

NGO Action Group on the EU's Child Rights Strategy



European Parliament Joint Hearing
“Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child”
17 April 2007
Recommendations to the European Parliament
(Initiative of the NGO Action Group on the EU Child Rights Strategy)

The NGO Action Group on the EU Child Rights Strategy warmly welcomes the adoption in July 2006 of the European Commission's Communication “Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child” (hereafter referred to as “the Communication”). As set out in the Communication, there is *“an urgent need for a comprehensive EU strategy to increase the scale and effectiveness of EU commitments to improve the situation of children globally and to demonstrate real political will at the highest possible level to ensure that the promotion and protection of children's rights get the place they merit on the EU's agenda”*.

On the occasion of the European Parliament Joint Hearing, the Action Group on the EU Child Rights Strategy, supported by five organisations*, welcomes the active and common interest of such a large number of EP committees in taking part in the challenge of creating the future EU Strategy on Child Rights. In this context, we urge the European Parliament to take the necessary actions to ensure that the EU upholds its commitments as set out in the Communication.

In this framework, we call on the European Parliament to ensure that:

- 1) ***Children's rights are mainstreamed*** into all EU internal and external actions (including policies, legislation, programming and any other political tools). This should include the development of a package of resources and tools such as a ‘child rights impact assessment’ and child sensitive indicators that can be applied to on-going and future work.
- 2) ***Child participation¹ becomes a central element*** to the EU's work, rather than an ideal or included on an ad hoc basis. Child participation should be clearly defined, to ensure equality, inclusive and meaningful participation and fair representation of participants from within and from outside the EU.
- 3) ***The EU devotes sufficient human and financial resources*** to ensure the successful implementation of the Communication. In particular the European Commission must fulfil its commitment to establish a children's rights coordination unit which has sufficient staff and resources to act effectively.
- 4) ***The European Parliament plays a monitoring role*** to ensure the European Commission realises its commitment to take a leading role in promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of children, in both internal and external policy and action. The Commission has also committed to reporting back on the Communication's implementation. We encourage the EP to support the involvement of civil society in that monitoring and evaluating process.

¹ To have meaningful child participation, children must be able to express their views on issues that affect them. They need good information, formulated in a child-friendly manner, which will enable them to be more involved and committed. Consultation with children should also allow them to have enough time to give their opinions, and have a chance to get to know and feel comfortable with each other in order to share their opinions and experiences.

In the short run, we urge MEPs to pay particular attention to the following processes:

1) Development of the Green Paper and subsequent Strategy on the Rights of the Child

A key output of the Communication will be an EU Strategy on Children's Rights. It is crucial that the Green Paper, which is planned for 2008, launches as wide as possible a consultation with local, regional and national public administrations, civil society, experts on children's rights and children themselves in all Member States. The results of this consultation should form the basis of a White Paper, to be adopted in 2009, that will set out the EU's future Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

2) Preliminary studies conducted by the European Commission

The Communication commits the European Commission to conducting two studies in 2007. One study focuses on the impact of existing EU instruments and actions (legislative and non-legislative, internal and external) on children and children's rights. This should identify gaps and help to develop appropriate methodologies for assessing the impact of the Commission's work on children. The second study aims to identify and collect data on children's rights. It should include a comprehensive review of existing data (and the associated indicators) on children related to internal and external actions, and of how such data can be used to inform the formulation of relevant EU internal and external policies, legislation and actions. Both studies will provide crucial information for moving forward on a well-informed Strategy on Children's Rights.

3) European Forum on the Rights of the Child

A key element of the Communication is the creation of a European Forum, which "*will contribute to the design and monitoring of EU actions and act as an arena for exchange of good practice*". The Forum should provide the opportunity for stakeholders to discuss specific issues and to produce policy recommendations on both internal and external affairs, based on the work of expert groups, including a group of children. The independence of this body must be ensured, allowing the Forum to initiate discussions and reports on new areas that require attention by the EU. Preparation of the Forum (including its participants, the agenda, agreed working methods, financing, etc.) must be transparent, and must foresee meaningful child participation. The EU Annual Budget for 2008 should include a specific budgetary line for the support of the European Forum.

Many challenges lie ahead in developing and implementing an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Recognising the crucial role of the European Parliament in this framework, we urge all committees and political groups involved in this Joint Hearing to create a Joint or Inter-Parliamentary Group on Children's Rights, or other formal grouping, to initiate, coordinate and lead Parliamentary processes aimed at enhancing children's rights in Europe and worldwide.

* ECPAT International; European Evangelical Alliance (EEA); European Federation for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children; International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) European Network; Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture (OMCT) Europe