

# National Partner Network Meeting

6-7 October 2020

*Child Rights Strategy Session*

*6 October 2020, 14.00 – 15.30 (CET)*

## Minutes

**The purpose** of this session was to discuss the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. In particular, we wanted to summarise the latest updates on this pivotal process, identify our common advocacy priorities and analyse how we can cooperate in responding to the European Commission's consultations on the matter.

**Summary of the key outcomes and follow-up actions:**

- It is strongly encouraged for the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child to include reporting and monitoring mechanisms. This is essential for anchoring the strategy, securing adequate funding, connecting the EU to the national and local level and to generate much needed data.
- The work of the EU needs to be communicated better. Many organisations cannot relate to the activities in Brussels and are not aware of the initiatives being taken, their chances of impacting it or the importance on national and local level. Awareness raising is therefore key.
- The ECs efforts to increase child participation is broadly celebrated. It is further encouraged for the EU to promote child participation in member states.
- Face-to-face consultations are still essential. Inequalities in society (especially the digital divide) means that the most marginalised groups do not have the same possibilities of participating in consultations. Often, it is easier to reach out to empowered children who are already engaged in activities and projects.
- Many felt the need for national strategies. Although most countries have ratified the UNCRC, many still do not have strategies in place for its implementation.
- Finally, the child rights strategy should be an overarching document mainstreaming children's rights across policies and documents from the EU.
- Although the broad set of issues envisioned to be included in the Strategy, particularly inequalities and equity of opportunity were raised as issues of significant importance. These are issues that have increased in importance due to Covid-19.



Topic/Agenda item	Discussion Points
Welcome and setting the scene	
<p><b>1. Opening remarks:</b> Mieke Schuurman, Eurochild Senior Advisor – Child Rights &amp; Safeguarding <a href="#">See also ppt</a></p>	<p>Eurochild Senior Advisor, Mieke Schuurman welcomed participants outlining the purpose of the meeting. The European Commission (EC) has <b>recently opened for public consultations</b> for the upcoming European Strategy on the Rights of the Child. There are <b>two separate consultations; one for children and one for civil society and other stakeholders</b>. By coordinating our inputs, we have a stronger chance of affecting what goes into the final strategy.</p> <p>Mieke explained how every Commissioner has a mission statement outlining their tasks and responsibilities. For Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, this includes making a child rights strategy, which includes actions to <b>protect vulnerable children, protect the rights of children online, foster child friendly justice and prevent and combat violence</b>. The strategy will be in the form of a communication.</p> <p>DG Just and DG employment has expressed interest in doing joint consultations with children. Eurochild and four partner organisations have developed <b>a questionnaire for focus group consultations with children</b>. It has been open for two weeks and can be completed until the end of October. It is available in 16 languages. In particular, we encourage the participation of organisations with the ability to consult with children from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p> <p>Last week, Eurochild facilitated child participation at the <a href="#">13<sup>th</sup> EU Forum on the Rights of the Child</a>. It was the largest number of children ever to participate in the Forum and the EC was very happy with their contributions, which will feed directly into the Strategy. The Eurochild Children’s Council (ECC) were speaking on two high-level panels, organised a child-led workshop on child friendly justice and gave the closing remarks.</p>



	<p>Besides from the Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the Commission is currently also working on several other strategies, including a strategy on victims’ rights, more effective fights against child sexual abuse, LGTBI+ equality rights, disability strategy and a strategy on Roma.</p>
<p><b>2. Setting the scene:</b> <b>Enrico Paolo Tormen,</b> <b>Eurochild EU Affairs</b> <b>Assistant</b> <b>See also ppt as above</b></p>	<p><b>The CRAG Joint Position Paper</b></p> <p>Eurochild EU Affairs Assistant, Enrico Paolo Tormen, went on to further explain how Eurochild will response to the EU consultations on the Strategy is twofold: On one hand, <b>we will respond to the consultation based on Eurochild’s views.</b> On the other, we cooperated with UNICEF and the Child Rights Action Group (CRAG) – a coalition of child rights networks, that Eurochild is part of, to draft a joint position paper on the Strategy. <b>The CRAG joint position paper was launched on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, and was endorsed by 35 organisations.</b> It has already been submitted to the EC and was presented at a plenary sessions of the EU Forum on the Rights of the Child.</p> <p>The document is based on a specific set of principles, according to which the strategy should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the promise to leave no child behind.</li> <li>• Be relevant for all children globally, paying attention to those in <b>most vulnerable situations</b> and <b>facing different forms of discrimination.</b></li> <li>• Be <b>mandatory</b> for all EU institutions and member states, <b>mainstreaming</b> children’s rights in all EU policies, actions and programmes.</li> <li>• Action oriented and monitored</li> <li>• Based on meaningful and rights-based processes of <b>children participation</b>, because children should be an integral part of the design and implementation of the Strategy.</li> <li>• Be properly financed: <b>EU funding instruments as well as national budgets</b> should support the implementation of different priorities of the Strategy</li> <li>• Take into consideration the impact of COVID-19</li> </ul> <p>Enrico explained that when deciding on the structure of the document, they followed the priorities of the political guidelines of the 2019-2024 Von der Leyen European Commission, making sure that children’s rights are mainstreamed in EU’s main priorities. The document calls on the EU Institutions to priorities:</p>



- An economy that works for children
- An **inclusive approach to protecting children** in accordance with EU fundamental rights
- A stronger Europe for **all children in the world**,
- Defending children's rights in a world fit for the **digital age**
- A role for children in the **European Green Deal**
- A new push for rights-based, meaningful, and inclusive **child participation** in European democracy

Due to limited time, Enrico only had time to elaborate on the first and last priority. However, he invited participants to read the whole document and examine in depth all the points that could be useful for your advocacy strategies

#### **An economy that works for children:**

Addressing the first priority of the position paper, Enrico explained that today, 1 in 4 children in the EU grow up at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This figure is expected to increase due to the socio-economic implications of the COVID19 crisis. Taking this into consideration, the document calls for:

- A social and sustainable Europe 2030 Strategy that will set an ambitious target for child poverty reduction and social inclusion
- A Child Guarantee Council Recommendation that follows the 3 pillars of the 2013 European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children: that is access to adequate resources, services, and child participation
- EU Member States should design national Child Guarantee implementation plans, which should be monitored by the European Commission. This monitoring should feed into the European Semester, the European Pillar of Social Rights
- The Member States should use the EU Recovery Plan as well as the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework to support the implementation of the Child Guarantee and the Europe 2030 Strategy.
- The European Commission, Council and Member States should improve the collection of disaggregated data on wellbeing and social inclusion
- The EU should promote early childhood development across policies and funding opportunities



**Child Participation:**

Addressing the sixth priority of the position paper, Enrico explained that the vision of the paper for the EU is an approach of “Nothing about children, without children”. This means that the Strategy should:

- Ensure rights-based meaningful and inclusive participation of children in decision-making processes
- Ensure Member States and partner countries, in collaboration with CSOs, provide child rights **education and capacity building** to children and professionals
- **Promote knowledge and skills exchange** on rights-based child participation within and between Member States and partner countries, including CSOs
- Increase public funding and EU funding allocation to create rights-based child participation mechanisms
- Carry out strong and compulsory accountability and feedback mechanism to children after they have participated in decision-making processes and ensure the monitoring and evaluation of rights-based child participation

Enrico finished his presentation by encouraging participants to use the CRAG joint position paper as inspiration for their own contribution to the EC consultations.

Discussion - Part I: Members Presentations

**1. Judit Costa, German Coalition on the Rights of the Child about the German Coalition event on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child – lessons learned and good practices**

Judit Costa from the German Coalition on the rights of the Child took the floor. She started out by sharing several links with information for participants on her organisations work. This included an event on the [German EU presidency](#), on the [Common European Asylum System](#) and on the [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#). She also linked to a [presentation on the Strategy](#) (in German).

Judit explained that both the event on a common European asylum system and on the German presidency were both very important to their members. However, in this presentation she would primarily focus on the one on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.



	<p>As a coalition, their goals is to bring attention to the influence and general work of the EU and how it is relevant to their members. They had experienced that many felt that the EU is too far away from their reality. They found it easier to address when matters were turned into national law. As opposed to the UNCRC, many felt that <b>the EU lacks important reporting measures</b>, which makes it difficult for civil society to express their experiences. This would be a helpful way of connecting Brussels to the local level.</p> <p>Judit continued explaining that the coalition was nationally seen as a German Eurochild because of their ability to redistribute responsibilities. Explaining their philosophy and role as a convener, she quoted the deceased Ruth Bader Ginsburg: <b>“Fight for the things you care about, but do it in a way that leads others to join you.”</b> For many organisations the German coalition is a role model for thinking systematically linking the local, state/federal and EU level to the Strategy.</p> <p>Judit finished by asking whether a reporting procedure is envisioned for the Strategy. She emphasised that it would mean a lot to the German organisations. It has <b>a large impact on how money is spent and it will help to anchor the Strategy and generate data, which can be used for advocacy.</b></p>
<p><b>2. Ninetta Kazantzis, PCCPWC, Cyprus, input on children’s consultations</b> <a href="#">See also ppt</a></p>	<p>Ninetta Kazantzis from the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC) took the floor to explain how they had conducted consultations with children in Cyprus.</p> <p>Ninetta started out by briefly explaining the political context of Cyprus clarifying that she is only addressing the government controlled area inhabited by 876.000 people. 20 percent of these are below the age of 18. She then went on to give an overview of the social structures of the population.</p> <p>On 29 August, PCCPWC conducted face-to-face consultations (focus group discussions) with children between the age of 11 and 17. In order to adhere to government regulations, the groups were limited to 16 people (including adults). They had taken steps to ensure <b>gender balance and background diversity</b> in order to rightfully <b>represent the population.</b></p> <p>Ninetta explained that the results indicated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are not very much aware of their participatory rights</li> <li>• Children are not very much aware of what the EU represents/is</li> </ul>



- Children are not involved/organised in different groups (school councils, groups on the local or the national level) are a minority
- Organised children are much better informed and assertive of their rights

Based on the consultations, PCCPWC realised that there is a need for more consultations. Therefore, they have expanded with four targeted groups of children that potentially have had different experiences and can offer a better understanding of the situation of participation and the impact of COVID-19. These will be:

- Children from "mixed marriages" (one parent Cypriot, the other foreigner)
- Children in care
- Children with Migrant Background
- Children with Disabilities

These groups were picked particularly because of their underrepresentation in school councils, their adverse living conditions (including marginalisation and exclusion) and for **commonly being excluded from other consultations run by (local) authorities**. The consultations are planned to be conducted in October and will comprise of 6-8 children.

Ninetta finish by emphasising the importance of face-to-face consultations. Due to the digital divide, many of the most vulnerable children do not have the possibility of communicating via technology. She hoped to have conducted the last consultations by the end of October, while remaining attentive of the challenges of Covid-19.

### Discussion - Part II: Consultation in smaller groups

#### Debate on what members would like to see in the next EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

The meeting was divided into three breakout groups to further discuss what to feed into the Strategy. The following three questions were posed to guide the discussion:



1. What are the most important issues for children that your organization would like the European Commission to work on for the next years? Also consider what the relevance would be for your work and that of your members at national level.
2. How would your organisation be able to contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy on Children's Rights at national level and monitoring the work of your government? Would it be helpful if the EU would call on Member States to develop national child rights strategies?
3. The EC is increasingly seeing the value of children's participation in EU decision-making processes (they are consulted on the EU Strategy and the Child Guarantee; over 60 children participate(d) in the EU Forum on Children's Rights; the DG JUST study on child participation in democratic and political life; the Bucharest conference and children's declaration; EP annual events on 20 Nov).  
**How can the EU ensure children at grass roots level, including children from vulnerable backgrounds, are able to participate and what could the role for your organisations be?**

After reconvening, elected rapporteurs reported back from the discussions in their respective rooms.

#### **Breakout Room One:**

Enrico Paolo Tormen explained that they had discussed how the Commission proposed pact on migration needs to be coherent in policy papers and should in line with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. The Strategy is a great **opportunity for constructively shaping other policy papers**. They had also discussed the **necessity for national strategies** for combating poverty. Other important elements to include in the Strategy included monitoring, digitalisation, poverty and education for all.

Enrico reported that **raising awareness is essential**, since many members do not know that the Strategy is being drafted. This should include how to participate and have influence.

Finally, Enrico raised that for child participation, many organisations find it challenging to include vulnerable children. Among the factors that need to be taken into consideration are time restrictions, language and technological barriers.

#### **Breakout Room Two:**

Sean O'Neill reported back from the second breakout room. Due to time constraints, they had primarily focused on the first two questions.





Among the issues the EC should work on are: **inequalities**, which has been exacerbated by Covid-19, **child poverty** (both the direct and indirect consequences), **migrant children** and their disadvantages, **mental health**, **preventive policies** (from early age) addressing issues of violence and mental health, more **focus on participation, equity and equal opportunity** and **support for civil society** (many organisations are struggling financially).

Sean also reported that many felt the need for national strategies. Although most countries have ratified the UNCRC, many still do not have strategies on the rights of the child.

A final idea was to have a national reporting day in the EC. This may help some organisation who do not have the capacity for a second reporting round.

#### **Breakout Room Three:**

Mieke Schuurman reported back from the third breakout room. Several challenges were raised. Firstly, she mentioned the **work/life balance, where a framework from a child's perspective is needed**. The Covid-19 crisis and return to schools has also shown a lot of **gaps in the educational system** (including teacher capacity, safety and materials), which needs additional funding. It was also raised that experience for many children in institutions had been particular hard with little contact to their parents during lockdown. The EU should therefore focus more on **deinstitutionalisation**. Other things mentioned included an increased focus on **child friendly justice**, where there is a need for increased collaboration between different actors in the child protection system. A **one-door policy** was encouraged. The EU was also encouraged to promote **increased child participation** in decision making (even at highest level), **mainstreaming children's rights**, as well as the necessity of **handling violence against children in an online spectrum**. Finally, it was mentioned that Finland will adopt a child rights strategy by the end of the year.

Mieke reported that participants in her group also expressed that there is a **lack of knowledge about the Strategy**. Although different initiatives exist in different countries, the participants would strongly support **national strategies**, although it was recognised that that would require a lot of lobbying and awareness raising.

Finally, organisations expressed strong interests in engaging with Eurochild and EU activities and events and to include children as much as possible. In general, participants were **pleased to see the developments on child participation on EU level**.



**Closing & Summarising  
what has been shared  
and how to move  
forward**

Ute Mayrhofer from the National Coalition for the Implementation of the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child in Austria took the floor. She informed the participants that they are currently working on **a child rights based approach for the legal instruments for business and human rights**. She mentioned how approaches from feminist and indigenous perspectives had successfully already been taken, but that the perspective of children was still missing. She therefore encouraged all organisations interested in being part of developing such an approach to reach [out to her](#). Alternatively, organisations can also join the joint submission. She finished off by sharing [a link](#) to the project.

Mieke Schuurman then explained that Eurochild was contacted by the OAK Foundation about the development of **legislations on the new electronics and communications code**. If it will be adopted in its current form, it will **prevent tech companies from detecting grooming behaviour and taking it off of their accounts**. It is therefore crucial that it is amended. Members of the European Parliament LIBE committee should be made aware of the danger, so it is encouraged to take contact to your national MEPs. Mieke promised that Eurochild will send out more information on the matter.

Mieke finished by thanking everyone for their active participation ensuring participants that all the inputs would be communicated directly to the EC.