

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

On behalf of Plan International I would like to present to you the results of the consultations on the European Commission's Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the rights of the child' that Plan undertook with children outside the European Union – in the ten so called 'developing countries'. **I urge the EU institutions to listen to what the children have said and take their contribution into consideration while implementing this Strategy and focus on these issues while formulating its external policies.**

Children are not mere passive recipients of aid rather Plan sees them as drivers of their own development. In order to facilitate these consultations Plan along with Save the Children commissioned **child friendly versions** of the communications making this policy document easier for the children to read and understand. As main means of consultations, common **questionnaires** were used complimented by **workshops** and **focus-group discussion** enabling a participatory approach. **Gender balance** was achieved as well.

The ten countries from which children and young people were consulted are **Albania, Benin, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Thailand and Vietnam**. The age range of the respondents is 13-17 years - many of them from youth groups. Over 255 **children participated** in these consultations over a period of **three months**.

The findings can be divided into three main headings:

- i. **Thematic areas** that children and young people believe the Strategy should focus on;
- ii. Their **views on the action points** accompanying the Strategy;
- iii. The **best methods to involve children** and young people in the Strategy as well as how to share information with them about it.

1. Thematic areas

Four main thematic areas emerged from the consultation that the children would like the EU to focus on in their external policies. These are issues that concern and affect the children and their communities most - **poverty, violence, exclusion and health** – with the last three issues being intrinsically linked to child poverty. Violence against children is a recurring theme which according to the children takes the form of **child labour, abuse and sexual exploitation**. **Hazardous work, begging, early marriage and volitions faced by girls** were further mentioned by the children in this context. The issue of exclusion ranges from **gender-based bias** that excludes girl children to other vulnerable groups such as **orphans, disabled children** and children belonging to **minority groups**. Whilst in Albania Roma children felt discriminated against at school, in India, the caste system and religious divide between Hindus and Muslims were mentioned as fostering exclusion of some children. Regarding health, children believe that illnesses in the developing countries occur due to **poor sanitation, unclean water, inadequate medical services and malnutrition**.

2. Analysing the action points in the Strategy

Children believe that they are not being heard, especially by their own parents. They perceive the lack of awareness about child rights as a huge obstacle to its enactment, and expressed a **strong desire to see awareness-raising constitute a key part of the Strategy**. They also believe that **laws must be strengthened** to protect children from the worst child rights abuses. Children also gave thumbs up to the **proposed idea of installing child helpline and hotline** for those in need.

3. Best methods to involve children

Children strongly believe that they should be involved in the decisions that the EU makes as it concerns them and their wellbeing. They suggested a number of methods to engage them including through **questionnaires** but also via **meetings with other children and adults**. Needless to add, they want to receive information in a **child-friendly format**, for which their preferred mediums such as **newspapers** and **magazines** as well as **television** and **radio**. Though it is still unclear how children and young people would like to be involved in the European Forum on the Rights of the Child, the consultations do reveal that this is an area they are very keen to participate in.

Finally, I would like to mention the four key recommendations that the report urges the EU to be included in the implementation of the Strategy:

1. The four thematic issues which emerged from the consultations with the children namely **poverty, violence, exclusion** and **health** should be a key part in the implementation of the Strategy and the EC's external policies and programming in third countries, in order to improve the lives of children throughout the world.
2. **Orphans** should be especially addressed in the Strategy as lack of protection by their own parents makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.
2. **Laws should be strengthened** and **parents/adults should be made aware of children's rights**. Stronger laws would deter perpetrators.
3. Children should be **included in decision-making** processes so that they can give their perspective and opinions on how to make policies that affect them most effectively. Information should be regularly disseminated to children and young people on the EU's work through the media.
4. Children and young people should be engaged in the **training of adults and peers** to raise awareness of certain child rights issues in order to deter violations from occurring. These should be organised with the help of the EU including e.g. training of the EU staff by children!

I would like to end with a warm word of thanks to the European Parliament for organising this timely hearing on children's rights and for giving the floor to children and enabling their voices to be heard here today.

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Plan Europe
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