

Key child rights challenges in Europe today

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Children's rights in Europe in 2005

„Despite the treaty's pedigree, there still seems to be a problem: these rights are not perceived as children's human rights, but simply as... children's rights.

While children's special needs and vulnerability are usually acknowledged, responses too often continue to be based on the all-pervasive legacies of the charity approach to children's issues — conveniently backed up by selective references to the Convention where possible. As a result, the responses are neither systematic as such nor are they systematically inspired and guided by the overall letter and spirit of the Convention. Worse, many children's rights are still widely contested, even if they are in principle recognised, in other international treaties, as human rights.” (Nigel Cantwell, What about us? Children's Rights in the European Union, Next steps, 2005)

Key child rights issues in Europe in 2005

- Poverty and social exclusion
- Violence against children
- Children deprived of family care – mainly in institutions, primarily under the age of 3
- Trafficking
- Influence of the media and Internet
- Asylum seeking children and their families
- Discrimination
- Environmental problems

Towards a Strategy....

- EU Commission Communication in 2006
“Towards an EU strategy on the Rights of the Child” aimed at establishing a comprehensive strategy to effectively promote and safeguard rights of the child
- The EU has an obligation to mainstream children’s rights by protecting them from child rights violations

The Europe 2020 program

- December 2009 – new Lisbon Treaty recognizing children’s rights among the EU’s objectives
- The EU Fundamental Rights Charter reinforces the grounds for further EU action
- The Strategy does not create new EU competences – basic responsibility still at national level
- It is an important framework to ensure children’s rights by promoting and protecting them in all EU policies and actions

Main issues in the Strategy – 5th Child Rights Forum, Brussels, 14 October

- Child friendly justice
- Protection from violence: Bullying and sexual violence
- Poverty and social exclusion
- Vulnerable groups of children, with special attention paid to Roma children

What do children say?

Eurobarometer study:

- 170 focus groups with children aged 15-17 years in March 2010
- 6 in each Member State
- 8 with Roma/Sinti/Traveller children
- 51 children with special needs

What do children say?

- Widespread awareness about the existence of human rights
- Limited conception of specific rights of children
- Most often mentioned issues:
 - Right to education
 - Right to be a child
 - Right to have a voice, involvement in decision making affecting their life, listening to them

What do children say?

- Basic needs to food, shelter, health care acknowledged but mostly taken for granted
- Very limited information on available or possible services especially on safeguarding rights and access them
- Trust in parents, friends, less in teachers and other professionals
- More support at risk situations and at school
- Proactive support for the more vulnerable

Key child rights issues in Europe in 2010

- Europe has got many countries not members of the EU
- EU policies are influential and a direction for many
- New members and many in the accession phase in the future
- Countries are facing challenges in different ways and depth but more similarities concerning the basis questions than differences

Eurochild policy position

Set overarching aims:

- To promote and protect child rights in EU internal and external actions
- To support Member States efforts to promote and protect children's rights and implement the UNCRC
- Establish a seven year framework with two 3 ½ years delivery periods

Eurochild policy position

- Set the following strategic objectives together with proposals for concrete actions:
 - Mainstream children's rights in all EU actions
 - Identify and develop priority areas
 - Monitor and evaluate action undertaken
 - Enhance data collection and the development of common indicators at EU level
 - Communicate effectively on children's rights

Opinion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

- Combating child poverty and social exclusion needs further attention as 20% of children in Europe are living in poverty
- Children's rights should be mainstreamed in a broader development policy debate to ensure policy coherence
- More visibility and active participation for children
- Migrant, asylum seeking and refugee children should be given more attention
- Member States should support and promote children's rights through technical assistance, good practice exchange, including the work done by regional and international organizations

Opinion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

- Support to high quality, inclusive life long education and opportunities for all, including early childhood education and care, extra curricular activities, life skills, child rights and peace education
- Strengthened effort in research, data collection, outcome measurement, indicators for better monitoring, evaluation, support to policy and planning
- Training of professionals working with and for children
- Committee on the Rights of the Child and other groups of experts, institutions should be involved

Extended role of periodic reports, alternative reports and concluding observations

Widespread use of periodic reports, alternative reports and concluding observation is a good way of regional comparison, monitoring, evaluation, co-operation and work, advocacy, representation together in many ways

New Optional Protocol for a communication procedure

- Complement and reinforce the the mandate of the Committee to receive complaints from children and their representatives (e.g. NGOs)
- Helps develop jurisprudence on child rights
- Elements paper was prepared by the Committee on the key provisions
- First draft will be discussed by the State Parties in December and NGOs can contribute to it
- This would empower children and make them and the key issues more visible
- It gives an opportunity to analyze individual cases in depth and understanding the process and situation in a given country better

Thank you for your attention!