

'BUILDING A CHILD-FRIENDLY EUROPE: TURNING A VISION INTO REALITY'
CONFERENCE ON THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S STRATEGY FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD 2012-2015

PANEL DISCUSSION: 'BRINGING STANDARDS CLOSER TO CHILDREN: CO-OPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE ACTION' - Council of Europe (CoE) questions followed by answers provided by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

1. CoE: What are your expectations from a Council of Europe Children's Rights Platform?

FRA: The Draft Strategy refers to the link between the CoE standards, the recommendations issued by the monitoring bodies and "the practical steps that need to be taken to implement them". In the FRA's view, the Platform can play a key role especially the latter aspect: serving as a framework for dialogue, exchange of information and strategic planning, which brings together the existing standards, their interpretation by the monitoring bodies, and the experience of those dealing with the protection of children on a day-to-day basis, as well as the experiences of children themselves. This in order to ensure that adequate practical steps are taken to implement the norms - which match the realities on the ground and the needs of those concerned.

The Platform could therefore first serve to identify evidence needs, so that the knowledge necessary for sound policy-making can be obtained, and secondly serve as a forum for exchange of information on existing policies, practices, their advantages and drawbacks, allowing practitioners and authorities to learn from each other's experiences and improve their practices and policy-making vis-à-vis children.

2. CoE: What potential contributions could your organisation make to the Platform?

The FRA's main objective is to provide evidence based advice to the EU institutions and Member States. The FRA obtains the relevant evidence through the collection of primary and secondary data and produces thematic reports on issues concerning fundamental rights, as well as an annual report. The output of the FRA can inform the deliberations of the Platform.

In addition, the FRA has developed indicators for the protection, respect and promotion of the rights of the child in the EU. They bring together the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe as well as EU standards, as a means to facilitate the protection of children, providing an initial tool to measure the effectiveness of existing practices. The FRA is currently engaged in primary data collection in close cooperation with the European Commission on child friendly justice, incorporating the CoE Guidelines on child friendly justice in its work. The indicators developed by the FRA and the actual outcome of its work can be useful to the Platform.

3. CoE: what could be possible working methods of the Platform?

FRA: Regarding working methods, it could be useful:

- to work around specific thematic areas, in connection with existing legal or policy development processes wherever possible;

- to promote and facilitate dialogue with practitioners and with authorities dealing with children, including at the regional and local levels, where children's rights related policies and practices are often developed and implemented;
- to use the appropriate online tools allowing for continuity in the activities while reducing travel costs, particularly in time of crisis.

The Platform could therefore:

- serve as a framework for dialogue, exchange of information and contribute to strategic planning and the coordination of the work of key actors in the field;
- incorporate the evidence from existing practices and the experience of practitioners and authorities, as well as the norms and standards and their interpretation by the monitoring bodies;
- draw conclusions on strategic planning regarding stakeholder engagement and how to influence policy-making and legislative processes at the national and international and levels, with the aim to develop integrated approaches between: a) international standards and practices; b) practitioners and authorities working with children and c) within and across CoE Member States.

4. CoE: What could be the criteria for membership?

FRA: the open and inclusive character of the Platform should be maintained. Among the criteria for membership it could be useful to consider the following:

- demonstrated work and experience on the protection of the rights of the child;
- demonstrated commitment to the search for adequate means to protect the rights of the child;
- certain level of representativeness or possibility to influence child protection processes, practices, or policy-making.

5. CoE: How can partners integrate the objectives of the Council of Europe strategy 2012-2015 in their respective agendas and make this cooperation effective and visible?

FRA: An independent member selected by the CoE sits on the FRA's Management Board. This body has, among other responsibilities, that of approving the annual work programmes of the Agency. Close co-operation of the FRA with the CoE Secretariat and with the political bodies of the CoE in the field of the rights of the child and the integration of CoE objectives already occurs in practice. The CoE Secretariat and the FRA services also maintain close cooperation and coordinate activities at the operational level.

The FRA also reports on its activities regularly to the CoE Committee of Ministers. In its work the FRA always relies on the CoE's standards, and consults with its Secretariat closely, for example in developing child rights indicators.