



# **Towards a Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015**

## **Draft strategy**

Prepared by the Secretariat of the Children's Rights Division  
Justice and Human Dignity Directorate  
Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law  
Council of Europe

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## **Executive summary**

The Council of Europe transversal programme “Building a Europe for and with children” was launched in 2006 in response to a mandate resulting from the 3rd Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Warsaw 2005). The draft strategy on the rights of the child 2012-15 proposes a vision for the Council of Europe’s role and action in the field of the rights of the child, taking into account the progress achieved during the two previous policy cycles, the needs expressed by governments and the challenges identified by the international community. The draft strategy is the result of extensive consultations with governments, parliamentarians, key international organisations and civil society representatives. It is also based on an analysis of surveys and consultations with children.

In fulfilling its role as a catalyst for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Europe, the programme’s overarching goal in 2012-15 will be to achieve effective implementation of existing children’s rights standards. To that end, the programme will provide policy guidance and assistance to the member states in implementing United Nations and Council of Europe standards, promote a holistic and an integrated approach to children’s rights, and identify measures that will tackle old and new challenges in this field.

The programme will focus on four strategic objectives:

1. Promoting child-friendly services and systems
2. Eliminating all forms of violence against children
3. Guaranteeing the rights of children in vulnerable situations
4. Promoting child participation

The programme will continue to mobilise and co-ordinate the contribution of all Council of Europe bodies and institutions, mainstreaming children’s rights into its monitoring bodies and human rights mechanisms, as well as into all of its policy areas and activities. Furthermore, the programme will co-ordinate and consolidate partnerships with other international organisations, professional networks and civil society at large, through the Council of Europe’s Platform on the Rights of the Child.

# **"Building a Europe for and with children" – Towards a strategy for 2012-15**

## **1. 2006-11 – Launching the process and assessing the progress**

### **a. Background**

The 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (2005) mandated the Organisation to mainstream children's rights into all its policies, co-ordinate all child-related activities and eradicate all forms of violence against children. In response, the Council of Europe launched the programme "Building a Europe for and with children" in Monaco in April 2006. The programme completed two policy cycles that led to a number of achievements and it identified the challenges ahead.

### **b. Achievements**

Under the first two policy cycles (2006-09 and 2009-11), the programme:

- developed new working methods and strengthened the Council of Europe's capacity to fulfil its mandate, notably by setting up a multi-stakeholder platform on the rights of the child,<sup>1</sup> and by training Council of Europe staff on children's rights and child participation;
- mainstreamed children's rights, among the main Council of Europe actors and partners in Europe, into virtually all policy areas and developed a holistic child rights-based approach that is complementary to the United Nations agenda;
- identified the need for and assisted in the drafting, adoption and promotion of new standards<sup>2</sup> and policy guidelines (including national child-violence prevention strategies, child-friendly justice, health and social services);
- brought about major legislative and policy changes regarding children's rights in member states, notably through its two campaigns (on eliminating corporal punishment of children and on stopping sexual violence against children);
- increased children's access to information and participation by producing child-friendly material, developing policy reviews on child participation and holding consultations with children;

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<sup>1</sup>. Including governmental focal points, the Committee of Ministers' Thematic Co-ordinator, an Inter-Secretariat Task Force, representatives from Council of Europe bodies and institutions, international organisations and civil society.

<sup>2</sup>. Including the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse CETS No. 201, the European Convention on the Adoption of Children (Revised) CETS No. 202, Recommendation Rec(2005)5 on the rights of children living in residential institutions, Recommendation Rec(2006)12 on empowering children in the new information and communications environment, Recommendation Rec(2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting, Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)4 on strengthening the integration of children of migrants and of immigrant background, Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)4 on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence, the two Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe: on child-friendly justice and on child-friendly health care, as well as the draft Recommendation on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families.

- developed co-operation with key international partners, moving from exchange of information towards joint programming and implementation.

### **c. Remaining challenges**

Challenges remain in the following four fields:

- **Prevention:** There are not enough domestic actions targeting prevention policies, training professionals and raising public awareness of children as genuine rights holders. Decision makers have not accorded enough importance to collecting the comprehensive data needed to successfully manage and implement various policies and services at national and local level.
- **Protection:** Millions of children in Europe are still in need of protection: children continue to be victims of abuse, exploitation, neglect, exclusion and discrimination. Some forms of violence (such as corporal punishment) are still legally and socially tolerated and widespread. Although many countries deploy important means to protect children, national and local authorities need to undertake actions that are more thoroughly anchored in human rights, are sustainable and based on a clear vision.
- **Provision:** Service provision to children and their families does not always match their needs. Certain categories of children have very limited access to education, health care, justice, social protection and to a nurturing and caring environment. Economic, social and technological developments have resulted in new challenges that children, their families and the professionals working with them are not sufficiently equipped or trained to handle. Integrated national strategies are crucial to strengthen governments' ability to respond to existing and emerging challenges in a cost-efficient manner.
- **Participation:** Children's participatory rights are not respected: children have little access to information and their views in public and private life are rarely sought or given due consideration.

## **2. Draft strategy for 2012-15 – turning a vision into reality**

### **a. The process**

On 19 March 2011, the Committee of Ministers invited the Secretariat to consult the national focal points on children's rights and other key stakeholders on the contents of the future strategy.<sup>3</sup> The present draft strategy is the result of extensive consultations conducted with:

- the Council of Europe Inter-Secretariat Task Force on the Rights of the Child (June-July 2011);
- the network of government-appointed Focal Points on the Rights of the Child (July-September 2011);
- the Parliamentary Assembly, through its Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee (October 2011);

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<sup>3</sup>. Programme "Building a Europe for and with children", Progress report and new priorities CM(2011)35.

- key partner international organisations, professional networks, civil society and the private sector (September-October 2011);
- participants at the Monaco Conference, through bilateral and multilateral consultations (November 2011).

The draft strategy also takes into account the children's views that were obtained through a wide range of surveys and youth consultations undertaken by national authorities , national human rights institutions (including Ombudspersons for children), NGOs, independent researchers and international organisations.<sup>4</sup>

The draft strategy will be submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption in January 2012.

### **b. The new strategy in a nutshell**

In the period 2012-15, the Council of Europe will aim at the **effective implementation of children's rights standards**. It is essential to bridge the gap between standards and practice by providing guidance, advice and technical assistance to member states on how to best implement these standards.<sup>5</sup>

This will be done through:

- **Promoting a holistic approach:** support member states in observing the four principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child as well as the interdependence and indivisibility of children's rights;
- **Information, awareness-raising and capacity-building:** improve the access to information of all stakeholders – including authorities, professionals, children and young people – on standards, monitoring reports, campaign and training materials and any other relevant tools and provide professionals with training on the same;
- **Mainstreaming and monitoring:** sustain and develop a child-rights perspective in all Council of Europe activities, in particular Council of Europe monitoring bodies, as well as maintain and develop spaces for exchanging information and good practices and debating on current and emerging issues.

The four strategic objectives below build on the achievements of the programme's previous cycles and respond to the needs identified by all the programme's partners. They take into account the child-rights dimension of four other transversal Council of Europe programmes, which deal with the information society; Roma<sup>6</sup> and Travellers; equality and diversity (including gender and children with disabilities); and migration, including unaccompanied minors.

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<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe report on "Children's and young people's perceptions of threats ad challenges to the rights of the child in Europe", August 2011. This report may be obtained from the programme's Secretariat.

<sup>5</sup>. The relevant standards may be consulted on the following website: [www.coe.int/children](http://www.coe.int/children).

<sup>6</sup>. The term "Roma" refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers, and related groups in Europe. It encompasses the wide diversity of groups concerned, including those which identify themselves as "Gypsies".

**Strategic objective 1: Promoting child-friendly services and systems**

**Strategic objective 2: Eliminating all forms of violence against children**

**Strategic objective 3: Guaranteeing the rights of children in vulnerable situations**

**Strategic objective 4: Promoting child participation**

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## **Strategic objective 1 – Promoting child-friendly services and systems**

### ***What children and young people say***

*Children and young people report that they are wary of the public services and systems they come into contact with. They want to be treated as individuals, and do not have personal relationships with professionals based on trust and respect.*

*Children also report that they often do not know where to go for help. They complain that they are inadequately informed about procedures involving them and that they are neither heard nor taken seriously by professionals. Victims of abuse are often afraid that they won't be believed, and when they do find the courage to speak out, professionals undermine the importance of what they have said.*

Children and young people are legally entitled to equal access to healthcare, including adequate treatment to social, justice, education and family services or systems; and to sport, culture and other recreational activities. The Council of Europe will support the development of **child-friendly services and systems** that are respectful, responsive, reliable and responsible, with a particular focus on children in vulnerable situations.

### **Child-friendly justice**

In line with the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice, the programme will help member states review their domestic legislation, policies and practice to improve children's access to and treatment in civil, criminal and administrative justice, irrespective of their capacity to understand and their status. In this context, member states need to help children, their parents and the professionals working with them, to understand more about children's rights in the justice system.

### **Child-friendly healthcare**

Promote, in line with the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly healthcare, national policies that have taken children's rights as a guiding principle in the planning, delivery and monitoring of healthcare services for children, provide equitable access to quality healthcare without discrimination, ensure appropriate integrated services for children with special needs and found all decisions regarding children's health on their best interests and taking their views into account.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Final Declaration adopted at the 9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Health, Lisbon, 30 September 2011.

### **Child-friendly social services**

Promote child-friendly social services as defined in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2011) on social services friendly to families and children, defined as services which take into account the child's age, level of maturity and understanding, an assessment of each child's unique circumstances, and which give due consideration to their views, in particular with respect to family ties.

### **Family law and policies**

Promote the signature, ratification, implementation and monitoring of all Council of Europe standards on family law.

### **Education**

Promote citizenship and human rights education, including the development of training programmes for education professionals, with particular focus on children's rights, democratic culture, equality, intercultural dialogue and a child- and learner-centred pedagogy.

### **Sport, Culture and other recreational activities**

Promote ethical bases of sport and the human dignity and safety of those involved in sport, in particular by safeguarding children from exploitation for political, commercial and financial gain and from practices that are abusive or debasing, including the abuse of drugs and sexual harassment and abuse. Promote children's rights in sport by developing adequate sport pedagogy and coaching that respect their physiological and psychological boundaries.

## **Strategic objective 2 – Eliminating all forms of violence against children**

### **What children and young people say**

*Children and young people consider violence to be a priority problem. They are alarmed about the impact of violence and crime on their lives and do not feel adequately protected, for example against bullying, gender and youth violence, corporal punishment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse inside the family, in school and in alternative care.*

*Once they have disclosed abuse, child-violence victims are often exposed to secondary victimisation, as the reporting procedures, investigation and judicial proceedings fail to respect their rights, needs and opinions.*

Children and young people are legally entitled to be protected from all forms of violence. But despite positive steps in this direction, children continue to suffer violence in all spheres of life – in the home, schools, residential institutions, detention, the community, and the media.

The Council of Europe will continue to act as a regional initiator and co-ordinator of initiatives to eliminate all violence against children in Europe, and as the European

forum for follow-up to the recommendations of the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children (2006), it will continue to support the mandate of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children. To that end, it will adopt a two-pronged approach to:

- support the adoption and implementation of integrated national strategies to protect children from violence. These will include legislative, policy and institutional reforms and a focus on prevention;<sup>8</sup>
- promote zero tolerance for all forms of violence by raising awareness and taking action to address specific types of violence and focus on settings in which violence occurs.

### **Sexual violence**

Pursue, in co-operation with its international partners, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the ONE in FIVE Campaign to stop sexual violence against children, to ensure implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201) and other Council of Europe conventions that contribute to eradicating all forms of sexual violence.

### **Violent discipline, gender-based violence and domestic violence**

Continue to facilitate a culture of zero tolerance of violence towards children, to promote the prohibition of violent discipline (including corporal punishment of children) and the development of positive parenting policies in member states.<sup>9</sup> Special attention will be paid to encourage the signature, ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, with a view to protecting girls from gender-based violence and all children who have witnessed it, and to preventing and eliminating all domestic violence affecting children.

### **Violence in schools**

Assist member states to develop the legislation, policies and systems needed to assess, prevent and eliminate the various forms of violence in schools. Good practices using the whole-school approach and the tools provided by the Council of Europe programmes on human rights education and education for democratic citizenship will be promoted and shared with a view to assessing and multiplying their impact on the elimination of practices such as bullying, discrimination, degrading punishment and harassment.

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<sup>8</sup>. In line with the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence.

<sup>9</sup>. Recommendation Rec(2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting.

## **Strategic objective 3 – Guaranteeing the rights of all children**

### **What children and young people say**

*Generally, children resent being labeled as members of a “vulnerable group”. They prefer to be treated with respect as individuals, despite any common experiences or situations.*

*Consultations with children and young people in alternative care show that they are not properly prepared to enter care and lack continuity, monitoring and consideration with regard to family ties.*

*Children in detention are concerned by having to share space with adult offenders, their lack of adequate preparation to reintegrate into the community, slow judicial proceedings and a lack of alternative approaches to tackle crime.*

*Asylum-seeking and unaccompanied children describe the procedures they have to undergo, in particular detention, as stressful and traumatic. They also say they are victims of widespread prejudice and discrimination.*

Children are legally entitled to equal enjoyment of their rights, yet in practice, some children are particularly exposed to rights violations, and need special attention and measures to protect them. The Council of Europe is committed to eliminating discrimination against vulnerable children, through stepped up co-operation with Unicef, the EU and civil society. Besides the groups of children mentioned below, the Council of Europe will continue to protect the rights of other children in vulnerable situations, such as those from national minorities; children raised in social isolation; child victims of discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity; and children living in poverty.

### **Children in alternative care**

Provide guidance to member states in implementing the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and the Council of Europe recommendations on the rights of children living in residential institutions<sup>10</sup> and on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families.<sup>11</sup> The Council of Europe will focus on de-institutionalisation, monitoring adherence to the rights of children living in residential institutions, and empowering children in care by informing them of their rights in a child-friendly manner.

### **Children with disabilities**

Provide expertise and policy guidelines to member states with a view to protecting the rights of children with disabilities through the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society (2006-15).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>. Recommendation Rec(2005)5 on the rights of children living in residential institutions.

<sup>11</sup>. Draft recommendation on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families, submitted by the CDCS for adoption by the Committee of Ministers.

<sup>12</sup>. Recommendation Rec(2006)5 on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015.

### **Children in detention**

Promote and evaluate the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)11 on the European Rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures, Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice and relevant standards of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). The Council of Europe will pay particular attention to developing alternatives to detention, access to legal aid and legal representation, and protecting children in detention from violence. A specific focus will also be drawn to the rights of children with parents in prison.

### **Migrant children and children “on the move”**

Guide and assist member states in improving the protection of migrant children and children “on the move”, including asylum-seeking, refugee, unaccompanied, separated, internally displaced and stateless children. Promote the application of the guidelines on child-friendly justice to children in these situations and the implementation of recommendations CM/Rec(2007)9 on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors, CM/Rec (2008)4 on strengthening the integration of children of migrants and of immigrant background, and CM/Rec(2009)13 on the nationality of children.

### **Roma children**

Protect the rights of Roma children, through the training of Roma mediators in education and combating discrimination and segregation of Roma children in education and health systems. The Council of Europe will pay particular attention to the rights of Roma girls and the need to combat early marriages.

## **Strategic objective 4: Promoting child participation**

### **What children and young people say**

*Children and young people say that their right to participation is respected the least. They feel excluded from civil life and from decisions on important topics affecting their lives, notably placement outside the family, schooling, and medical treatment. They see the following as major obstacles to their meaningful participation: age limits on the right to be heard; a low level of information; adults' prejudice and lack of listening skills when it comes to children; intimidating formal settings and tight schedules. The situation is even worse for children in vulnerable situations.*

All children have the legal right to be heard and taken seriously in all matters affecting them, whether related to family or alternative care environments; day-care; schools; local communities; health care, justice and social services; sport, culture and other recreational activities; and policy-making at domestic, European and international levels. A major obstacle to effective child participation can be attributed to adult attitudes. The Council of Europe and its member states are responsible for reversing this situation and establishing a culture of respect for children's views and decisions.

Children's participation is a cross-cutting issue in implementing the strategic objectives of the Council of Europe strategy on the rights of the child. The Organisation will continue to mainstream child participation into its own standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation activities. This objective will be implemented in particular through close co-

operation between the Programme “Building a Europe for and with children” and the youth and education sectors.

### **The right to be heard and taken seriously**

Promote and evaluate the implementation of the children’s right to be heard in line with the Recommendation on participation of children and young people under the age of 18,<sup>13</sup> focusing in particular on children in vulnerable situations.

### **Democratic citizenship and human rights education**

Support member states in implementing the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education,<sup>14</sup> focusing on the active participation of children and human rights education for and with children from a broad spectrum of educational settings, including formal and non-formal education.

### **Information**

Produce and disseminate child-friendly information on the rights of the child, both online and in print, and in non-official languages of the Council of Europe.

### **Empowering children in the new media environment**

Empower children to exercise their participatory rights in the new media environment, while securing their right to privacy by developing new tools that will help them better manage their privacy and personal data on the Internet. Encourage self-regulation and governmental regulation of Internet providers, social networks and the media in compliance with the rights of the child, as well as the empowerment of children and parents towards enhanced on-line self-protection and prevention.

## **c. Partners**

Since 2006, the programme “Building a Europe for and with Children” has established important partnerships with key stakeholders at global, European, national and local level. This has proven to be highly effective in bringing the Council of Europe standards and work closer to policy makers, as well as to the programme’s primary stakeholders and ultimate beneficiaries: children. The programme will thus pursue the establishment, co-ordination and consolidation of partnerships with authorities and institutions at all levels, international organisations and networks as well as civil society.

### **Co-operation with the European Union**

The Council of Europe will continue co-operation with the EU, which is considered a major partner in achieving the strategy’s objectives and in building a pan-European space fit for children. The Council of Europe has high expectations that the EU will support its strategy by acceding to the European Convention on Human Rights and to other core Council of Europe conventions relative to children’s rights. Work with the European Commission and its children’s rights co-ordinator will be reinforced. Due to potential synergies between the actions of the EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child<sup>15</sup> and the priority areas identified in the Council of Europe’s strategy – child-friendly justice, protecting children in vulnerable situations and fighting violence against children – co-operation between the EU and the Council of Europe will be particularly important, both inside the EU and externally. Data collection and the development of

<sup>13</sup>. Submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption in December 2011.

<sup>14</sup>. Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

<sup>15</sup>. Communication from the European Commission: An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child, COM (2011) 60 final, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0060:FIN:EN:PDF>.

indicators conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)<sup>16</sup> will be given particular attention with a view to monitoring the implementation of children's rights standards.

### **Co-operation with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

The Council of Europe will give specific consideration to the CRC's General Comments and concluding observations in all of its activities. Furthermore, in monitoring the effective implementation of European standards, the Council of Europe will build on the CRC's country reports with a view to assisting its member states ensure effective and consistent follow-up to the CRC's recommendations. Finally, the Council of Europe will promote, throughout its 47 members, the signature and ratification of the new Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure for Children's Rights Violations, enabling the CRC to examine communications from children and their representatives.

### **Co-operation with Unicef**

The Council of Europe will step up its co-operation with Unicef, in particular its Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent states (CEE/CIS) and its Office for Europe. It will seek Unicef's expertise and programming experience in developing Council of Europe standards and guidelines and strengthen co-operation to promote equity, particularly in guaranteeing the rights of vulnerable children. Towards supporting implementation of standards, the Council of Europe will leverage Unicef's field presence in the CEE/CIS region, while strengthening its own field presence in selected countries. The potential of common actions as foreseen by the 2007 Joint Declaration on the reinforcement of co-operation between the Council of Europe and Unicef will be further explored.

### **Co-operation with non-governmental organisations**

The Council of Europe will intensify its relations with the non-governmental sector, facilitating their advisory role and their access to Council of Europe tools and decision-making processes. Co-operating with research and academic institutions will be reinforced in order to promote data collection and analysis and to develop the impact assessment tools needed to guide action. The Council of Europe will also seek to strengthen co-operation with media and the private sector to promote awareness on and implementation of its standards. The Council of Europe will seek to build bridges between donors and NGOs as implementing partners.

#### **d. Working methods and institutional setting**

Existing standards constitute an excellent basis for the effective protection and promotion of children's rights. Yet, the lack of comprehensive data and thorough analysis of the situation in member states makes it difficult to remove the obstacles to implementation of laws and policies. It is therefore important to develop the Council of Europe capacity to identify shortcomings and good practices with a view to providing general guidance and tailor-made support to implementation in practice.

The programme's working methods will serve the following objectives:

- mainstreaming of children's rights in all Council of Europe actions and in particular in existing monitoring mechanisms;

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<sup>16</sup>. Report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, Developing indicators for the protection, respect and promotion of the rights of the child in the European Union, available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-report-rights-child-conference2010\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-report-rights-child-conference2010_EN.pdf).

- ensure transversality and co-ordination of actions;
- promote a holistic approach to the rights of the child;
- enhance communication with all stakeholders and the media;
- develop a culture of direct communication with children and families in a language they can understand;
- strengthen the Council of Europe capacity to provide comprehensive data on the implementation of children's rights standards in Europe.

### **Reinforcing the Council of Europe capacity to support the implementation of standards**

The Council of Europe Platform on the Rights of the Child was launched in 2008 to take into account the transversal nature of the programme “Building a Europe for and with children” and the need to create a forum for strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of the programme as a whole.

The platform’s work is facilitated by the Secretariat of the Children’s Rights Division (Directorate of Justice and Human Dignity, DG I) and includes:

- the Council of Europe Inter-Secretariat Task Force on the Rights of the Child which meets regularly to exchange on results and difficulties arising in their respective fields of activities, to co-ordinate the response and propose action;
- the Committee of Ministers Thematic Co-ordinator on children’s rights of the Council of Europe (TC-ENF) who liaises with relevant rapporteur groups and ensures Committee of Ministers ownership and leadership of the programme;
- the Council of Europe Network of Focal Points on the Rights of the Child which was created to promote co-ordination of the various actors and policies at national level, and to establish a link between such co-ordination mechanisms and the Council of Europe programme;
- representatives of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Commissioner for Human Rights and other bodies and institutions such as steering and expert committees, monitoring bodies and the relevant institutions and bodies;
- representatives from international organisations, civil society, ombudspersons, higher level education and research institutions, international experts, professional networks, youth organisations, parents associations and individual children.

The platform provides for a flexible forum for exchange and is designed to complement and support the work of existing steering committees and monitoring bodies which, as a result, have become even more active in the field of children’s rights. The platform as such does not hold regular meetings, but its members are informed of and consulted on

main policy documents. They are also invited to all major children's rights events organised by the Council of Europe.

In order to take into account the decision to focus on implementation of standards, the Council of Europe needs to strengthen its capacity to provide expert's advice to guide and support the work of the Committee of Ministers, various steering committees, existing monitoring bodies and the member states. The creation of a **children's rights commission** will address this need. Composed of seven independent experts appointed by the Committee of Ministers, the commission will make the link between Council of Europe standards, the recommendations issued from the monitoring bodies and the practical steps that need to be taken to implement them. It will also maintain dialogue and a regular exchange with the national focal points, other international organisations and civil society.

### **Reinforcing the role of Council of Europe monitoring bodies**

Given the number of Council of Europe treaties with implications for the rights of the child, as well as child-specific legal instruments, priority will be given to the implementation of existing Council of Europe standards through a more proactive mainstreaming of the rights of the child into the Council of Europe monitoring bodies and human rights mechanisms. Specific support will be provided to the European Court of Human Rights and other Council of Europe mechanisms and conventional committees.<sup>17</sup> Monitoring activities are also being pursued by the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Commissioner for Human Rights. All these bodies will be encouraged to focus effectively on the rights of the child in their work and will be able to benefit from the expertise available through the newly created children's rights commission and an increased visibility thanks to the programmes' communication efforts.

The greater mainstreaming of children's rights in the monitoring bodies and human rights mechanisms will result in:

- the member states' full ownership of all Council of Europe children's rights standards and their more consistent and homogeneous interpretation and implementation at national level;
- a more efficient use of monitoring reports and of child-friendly feedback and advocacy mechanisms including those from UN treaty body monitoring<sup>18</sup> for the purpose of developing future Council of Europe activities in the children's rights field;
- the development of tailor-made co-operation packs for the member states focusing on the implementation of measures deriving from the judgments of the

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<sup>17</sup>. This will include the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR), the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, as well as a range of other conventional committees, including the Convention Committee on the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children and the Standing Committee on the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (T-ED).

<sup>18</sup>. Including concluding observations and General Comments of the CRC, NGO reports to the CRC and the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review

European Court of Human Rights, as well as recommendations and conclusions of other monitoring bodies; and

- an improved access of children to international justice, including through children's input and direct contribution to the monitoring and human rights mechanisms' work,<sup>19</sup> the development of child participation activities, child-friendly versions of the standards as well as through training and support of professionals (including NGOs, national human rights institutions, legal professionals and civil society representatives).

The Council of Europe will also increase its support for national institutions and organisations responsible for monitoring compliance with the rights of the child at the national level, including specific independent complaint and inspection mechanisms, and encourage the development of cross-border co-operation and exchange of information in the member states. These include national human rights institutions, including most notably ombudspersons for children, as well as a broad range of children's rights NGOs.

### **Evaluation**

Implementation of the strategy will be subject to internal and external evaluation. At the end of 2013, the Committee of Ministers' Thematic Co-ordinator on Children will effectuate a mid-term review to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and relevance of actions in the context of the objectives stated. A progress report on the implementation of the strategy will be presented to the Committee of Ministers by mid 2015.

### **Action Plan**

An action plan setting out proposed projects and activities to be implemented under the strategy is appended<sup>20</sup>.

### **Budget**

The strategy will have duration of **four years** covering two budgetary cycles (2012-2013 and 2014-2015).

The strategy's budget will be composed of the Council of Europe's ordinary budget and member states' voluntary contributions, including secondments. The ordinary budget will include the budget of the Programme's Co-ordination Unit, as well as resources from Council of Europe sectors and services implementing specific projects and activities on the rights of the child.

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<sup>19</sup>. Following a pilot project with one monitoring body, a road map will be developed to mainstream child participation into as many Council of Europe monitoring bodies as possible.

<sup>20</sup> This document will be appended, once the strategy is submitted to the Committee of Ministers