



**MCAI** Maternal & Childhealth  
Advocacy International

Improving maternal & child  
healthcare worldwide

**Address:** 1 Columba Court, Laide,  
Achnasheen, Highland,  
IV22 2NL, UK  
**Tel/Fax:** +44 (0)1445 781354  
**Tel:** +44 (0)1445 731595  
**Email:** office@mcai.org.uk  
**Website:** www.mcai.org.uk

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## MCAI Statement

### The UK should provide sanctuary to unaccompanied child refugees

As Trustees of the UK-based international medical charity, Maternal & Child Health Advocacy International (MCAI), we call on the UK Government to urgently reconsider its decision not to give sanctuary to child refugees who are alone and at risk in Europe.

In a vote in the House of Commons on 26 April 2016, the Government narrowly defeated a cross-party amendment to the immigration bill, tabled in the House of Lords, which would have seen the UK accept 3,000 child refugees.

Founded in 1995 in response to the effects on children of the war in Bosnia, MCAI's first charitable act was to [medically evacuate severely ill children and their families from Bosnia](#) to the UK for medical treatment with the full support of the UK government. Since then, MCAI has strongly advocated for the health and rights of children, and has much experience of working in [armed conflict settings with refugees](#).

Therefore, in keeping with MCAI's values and from a position of knowledge, experience and expertise, Trustees call on all of those MPs who voted no in the House of Commons vote to reconsider their position.

In 2015, violence, poverty, and persecution forced almost 60 million people from their homes, causing largest refugee crisis since World War II. Over 20 million people were driven by the Syrian war and other protracted conflicts, and last year, one million refugees entered Europe.

Children are easily forgotten in this crisis: [at least 95,000 child refugees are now on their own in Europe](#). They are sleeping rough and in makeshift camps, desperately vulnerable to abuse and to trafficking into modern slavery. Thousands have gone missing. For example, more than a quarter of the 13,000 unaccompanied children who reached Italy in 2014 disappeared on arrival. It is assumed that many of the missing children are trafficked into the sex and drugs trades or forced into child labour.

Globally, the current refugee crisis is having a significantly greater impact on countries outside of Europe. None of the 10 countries currently sheltering the most refugees, for example, are in Europe.

The UK showed great leadership in rescuing 10,000 children from Europe through the Kindertransport – a government-backed programme that accepted child refugees from

Germany in the run-up to World War II. Since then, the UK has taken in refugees during more recent conflicts, such as those forced to flee from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, when about 3 million people were displaced within Europe. It is therefore shameful that in the current refugee crisis, the biggest of all time, the UK Government has opted to reverse its policy.

All countries should help give sanctuary and protection to unaccompanied child refugees. We urgently call on the UK Government to reconsider its position.

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**The MCAI Trustees are:**

Dr Alice Clack, Dr Sheena Crawford, Dr Ian Davis, Dr Brigid Hayden, Dr Madho Jingree, Dr Rhona MacDonald, Mrs Parin Robbins, and Professor David Southall

**Information Sources**

UNHCR

<http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>

<http://www.unhcr.org/567918556.html>

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c1d.html>

Reuters

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-refugees-idUSKBN0U10CV20151218>

Save the Children

[https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/On\\_their\\_own1.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/On_their_own1.pdf)

ICRC

[https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/781\\_806\\_young.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/781_806_young.pdf)

The Bureau of investigative journalism. April 10<sup>th</sup> 2016

<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2016/04/10/revealed-fourfold-rise-95000-unaccompanied-children-claim-asylum-europe-2015/>