



MINISTRY FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

State Secretary for Disability and Assistant to the Minister

I would like to start by greeting all the participants and congratulate the organisers for this initiative - the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, the Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, and Council of Europe.

I'm sure that, after this panel discussion, a further impetus would be lend to the Council of Europe's "Policy Guidelines on national integrated strategies for the protection of children from violence".

First of all, I might to say, I am personally committed to the effective adoption and implementation of such comprehensive strategies.



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Portugal, under the programme “Children and Violence”, was one of the four volunteered countries that reviewed their national policies for protecting children against violence.

It was a remarkable experience. I can say that for Portugal it was very useful to Join that strategy conceived by Council of Europe and I want to stress, once more, the role of Ms Maud de Boer Buquicchio and her team on the implementation of the strategia. Thank you for believing in Portugal.

In this vein, “Build a Europe for and with children” proposed recommendations for the setting up of a model strategy against violence.

Violence against children **occurs everywhere** – exists in every country and cutting across culture, class, education, income and ethnic origin; **it covers different places** – at school, in the family, in residential institutions, in the community, in media and cyberspace; **and it takes a variety of forms** – to name a few, trafficking, organised paedophilia, sexual abuse and corporal punishment.

Violence against children is a fundamental right violation!



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It is a violation extended across time, as it leaves imprints on the adulthood.

I am confident that all violence against children is preventable.

Its multidimensional nature calls for an integrated approach: from the promotion of children's rights to the protection of children from violence.

Today, I would like to share with you some of the national policies on prevention and on protection of violence against children in Portugal.

Our aim is to guarantee children access to fundamental rights and children well-being.

For that, definitely, we have to take in account the transversal nature of issues relating to children and the need to define resources, priorities and budgets, essential to create the conditions favourable to guarantee their rights and higher interest.

Having this in mind, specific legislation was approved to protect children against violence and abuse.



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Portuguese Criminal Law was revised in the end of 2007 and, since then, it considers the crime of any form of violence, including corporal punishment, in any context, even in the domestic situation, perpetrated by any person or institution against children, people with disability or the elderly people.

Last September, it was published legislation to impose the definition of an idoneous profile of professionals working with children.

Since then, the presentation of criminal records regarding eventual crimes related to sexual abuse or maltreatment is compulsory for the application to jobs that are supposed to contact with children.

Moreover, in 2007, we developed the National Initiative for Child and Adolescence (INIA).

INIA is a strategy for childhood and adolescence which aims to define, for the period of 2 years (2009-2010), an action plan to defend children's rights.

INIA's core is based on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and follows the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Portuguese children's situation.



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INIA' definition was based on direct participation, involving all Ministries, key departments and organisations responsible on childhood and adolescence.

At a very early stage, a workshop was launched to identify situations of violation of children's rights and to collect policy suggestions for a set of strategic elements organised by dimensions of well-being.

People from academia, the media, social partners, local government, parliamentary groups, associations of parents and young people, caregivers and other nongovernmental organizations participated on it.

Additionally, public hearings were made online on the internet site, where children, parents and professionals gave their opinion about policies and measures needed.

INIA develops common guidelines for intervention of all the key State sectors and entities dealing with children and young people issues, such as, health, education, social support, justice, cultural activities, leisure and security.

For its implementation, it requires an effective cross-sectoral co-operation.



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One of INIA's strategic objectives is to promote positive parenting and equity in parental responsibilities.

Thus, some specific programs were created: for instance, a positive parenthood program, a training program for more vulnerable families.

We worked with five Portuguese universities on trials of positive parenting training, with the aim of giving families the knowledge and social skills for a healthy and safe relationship with their children.

Another program - the "Born Citizen" program - aims to promote child's right to a name and social protection.

It provides official record services on health units after the birth and the identification of children at risk.

The "Born Citizen" program involves the co-operation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice.



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The guarantee of an alternative family environment to all children deprived of parental care and the defence of their deinstitutionalisation were also INIA strategic objectives.

In April 2008, it was created the DOM Plan, the acronym of the Portuguese words – Challenges, Opportunities and Changes.

This plan seeks the qualification of Homes, so that they act with respect for the rights of the children and young people in their care.

Since the beginning of the Plan, 103 training courses were developed, which contribute to reduce the risk of institutional violence, or to detect it immediately.

The creation of individual intervention plans for all children, provides the right not to remain in the institution any longer than it is strictly necessary.

The objective is lowering 25% the number of institutionalized children. We overcame this goal. Since this Plan is in place, the rate of deinstitutionalisation attained 29%.



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It is important to notice that in 2009 there was an increase of 76% of the number of adoptions.

The strategy for childhood and adolescence prioritises policies concerned with organising an alternative care system for children, consisting of diversified, qualified and permanently evaluated social responses.

At this level, action is directed towards developing measures to enable young people to become independent, through the creation of 40 structures and instruments to support young people, who are in a position to begin the process of gaining their independence.

Another measure that we consider of the greatest relevance is the adoption of a new legal instrument: “*apadrinhamento civil*”, a civil kinship, which objective is to provide a permanent alternative family for institutionalised children who do not meet the criteria for adoption, while maintaining their relationship and bonds of affection with their biological parents.

INIA also includes some specific actions to be taken in order to combat violence against children, such as, a national social emergency help line.



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Moreover, next June, to celebrate the International Children's Day, a public campaign to prevent corporal punishment against children would be launched.

I would like also to underline local scope interventions.

The Commissions for Protection of Children and Young People develop their work through the local social networks.

These Commissions have preventive and protective goals and are required to promote the rights of children in their respective communities in a holistic developmental vision.

They function with a central nucleus, called "restricted commission" or as a large group that includes the main local stakeholders, named "enlarged commission".

As violence against children is considered a public crime, all citizens have the obligation of reporting the cases of violence to the Commissions for Protection of Children and Young People or to the Department of Justice.



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By December 2009, we had 291 local commissions, representing 93% of the Portuguese territory.

Ladies and gentlemen, I conclude by reaffirming the relevance and importance of this panel discussion in building Europe as a free space of violence towards the most vulnerable.

I shared with you some of the Portuguese policies to prevent and respond to violence against children.

I am determined to move the agenda forward.

The commitments undertaken by states upon ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are not in line with fragmented or simply reactive solutions.

In my view, the eradication of all forms of violence against children involves exchange of experiences between countries and regions.



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It may help to setting up national strategies or, if it is the case, to adjust existing ones.

Similar to other children matters, there isn't one method fit to all.

In this regard, the sharing of interventions can be an unique opportunity.

Once again, I congratulate the organisers for this initiative!