



European Federation for Street Children Comments on the Issue Paper for building an EU strategy for the rights of the child

EFSC shares and welcomes the two-fold approach set out in the paper of combining mainstreaming of children's rights with specific actions in identified areas to be categorised under the clusters of rights set out in the UNCRC. This approach, besides satisfying EFSC own commitment to a child-rights based approach in all policies, seems to adequately approach the issue of street children, which requires parallel specific measures in the various clusters of rights and a mainstreaming of children's rights in all policies.

EFSC also very much supports the approach set out in the paper of creating synergies between the various institutional actors involved at EU level in the protection of children's rights and valorise the contributions of each of them in a global EU shared approach. This way the strategy will contribute to an important parallel and structural element of improving the effectiveness of the coordination among EU actors in the child rights field and the protection of children's rights will certainly benefit from it. On the other hand, objective criteria should be identified to select the priority topics of the strategy while respecting the principle of indivisibility of human rights.

EFSC finally very much supports the focus on data collection, and recommends that the recommendation set out in the 2008 Report on "Child Poverty and Well being" to elaborate new ways of collecting data for the most vulnerable groups of children, including street children, is respected and actively implemented.

As for the future areas of intervention for EU action, EFSC's comments will concentrate on the internal side, due to its primary focus on the European Union.

1. General Principles:

- EFSC supports the notion of addressing a specific measure to marginalised or particularly disadvantaged groups. The complex of causes that determine child rights abuses and the social exclusion of children of particularly disadvantaged groups is linked to the complexity of the characteristics of the group and should be addressed in a way that not only targets the typology of the right but the group whose rights are being abused.
- EFSC fully supports the Commission's commitment to Child Participation not only as a theme but as an element of the elaboration of the strategy itself. EFSC suggests that child participation be ensured in the evaluation of the intervention methods for the social inclusion of children when selecting good practices and in cases where peer reviews are devoted to the inclusion methods of extremely marginalised children. Participation methods should carefully consider the cultural background of the children and should therefore

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not only vary from EU and third countries but should be fine-tuned according to the specific groups of children at stake.

- EFSC very much welcomes the recognition of street children as particularly vulnerable groups of children. In their case the mere recognition of the emergency situation in which they are living is a fundamental step towards addressing holistic and targeted measures for their integration and the protection of their rights. Indeed, their state of almost total exclusion from social, educational, and health services necessitates specific cross-disciplinary social intervention methods; ad hoc intervention is on the other hand hindered by the fact that admitting the phenomenon of street children is politically very delicate and tends to be underestimated if not hidden in many EU countries. The EU can play a major role in raising awareness of the phenomenon within Member States.

2. Civil Rights and Freedom

- The elective way for increasing the information available to children and adults regarding the UNCRC is to include it within formal and informal educational structures and in particular in the support to most marginalised groups; the Commission could, as part of the strategy, issue a specific document calling on Member States to include the CRC in all formal and informal education curricula in a sufficiently thorough manner;
- EFSC supports the awareness-raising and support of a coordinated action to ensure that effective policies for birth registration in third countries is a crucial part of the EU strategy on the rights of the child. Lack of registration and thus of an identity is one of the major hindrances to effective policies to fight against trafficking and child abuse, to addressing the most marginalised groups of children, including street children, and a major cause of the lack of reliable data on the issue. A joint European effort in this direction, to be linked with the FRA elaboration of indicators will certainly contribute.

3. Family life and alternative care

- EFSC supports the actions suggested in the issue paper under this cluster and in particular the comprehensive prevention plan against youth crime. Street children as an increasingly European phenomenon are particularly vulnerable to entering the illicit circles of drug selling and prostitution, and are increasingly exposed to trans-national criminal organisations. An EU-wide effort is therefore particularly necessary in this area.
- EFSC and its members support the family reunification as far as it is conducted in the best interests of the child and supports the promotion of foster care for victims of child abuse, neglect and abandonment, as well as the conduction of specific research on the issue as well as on alternative child protection services as a complement to established orphanages and institutions;
- EFSC particularly supports the idea to provide guidance/assistance to parents in need. `Broken homes` with all their disastrous consequences for the emotional well-being and socialisation of children constitute the negative environment which produces marginalized children and in its extreme form street children. Well settled assistance measures to parents if possible on an early level of prevention are crucial to avoid such developments.

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4. Basic Health and Welfare

- EFSC supports the proposal of addressing a specific measure to promote equal access to health care for the most disadvantaged groups, and suggests devoting a specific measure of the strategy to promoting access to social services in general for the most disadvantaged groups of children. This would be crucial for a sustainable re-integration process of street children.
- EFSC also supports targeted EU-wide campaigns promoting healthier lifestyles among children, which use alternative bottom-up methods aiming at reaching the most disadvantaged groups, building on the experience of locally active organisations. Particular focus should be given to drug abuse and HIV/AIDS prevention. In parallel, measures for the integration of children affected with HIV/AIDS should be outlined not only in third countries but also in the EU. Due to the fact that street children are often affected by this phenomenon, these efforts could be coupled with an effort to collect data and information about the situation of street children in Europe in order to ensure better prevention.

5. Education, Culture and Leisure

- EFSC is definitely in favour of building on the green paper on migration and mobility issued in the framework of the social Agenda in order to promote inclusive education in the EU.
- The issue of preventing school bullying and violence is crucial to most children living in segregated and disadvantaged environments - as EFSC member organisations report - where the inclusive function of schooling is nullified and inverted by the extreme poverty and social exclusion of the children attending it. Therefore these measures must absolutely be addressed as an integral part of the strategy in the field of education.

6. Special Protection measures

- EFSC supports the proposal to encourage member states to tackle child labour, child prostitution, sex tourism and paedophilia, through preventive measures aiming to support families and communities in which children live, and encourages the Commission not to forget the trans-national dimension of these phenomena and to promote joint efforts of the countries of origin and destination.
- The adoption of national child alert systems is an absolutely crucial measure for efficient emergency relief actions to protect high risk children in dangerous situations and to implement longer term prevention measures.
- EFSC would suggest the establishment of a specific “European Alliance against Drug Abuse of Children and Youth” for which a particular assistance programme should be adopted by the EU.

EFSC will follow closely the developments in the strategy and entrusts EURONET to represent its view at the steering group.

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