments as well as health organisations, hospitals, and migrant organisations to adopt and promulgate this Declaration.

This Declaration was drafted on behalf of the European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP) in its Ethics Working Group (EWG) by the members *Francis P. Crawley*<sup>1</sup>, *Peter Hoyer*<sup>2</sup>, *Artur Mazur*<sup>3</sup>, *Liesbeth Siderius*<sup>4</sup>, *Stefan Grosek*<sup>5</sup>, *Tom Stiris*<sup>6</sup>, and *David Neubauer*<sup>7</sup>\* based on discussions within the EWG and across the EAP.

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