



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD: "BETWEEN PROMISE AND DELIVERY"

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

**FRA Symposium: 2007-2017: Is Europe doing enough to protect fundamental rights?
The children perspective – Council Press Room, 175 Rue de la Loi, Brussels**

28 June 2017 – 9:00-9:30 (see Symposium Programme)

Madam President, Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished speakers and guests,

I am glad that today's Symposium, organised by the Fundamental Rights Agency in close cooperation with the Maltese Presidency, is dedicated **to the protection of the rights of the child**, which is one of the objectives of the European Union.

I would like to extend a particularly **warm welcome to the children and young people who are participating** today as speakers, observers and as rapporteurs.

The backdrop for this event – the FRA 2017 fundamental rights report – coincides with the **10th anniversary of FRA's** establishment and I would take this opportunity to thank the Agency for its work.

On long journeys, a question particularly beloved of children is **"Are we there yet?"**

With regard to implementation of fundamental rights, no, we are not there yet!

We are, as FRA says, "**between promise and delivery**".

Those four words acknowledge a certain amount of road travelled and progress made.

They also convey the message that we must not lose sight of **our destination**, namely the **protection, respect and promotion of fundamental rights**.

This message is very much in line with the European Commission's approach, detailed in our own **Commission's Annual Report on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, adopted last 19 May**.

On that occasion, the Commission delivered **three important messages**:

- **First**, we noted that we are at an existential period for our societies and for the future of European integration. In this context, we strongly reaffirmed that **fundamental rights are the foundation of our European Union and our communities**.

We are a **Union of Values**.

- **Second**, it is our duty to uphold democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law.

When the rules are breached, we stand up and enforce them.

- **Third, fundamental rights are for all** – not only for a few.

This Juncker Commission's focus is on **concrete results**.

We need to diagnose the real problems and focus on solving those.

Today's focus is largely on the rights of children.

And I would like to draw your attention on a striking data.

In 2016, more than **one in four children in the EU were still at risk of poverty or social exclusion**.

The European Pillar of Social Rights chapter on social protection and inclusion provides an opportunity to **redouble efforts and monitor progress much more rigorously**.

The Social Pillar very clearly sets a **right for children to be protected from poverty.**

It very clearly states that **children from disadvantaged backgrounds** have the right to **specific measures** to enhance their equitable access to and enjoyment of a range of social rights.

In terms of disadvantaged groups, FRA's surveys continue to show that the **situation of Roma children is particularly alarming.**

Progress has been made particularly in the right to education.

But the Commission had to launch **infringement proceedings against three Member States on the segregation of Roma children in education.**

Still, much more needs to be done to ensure an **integrated approach to child poverty** that links education and training to finding work.

900,000 children applied for asylum in the EU between 2014 and 2016.

With the April adoption of a communication on **the protection of children in migration**, we have set out EU actions and recommendations to Member States to address gaps and shortcomings.

We **welcome FRA's engagement in the hotspots in Greece and Italy** supporting the efforts of the Greek authorities and EU agencies – such as EASO – to provide practical guidance on child protection.

The Commission will now **establish an EU-wide guardianship network** to develop and exchange good practice and guidance, taking also into account the work done by FRA.

Member States are encouraged to **strengthen guardianship** and ensure that **guardians are swiftly appointed** for all unaccompanied children, to safeguard their best interests and wellbeing.

Unaccompanied and separated children should be cared for under the auspices of **integrated national child protection systems**.

And more needs to be done to ensure a **range of care options**, including the **availability of foster care**.

Child safeguarding and child protection need to be embedded in all hotspots and reception centres hosting children.

And people working with children in migration should always be trained to do so.

Member States are also encouraged to speed up **family reunification** procedures – this is critical for the best interests of the child.

Access to **inclusive formal education** is not yet assured for all children in migration within the EU.

And Member States are encouraged to step up efforts.

More needs to be done to **support transition to adulthood**, or leaving care, also with regard to access to education and training.

Children are often **stigmatised or victimised because of their ethnic and migration background.**

The Commission has put in place a **high level group to work with Member States** and other actors – including FRA – on practical, actionable policy responses, including on **hate crime recording.**

For child victims of violence, the Victims' rights directive needs to be implemented fully.

Many gaps remain, including with regard to specialised services for child victims.

For example, **children's right to information and right to be heard must be improved to support their access to justice.**

We need to listen to children and empower them to be involved in **all decisions that concern them.**

After all, they are experts on their own situation.

Of course, on all these matters, **Member States and their national, regional and local authorities** are at the forefront in implementing and promoting fundamental rights.

And **Member States can rely on the EU's** legislation, policy guidance, funding programmes, and operational actions by EU agencies to support them.

The Commission and FRA 2017 fundamental rights reports bring clarity on what has been achieved.

They also highlight gaps and challenges at EU and national levels.

I hope that today's informed discussions will focus on **concrete implementation.**

I hope that today's exchanges will also **renew commitment and efforts on abiding by our strong European values in implementing fundamental rights.**

Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.

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