

# **YOU** and **the EU!**

**Finding out more and having your say:  
The European Commission's  
Children's rights policy**



**Save the Children**



**Plan** works worldwide to achieve lasting improvements for children living in poverty in developing countries

**Save the Children** fights for children's rights. We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

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## **Word Bank (A-Z)**

**Acceding Country:** This is a candidate country (see below) that has followed certain rules and has completed the process for joining the European Union (EU). The latest countries to join the EU (in 2004) were: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia and on 1 January 2007: Bulgaria and Romania.

**Candidate Country:** This is a country that has applied to join the European Union and whose application has been officially accepted. At present there are two candidate countries: Croatia and Turkey. Before a candidate country can join the EU it must follow certain rules.

**Child:** Anyone under the age of 18 years old.

**Child Labour:** This is when children are forced to work instead of going to school. When children do work that harms them (for instance because they work for long hours or in dangerous conditions) this is called 'hazardous child labour'.

**Child Prostitution:** when a child has sex with an adult for money or for things they need such as food or a place to stay.

**Child Trafficking:** when a child is bought, moved somewhere and sold (they are often moved from one country to another) to work, for example as beggars, as cleaners/maids or in prostitution (see above).

**Communication:** If the European Commission agrees on an idea for a new law or a new policy it produces a 'communication' paper to explain exactly what this new idea is.

**Development Co-operation:** This is what the European Union does to support poor countries so that there is enough food and better healthcare, education, housing and roads for the people who live there.

**Discrimination:** When one child or group of children is treated unfairly by another, usually more powerful group of people.

**European Commission:** This organisation acts on behalf of all the countries in the European Union. It is independent of national governments. It proposes laws, policies, action plans and strategies. It manages the day-to-day business of carrying out EU policies and spending EU money. The Commission also keeps watch to see that everyone obeys the European treaties and laws. It can act against those who break the rules, taking them to the European Court of Justice if necessary.

**European Council:** The European Council brings together the heads of state or government of the European Union and the president of the Commission. The meetings of the European Council usually take place in Brussels. The European Council can discuss and decide on many different things that are of interest to the European Union. This includes general things such as how it should work, as well as more specific things like for instance the environment, migration, security etc. The decisions made at the European Council strongly influence what the European Union should focus on, how it should work and what the European Union should do about issues of concern to it

**European Union (EU):** This is a group of 25 European countries which have formed a 'union' (it may be easier to think of this as a 'club' whose members have agreed that some decisions should be taken by the club and not the individual members) to make it easier to trade between their countries and to work together for 'peace and prosperity'. The original union had only six members and was created in 1957. Since then, membership has increased and many new European laws have been introduced which have changed the focus of the union and the way in which it works in order to achieve a real area of peace and prosperity.

**Member States:** These are the member countries of the European Union. 'Member States' is often used to mean the governments of these countries. There are currently 25 members: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

**Policy:** Statements that explain what should or should not happen

**Roma:** A group of people with a shared cultural background, who live for the most part in Southern and Eastern Europe, Western Asia, Latin America, the southern part of the United States and the Middle East. Traditionally most Roma spoke Romani but today they often speak the language that is used in the place they live. Roma people, and in particular their children, are often discriminated against and don't have the same opportunities as others.

**Social Exclusion:** When one child or their family suffers from a number of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.

**Sexual Abuse:** When someone forces or tricks another person into having sex or having a sexual relationship with them. A sexual relationship might include kissing, touching or having sex. In most countries it is strictly forbidden for adults to have a sexual relationship with a child.

**Violence against Children:** when someone (an adult or another child) uses their strength or their position of power to hurt a child on purpose, not by accident. They can hurt a person's feelings, their mind or their general health and well-being as well as their body.

**UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:** This is a document, agreed by the United Nations, which explains exactly what rights children have. It is also an agreement between countries to obey the same laws about children. All but two governments in the world have agreed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and have agreed to make sure all children get all their rights.

## What is this paper about?

This paper is a summary of a ‘communication’ (an official paper) written by the European Commission which is called ‘Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child’. This summary is written for children aged 13-17 years old. It explains:

- why a strategy (a plan) on children’s rights is needed;
- what issues will be included in the strategy;
- how the European Commission will help turn the plan into action.

## Background

The European Commission has stated that children’s rights are one of its most important issues. In April 2005 it started a project to make sure children’s rights are an important part of all policies of the European Union. In March 2006, Member States were asked by the European Council to take action to help stop child poverty.

The communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child’ is based on the two actions above. It explains that an EU strategy will help children’s rights to be included and taken seriously:

- in the policies of the European Union and;
- with Member States.

## Why is an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child needed?

**For children across the world:** There is a huge gap between what should happen to children (for instance what is written in international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and the real-life situation for children. In real-life, millions of children across the world are poor, do not have good enough healthcare, are not able to go to school or are forced to work. Of the children who work, many are forced to work in dangerous and difficult circumstances, for instance by fighting as child soldiers. Girls often don’t have the same opportunities as boys. Many girls are forced to marry and to have children at a very young age. HIV/AIDS is a big problem for children and young people in many parts of the world, either because their parents fall ill and die, or because they themselves are infected. There are large groups of children who are especially vulnerable, for instance children with disabilities and children living on the streets.

**For children in the European Union:** Many children in Europe are also poor. Racism is a growing problem (particularly if children are seen as ‘outsiders’ – if they have moved from another country or have a different religion). Violence against children from family members or at school is also a problem. Many families and children in Acceding and Candidate countries in Europe have been badly affected by the changes their country has had to make to become part of the European Union. Poverty has sharply increased and child prostitution, sexual abuse and trafficking in children or child labour can be found at some level in all European Union countries. Children who cannot live with their parents

and Roma children are particularly in danger of becoming involved in child prostitution or of being sexually abused or trafficked because they are most affected by the rising poverty levels and don't enjoy the same protection from adults and society. These children need more help and support than others to help stop these things happening to them. Many children who cannot live with their parents have to live in large children's homes because there is no system for foster parents to look after them. Problems with the environment have had a serious impact on children's health in some countries (for instance when rivers are polluted and the water is not safe to drink).

Children's needs and children's rights cannot be separated. The respect and promotion of the rights of all children should go hand-in-hand with action to address their basic needs such as proper healthcare (good hospitals and medicines) or good schools and trained teachers. For example if children have the right to education then good schools need to be built, more people trained to be teachers and good equipment provided for pupils/students. It is therefore very important that a strategy or action plan is written to improve the situation of children around the world and to show how important children's rights are to the EU.

## How can the EU help?

The EU can help to make children's rights and needs a higher priority when international and national plans and activities are being developed. The EU can help Member States in their work on children's rights; it can bring Member States together, share examples of good practice with Member States and provide money for work on children's rights.

## What has already been done by the EU?

The EU has developed many policies and activities on:

- child trafficking and prostitution;
- violence against children;
- asylum and immigration
- justice and family matters
- education for children and young people
- a healthy environment for children
- child safety on the Internet and on TV
- discrimination and social exclusion;
- child labour;
- Children affected by armed conflict.

The European Commission has also used the criteria or rules that acceding and candidate countries to the EU are required to follow. The criteria were used to check that these countries are **protecting children properly** and working on children's rights.

## The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

The Communication explains that an EU strategy will help children's rights to be included and taken seriously. This strategy is written by the European Commission although organisations that work on children's rights were closely involved in writing the strategy. It is based on six objectives (objectives are like goals), each supported by a number of actions.

### **Objective One: To get the most out of existing activities and doing something about things that are urgent**

The Commission will continue its work on children's rights and continue to give money to projects promoting children's rights. At the same time it must do something about two things that need to be done urgently, which are explained below as 'urgent actions':

Urgent Actions	When?
1. To have a single telephone number (6-digit starting with 116) within the EU for child helplines and hotlines.	Early 2007
2. To launch an 'Action Plan on Children in Development Co-operation' this plan will focus on children's needs in developing countries.	2007

### **Objective Two: To find out priorities for future EU action**

Every five years the Commission will look closely at children's rights to measure how much progress has been made. It will discuss the results with adults and children to find out what the main priorities for future action should be.

Actions	When?
3. To get a complete view of the reasons why children's rights are not yet fulfilled.	2007-2008
4. To distribute a paper for people to discuss and comment on that identifies priorities for future concrete actions.	2008
5. To collect data (that can be easily compared and assessed) on children's rights.	2007 onwards

### **Objective Three: To mainstream children's rights in EU actions**

'Mainstreaming' means to make sure that all EU policies, laws and actions respect children's rights and agree with EU and international law (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Action	When?
6. To make sure children's rights are respected in EU actions.	2007 onwards

**Objective Four: To find ways for organisations to work together and discuss children’s rights**

The Commission will strengthen co-operation between all organisations and people who work on children’s rights and start to include children in all consultations, conferences and actions related to their rights and needs.

Actions	When?
7. To set up a space on the Internet for people to discuss children’s rights.	2007
8. To involve children when decisions are being made.	2007 onwards
9. To set up a ‘Commission Inter-services Group’ (a group of people from all the departments of the Commission) to speak about children’s rights and plan action. A person will be employed to organise these discussions on children’s rights.	2006

**Objective Five: To improve people’s understanding, skills and expertise on children’s rights.**

Training will be given to all people involved in ‘mainstreaming’ children’s rights into EU policy - so that they can perform their actions properly.

Action	When?
10. To ‘mainstream’ children’s rights in EU actions.	2007 onwards

**Objective Six: To produce an awareness-raising strategy for children on children’s rights.**

Awareness-raising is about people finding out more about an issue or subject. An awareness-raising strategy with children on their rights is needed so that children can know more about their rights and how to use them.

Actions	When?
11. To communicate more effectively on children’s rights.	2007 onwards
12. To provide information on children’s rights in a child-friendly way.	2007 onwards

**So how will all this be done?**

The Commission will find money to make sure that actions put forward in this communication take place. A report will be written every year on progress made.

**What YOU and other children can do**

The European Commission wants to consult with children about the strategy and wants children to participate in many of the activities you have just read about. Children will have a chance to **say what they think** about how the EU Strategy is put into action and what they want the EU to focus on. They will also decide how they want to discuss this – through meetings, workshops, newsletter, questionnaires etc – it’s up to you.