



Reaching the heights for the rights of the child

Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021

High-Level Launching Conference

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Statements

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Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)

(absent)

“How can the Council of Europe Development Bank help to make the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child a reality?”

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

1. Opening remarks

It gives me great pleasure to be part of this high-level plenary discussion today, representing the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB). I am also delighted to be participating in the launch of the third Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child, covering the period 2016-2021.

Initiatives such as this, coupled with the continuous work of the UN Expert Committee for the Rights of the Child and the 2009 Strasbourg meeting of experts on children’s rights, are hugely important for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

They are also crucial when it comes to exchanging views, consolidating results, debating outstanding issues and agreeing on ways to move forward.



Bulgarian Chairmanship
Council of Europe
November 2015 – May 2016
Présidence de la Bulgarie
Conseil de l'Europe
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The presence here today of Heads of State, Ministers, Vice-Ministers, State Secretaries, experts, and many other distinguished guests is a testament to our commitment to improving the situation on the ground.

2. CEB activity benefiting children

Fellow-speakers have already tackled the focal points of this session. I would like to outline some of the efforts that the Council of Europe Development Bank has been undertaking in that regard, and will focus on migrant and refugee children.

First, a couple of words about the Bank for those of you who may not be familiar with it: the CEB was established in 1956 on the basis of a Partial Agreement between member states and the Council of Europe. It operates within the framework of the Council of Europe and actively supports its values.

The Bank has an exclusively social mandate and provides long-term loans at favourable rates for the financing of projects with high social added value in its 41 member states. It also provides grants, on a more limited basis.

Over the past decade, roughly one-tenth of all projects approved by the CEB have been for the benefit of children. This represents a total value of over €2 billion worth of loans, with an additional € 1.5 million of grants provided for the same purpose.

Some of the areas in which the Bank has been making a difference: the improvement of existing public infrastructure; the construction and renovation of school facilities; the acquisition of school equipment; the provision of training; and the modernisation of children detention facilities.

These projects are for the benefit of both CEB target group countries (22 of its members in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe) and non-target group countries, and help to improve the living conditions of some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children across the continent.

Let me mention a few examples: in Hungary, we provided funds for the construction of a nursery school for 100 children in the municipality of Biatorbagy in 2005 (amount approved: €600,000). In Latvia, we approved a €25 million loan to the government in 2009 for the construction, renovation and expansion of kindergartens and elementary schools.

In Romania, we financed a project for the integration of street children in society in 2004 (amount approved: €3.3 million), and another project in 2006 for the construction and refurbishment of kindergartens and the provision of staff training and support equipment (amount approved: €67 million).

And more recently, at our latest Administrative Council meeting, we approved a €14 million loan to the government of Georgia to finance the rehabilitation of state schools, with emphasis on energy efficiency measures. The programme will improve the learning environment of 15,000 children, including 300 pupils with a speech or hearing impairment.

We also approved a €200 million loan to the City of Paris, which, among other things, will be used for the construction of new schools and the renovation of existing facilities, especially in areas with families facing social difficulties.

3. Migrant and refugee children

Given the CEB's social mandate, it goes without saying that the Bank would not remain idle as the migrant and refugee crisis in Europe intensified. In September 2015, we established the Migrant and Refugee Fund (MRF), in order to offer emergency assistance in the form of grants to the countries receiving overwhelming numbers of migrants and refugees.

The Fund has so far received donations in the region of €18 million and has approved projects worth almost €14 million in the Balkan region, for the provision of shelter, food, medical care, clothing and other emergency aid to migrants and refugees, including children.

And in October 2015, the Bank approved a loan of €2 million in order to part-finance two open accommodation centres for asylum-seekers on the island of Lesbos in Greece, with a capacity of 100 places, including 40 for unaccompanied children over 12 years old.

In addition to our emergency response to the crisis, we are stepping up our efforts to facilitate the integration of migrant populations in their destination countries through our lending activity.

It is a matter of major importance for us to ensure that migrant and refugee families have access to adequate housing, education, healthcare and employment, including professional and language training, in the countries where they are settling. This will enable them to integrate fast and smoothly into the society of the destination country.

More importantly, it will give their children the opportunity to build fulfilling, thriving lives. This is the best way to avoid exclusion and marginalisation, which are often linked to radicalisation and extremism.

4. Concluding remarks

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

The activity of the Council of Europe Development Bank covers a wide range of areas. Through our programmes, which are often of a cross-cutting nature, we actively contribute to the realisation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child in a number of areas: fighting poverty, inequality and exclusion; battling against violence; helping to prevent the root causes of radicalisation; providing assistance to migrant and refugee children and facilitating their integration into society so they can have equal opportunities.

To achieve this and fulfil our social mission, we work closely with all our partners and member countries. And we are determined to continue working in this direction, remaining loyal to our overarching objective to build a better Europe and, I would add here, to make Europe a better place for children.

Thank you.