



## Seventh Annual Dialogue

Committee of the Regions –European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

16 November 2015, Brussels

The Annual Dialogue is a well-established practice since 2009 by the Committee of the Regions and FRA providing an opportunity to discuss fundamental rights themes of relevance at regional and local level sharing knowledge on existing fundamental rights good practices.

Fundamental rights, and in particular the protection of the rights of the child have always been a core theme for the European Committee of the Regions and the European Agency of Fundamental Rights. Rights of the Child were part of the focus at the first dialogue: "From Paper into Practice", dedicated to the legal framework and its implementation. This event examined the role of local and regional authorities in the areas of education, in the fight against child abuse and trafficking and in the use of indicators to measure the implementation of these rights by local and regional authorities.

In its opinion on '*Local and regional cooperation to protect the rights of the child in the European Union*' the Committee of the Regions underlined that the rights of the child are a horizontal, cross-cutting issue, with multiple dimensions that must be mainstreamed into all relevant European and national policies. It pointed out that local and regional authorities are at the frontline to ensure child rights on a daily basis 'on the ground' in the context of their competences. In this context, local and regional authorities have an opportunity to develop effective policies that serve as examples both within their own countries and the EU.

The European Committee of the Regions has called for a comprehensive partnership with all actors relevant to the protection of the rights of the child, in particular EU institutions and Member States, as well as civil society and children themselves.

In 2014, following a request by the European Commission, FRA mapped national child protection systems across the EU, collecting data on the key components of national child protection systems, including on the responsible authorities and actors<sup>1</sup>. Emphasis was given on how national child protection systems respond to the needs of children with multiple vulnerabilities such as immigrant and refugee children or children with disabilities and on

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<sup>1</sup> More information on FRA research and the key findings of the mapping are available in EN,FR,DE at <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/comparative-data/child-protection>

issues of cooperation and coordination when developing and implementing child protection policies and laws.

The research findings outline the responsibilities and the important role of local and regional authorities in planning and implementing sound child protection policies and developing specialised services to protect children and support families.

Regional and local authorities depending on their concrete responsibilities and competencies can play an important role in the protection of child victims - by developing for example and/or monitoring alternative care services – as well as in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Effective child protection services, ensuring access to quality early childhood education, day care centres, primary health services and taking measures against poverty and social exclusion are some of the most common areas of action for regional and local authorities.

The Seventh Annual Dialogue focuses on strengthening child protection systems in the EU. In this respect it is important to underline that the Treaty of Lisbon introduced an objective for the EU to promote children's rights and that the EU's own Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees the protection of child rights by EU institutions, as well as by EU Member States when they implement EU law.

Every child has a right to a childhood free of exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect. And every child should be supported and encouraged to grow without discrimination of any kind into a healthy, capable adult through the provision of quality education and health care, as well as all other support systems that foster a child's development.

In order to achieve this public authorities with different tasks must cooperate efficiently. Our work indicates that more work is necessary in this regard to achieve better coordination and interagency cooperation within Member States and across the EU. It is crucial to ensure that all relevant actors at different levels of governance work together to protect and promote fundamental rights, including child rights.

Tackling geographical disparities regarding the availability and quality of services - manifested in particular between urban and rural areas- and ensuring harmonization of child protection standards and services within Member States and across EU, is critical.

Moreover, it is also crucial to explore the role of regional and local authorities and the challenges faced by them in relation to human and financial resources, in ensuring the protection of all children, irrespectively of their legal or residence status, and prevent child abuse, exploitation and neglect, by developing well-coordinated, integrated child protection services. This is particularly relevant today, in the view of the increased number of refugees seeking protection in the EU, many of whom are unaccompanied children and families.

The Seventh Annual Dialogue aims to contribute in strengthening integrated national child protection systems by discussing common challenges and identifying possible ways to support regional and local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities.