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EAP calls for EU governments to save European children from Syrian refugee camps

Over the course of the past few weeks dreadful news has reached us on the situation of European refugee children living in Syria. Hundreds have died from malnutrition and infections, and the local health services are overstretched. The European Academy of Pediatrics urges European governments to ensure a safe and immediate repatriation of these innocent children.

In the Al-Hawl camp in the north-east of Syria, more than 80,000 refugees are living in an overcrowded camp built for 10,000. Three thousand of them are children. UNICEF has called for European countries to take care of their own citizens living in these camps. Several European governments following Kosovo's lead, have started to take responsibility and follow UNICEF's request.

All European countries have ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child which holds the best interest of the child as its guiding principle. It is now time for governments to fulfil their commitments. A prolonged stay under the current conditions in the refugee camps is a threat to the mental and physical health of these children. The repatriation of these children to the European countries for which they hold nationality should be a priority, and pediatricians are committed to doing their part.

Some of the refugee children are born in Syria, others have been brought there by parents fighting for ISIL in the Syrian war. Many of these children have lost their parents. Regardless of their parents' participation in the war, these children are innocent and should not be held responsible for their parents' actions. According to the UN convention children have civil rights independent of their parents.

In an unsafe and disorganized post-war Syria, legal identity papers and documents required for travel and border crossing are lacking. Local governments have committed themselves to assisting with practical issues. The Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations have offered assistance to enable the children's safe return. The road back to a safer childhood has been opened. It is time European governments step up to the mark.

We, the European Academy of Paediatrics, encourage European governments to safeguard the health rights of their children in Syria and ensure a safe return.

The European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP) is the UEMS – European Union Medical Specialists Paediatric Section - and as such, represents the official political voice for both children, families and paediatricians throughout Europe. With delegates from 40 countries, EAP represents national paediatric societies and professional organisations of the European Economic Area countries as well as the National Associations of Medical Specialists of the Associated European members and observer countries.

In addition, European Paediatric Sub-Specialty Scientific societies are also part of the EAP. EAP seeks to promote the health of children and young people across the European continent as well as operating at the European level to defend and promote the interests of Medical Specialists. EAP is a member of EPHA and ISSOP. It aims to improve standards in training, service and research and is an influent advocate of children, youth and the medical profession in the political arena. www.eapaediatrics.eu