



20 November 2009 - 20th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

The problem of unaccompanied and street children in Europe remains unsolved

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, EFSC wishes to highlight the growing issue of the migration of unaccompanied children in the EU. Unaccompanied children are certainly one of the core derivations for street children.

Specific and targeted measures should be defined and implemented in order to improve the situation both of unaccompanied children in general and street children in particular, as it is clear that normal social intervention strategies are not sufficient or can hardly reach them.

In blatant breach of the rights and principles set forth in the Convention, most of these children live in the shadows and are strongly traumatized and socially excluded. They receive no formal education or health care and they are particularly vulnerable to becoming the victims of human trafficking, prostitution, drug addiction and crime.

On the 20th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, EFSC calls on national governments and the EU to assume their fundamental responsibility of realizing the rights set forth in the convention for each and every child, in particular the most vulnerable ones: The unaccompanied children and the children in the streets. We urgently call for of a joint public-private effort to do ensure this.

Declaration

The need for a new public-private partnership framework for the protection of migrant children in Central and Eastern Europe

In spite of an improvement in the overall child welfare indicators in Central and Eastern Europe, inequalities are growing and many policy challenges remain to be addressed in order to make sure that the rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are realized for all children. Higher mortality rates, extreme poverty, low access to education and training and health facilities, inadequate housing and lack of parental care are some blatant aspects of this exclusion. Children living in extreme poverty and exclusion are extremely vulnerable to violence and are at high risk of becoming victims of forced begging, labour and/or sexual exploitation and trafficking, and frequently come into conflict with the law.

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These children experience different aspects of migration, such as forced migration, illegal migration, abandonment by migrating families, unaccompanied migration and mobility both within the EU and from outside the EU. The current context of the economic downturn poses new challenges linked to the withdrawal of public spending in long-term social projects in favour of short-term recovery objectives.

The phenomenon of street children in Europe is closely linked to these issues. The increasing freedom of circulation of separated children within the EU following the removal of barriers as a consequence of the Schengen agreement makes the phenomenon an increasingly European one, with the recent access of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union posing particular challenges. A recent EFSC workshop on the situation of street children in Central and Eastern Europe revealed the presence of two parallel waves of migration of street children: one originating from Central and Eastern European Member States to Western European Member States, and one from non-EU countries in Eastern Europe and Asia to Central and European Member States.

These developments require that the issue must be comprehensively addressed by all EU Member States, and a fundamental and pro-active co-operation between origin and destination countries must be strengthened. At the same time, the local level of action and a close co-operation between NGOs, local authorities, and locally-active institutions, as well as their adequate resourcing remains crucial in ensuring that the national-level policy statements make a concrete difference in children's lives.

The private sector, not only in terms of social enterprises but also companies through Corporate Social Responsibility have an important role to play in giving sustainability to the achievements of inter-institutional co-operation, by supporting the actions of NGOs, by giving vocational training opportunities targeted towards marginalized children, in particular street children, and by adopting standardization measures which guarantee the abolition of child labour within the production chain.

In this context, a holistic approach involving all actors, at European, national, regional and local level is crucial, in which the European Union has an eminent co-ordinating role to play.

Therefore:

- We call upon the European Union to address the challenge of street children as a joint challenge of all European Member States in order to **make the European Parliament goal of ending the phenomenon of street children by 2015 a reality**;
- We call upon the European Union to play a co-ordinating role in addressing the challenges of the mobility of separated children within the EU by **bringing together origin and destination countries**, building on the key experiences from existing inter-governmental agreements such as that between Italy and Romania in the protection of unaccompanied minors and minors in conflict with the law;
- We call upon the European Commission to undertake a facilitator role towards a **comprehensive and co-ordinated data collection effort** EU-wide, in order to follow-up on the recommendations contained in the European Commission Report "Child Poverty and Well-Being in the EU", to improve the collection of data regarding vulnerable children. This requires a fundamental multi-level cooperation ranging from the EU level, in order to ensure comparability among data; among Ministries at National level; and among all actors involved in child protection at local level;

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- We call upon the European Commission to activate specific measures of protection and guardianship and social re-inclusion programs through **targeted EU funding also for unaccompanied foreign minors and street children inserted in the juvenile justice system for being in conflict with the law**, and through a close and operative co-operation between the national Ministries of Justice and the NGOs operating in the protection of children in conflict with the law;
- In consideration of the different dimensions of rights which are affected by the migration of children, we call upon the European Commission to launch **a new Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) with focus on Children**, which should build on the experience of the OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion in the field of child poverty, and which should be closely co-ordinated with the newly established OMC on Youth and with the OMC on Education and Training;
- We call upon the European Commission to closely link the upcoming **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child with the Social Agenda post-2010**;
- We call upon the EU Member States to adopt common standards based on the UNCRC at EU level for the **protection from criminalization** of street children, migrant children, children in conflict with the law and trafficked children;
- We call upon the social policy makers within the EU Member States, and particularly the national authorities in charge of preparing the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs), to ensure that **spending levels for social projects of child protection are maintained in spite of the economic downturn**, in order to protect those extremely excluded children who are most vulnerable to economic volatility. In addition, for the sake of guaranteeing that the rights and needs of the most excluded children are adequately addressed, we call upon the EU Member States to establish **procedures systematically to involve local authorities and NGOs, particularly those representing the most affected groups such as street children and the Roma children, in the elaboration of social and child protection policies and of the NAPs in particular**. In this context, it is essential to maintain the political independence of NGOs while ensuring that their voice is fully represented;
- We call upon local authorities to establish **networks** with NGOs, the private sector and all institutional actors involved in the protection of the rights of extremely excluded children, especially street children, and ensure that children and their families are systematically consulted and involved with a view to achieving a sustainable improvement in their living conditions.

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