

UN Calls for Protection Against Sex Abuse of Refugee Women and Children in Europe



Geneva, October 24 (RHC)-- The United Nations has raised alarm over sexual violence and abuse against refugee and migrant women and children as they are desperately pushing their way into Europe.

During a press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on Friday, UN refugee agency (UNHCR) spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said that the agency had received "credible testimonies" and reports about children who were engaged in "survival sex" to pay for food or other necessities, and women who were forced to have sex due to the lack of basic security particularly in overcrowded reception centers.

"From testimony and reports we have received there have been instances of children engaging in survival sex to pay smugglers to continue their journey, either because they have run out money, or because they have been robbed," she said, adding that lonely children can be particularly vulnerable as they lack the protection and care of an adult.

Children who are held in detention centers along with some adults would also face "great risks" of being abused by the adults, Fleming added, asking authorities to find, as a matter of urgency, alternatives to the detention of children.

Insecure routes to desired destinations and lack of enough lighting and separated spaces for single women in refugee camps, among others, are factors that heighten the risk of sexual assaults against women, Fleming added.

"UNHCR appeals to all concerned national authorities in Europe to take measures to ensure the protection of women and girls, including through providing adequate and safe reception facilities," she further noted, adding that some children "may also be placed in detention in some countries, including with adults, posing great risks to them."

According to the UN refugee agency, more than 644,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe by sea so far this year. Of these, over a third, 34 percent, are women and children who are particularly vulnerable to abuse as they cross Europe's frontiers.

Most of the asylum seekers who risk their lives to reach Europe are reportedly fleeing conflict-hit zones in Africa and the Middle East, particularly Syria. However, officials in the European countries are divided over how to deal with refugees.

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