



FRA Press Release

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Help end child trafficking through better guardianship

All across the EU, children without parental care risk falling victims of abuse or trafficking. Today, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) releases a handbook to strengthen national guardianship systems for children in Europe, as part of the [EU's anti-trafficking strategy](#) which recognises the vital role guardians play in protecting children from harm.

"No child should feel alone and abandoned by the State they live in," says FRA Director [Morten Kjaerum](#). "Guardians exist to protect children in the absence of parents. However, their role and work varies from across the EU. This handbook provides the much needed guidance that should help strengthen guardianship systems across the EU to better protect all children who are at risk."

"We must ensure that all children, particularly children without parental care, are safe from criminals, who violate their rights and deprive them of their childhood. Children are particularly vulnerable and at greater risk of becoming victims of trafficking in human beings. Child protection is a cornerstone of our EU anti-trafficking legislation and guardianship plays a very important role for the prevention of child abuse and exploitation. Regardless of their immigration status, children should be first and foremost treated as children," says EU Commissioner for Home Affairs [Cecilia Malmström](#).

There are many reasons why children might be separated from their parents. Trafficking is one of them. Unaccompanied children and children without parental care living in residential institutions are at higher risk of being trafficked.

FRA's handbook explains the important role guardians play in protecting all children from child abuse and exploitation. They form a central role in integrated child protection systems. Given how guardianship varies from country to country across the EU, the handbook aims to promote a shared understanding of the main principles and features of guardianship systems.

Irrespective of the reason of separation, all children have the same needs and equal rights. This underlines the need to strengthen child protection systems across the EU for all children.

The handbook presents a set of core common principles and key standards to improve conditions of children in guardianship. These include:

1. **Non-discrimination:** All children are entitled to the same level of protection, no matter where they come from. In this respect, EU Member States should harmonise guardianship provisions and services.



2. **Independence and impartiality:** Guardians must be able to act independently and impartially, guided by the best interests of the child.
3. **Quality:** Guardians and legal representatives should be qualified and receive continuous training on child protection and welfare. This should extend for example to skills in meeting the particular needs of child victims of trafficking or unaccompanied children.
4. **Accountability:** National law should ensure that guardianship systems are clearly defined and monitored so that the relevant authority can be held responsible and accountable.
5. **Sustainability:** States should provide sufficient human and financial resources for guardianship systems, which should also cover monitoring and training.
6. **Child participation:** Children should be informed and involved in all aspects of their guardianship. This also includes awareness of their rights and of how to complain, if their rights are not respected.

The handbook provides specific guidance for Member State officials and guardians on how guardianship systems and individual guardians can cater for the particular needs of child victims of trafficking and protect their rights.

The handbook will be available later in all EU languages. FRA will also publish a comparative overview of guardianship systems across the EU in early 2015.

To read the handbook, see: [*Guardianship for children deprived of parental care - A handbook to reinforce guardianship systems to cater for the specific needs of child victims of trafficking.*](#)

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Notes to editors:

- Other FRA work on [child rights](#) and [asylum, migrants and borders](#) can be found on the FRA website. This includes: [a comparative report on child trafficking](#) (2009); and a [report on separated children seeking asylum](#) (2010).
- The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is mandated to provide evidence-based advice to EU and national decision makers, thereby contributing to more informed and better targeted debates and policies on fundamental rights.
- The [EU's response](#) to trafficking and related [statistics on trafficking](#) can be found on the [Commission's anti-trafficking website](#).