



Building a Europe  
for and with children  
Construire une Europe  
pour et avec les enfants

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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## **First meeting of the Bureau of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF)**

**25-26 May 2020**

### **Meeting report**

#### **1. Opening of the meeting**

1. The Bureau of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child held its first meeting from 25-26 May 2020. The meeting was held via videoconference, as provided for in its terms of reference.

2. The CDENF Chair, Ms Maria-Andriani Kostopoulou (Greece), opened the meeting and welcomed the members, thanking them for their availability, responsiveness and support. The list of participants appears in Appendix I.

#### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

3. The draft agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix II.

#### **3. Statement by the Secretariat**

4. Regína Jensdóttir, Head of the Children's Rights Division, welcomed the members of the Bureau. She updated the CDENF Bureau on the precautionary measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic as applied in France and by the Council of Europe, and expressed her appreciation for the Bureau members' participation in this unprecedented context.

5. She highlighted that the impact of the COVID-19 related crisis raised serious concerns as regards the rights of the child and underlined the Council of Europe's role in assisting member states with practical and effective guidance in finding ways to address the crisis while respecting human rights, the rule of law and democracy, and in particular the role to be played by the CDENF to guide the Organisation and member states.

6. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat, notably:
- the action already taken by the Organisation- the [SG/Inf\(2020\)11 document](#) “Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the COVID-19 sanitary crisis - A toolkit for member states” issued by the Secretary General; and other measures regarding operating processes (teleworking /confinement etc);
  - the creation of the Organisation-wide COVID-19 [dedicated web page](#) on the protection of human rights in times of crisis;
  - the creation of a children’s rights [dedicated webpage](#) COVID-19 - Protecting and empowering children during the Covid-19 pandemic and plans underway to increase resources available;
  - several statements issued by convention-based mechanisms and monitoring bodies, in particular:
    - the statement by the Lanzarote Committee Chair and Vice-Chairperson on “[Stepping up protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse in times of the COVID-19](#)” (15 May 2020);
    - the [Joint Declaration on the right to data protection in the context of the COVID-19](#) pandemic of the Chair of the Council of Europe’s data protection “Convention 108” committee and the Council of Europe’s Data Protection Commissioner (also on data processing in educational systems) (30 March 2020);
    - the [statement](#) by the President of GREVIO (Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence) “ For many women and children, the home is not a safe place” (20 March 2020);
  - the dedicated [webpage](#) on Child-friendly justice in Europe – Participation and restorative justice, issued on 12 May in the context of the Georgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and which compiles the statements of high-level speakers and other key resources on child friendly justice.

7. The Chair informed the Bureau that the incoming Greek Presidency of the Committee of Ministers (May to November 2020), prioritised the protection of children (children as a vulnerable group, children at risk of poverty, children victims of violence, trafficking, forced labour and unaccompanied migrant children). Other priorities identified by the Greek government are the rights of younger generations to enjoy cultural heritage unaffected by climate change and social rights and access to health in the context of Council the Europe and the independence of justice and education and democratic culture in the digital area as well. She also informed that the CDENF is expected to contribute to the events organised under the Greek Chairmanship which address the rights of the child.

#### **4. The COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on children and their rights and possible actions to be considered by CDENF**

8. The Bureau discussed the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, its implications for children’s rights, including with respect to the implementation of the current Strategy and the development of the future Strategy beyond 2021. The Bureau appreciated the efforts made by delegations to respond in such a short time and instructed the

secretariat to reach out to the remaining delegations with an invitation to contribute with further suggestions, despite the expiry of the initial deadline for responses.

9. The Secretary of the CDENF summarised the written contributions received from 15 member states and 2 observer organisations to the survey circulated in advance of the Bureau meeting, which touched upon all five thematic priorities of the current strategy. The delegates' contributions have emphasised the important role to be played by the CDENF for facilitating regular exchanges of knowledge, good practices and experiences among member states and other organisations in the areas most affected as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. Contributions outlined the delegations' interest that CDENF prioritises the following issues in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic situation and immediate and long-term consequences:

- poverty and social exclusion (with a focus on how the crisis impacts on the livelihood of children and their families and increase in child poverty) ;
- strategies for ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable children, including effective access by children to health and social welfare services (including online social services);
- strategies for ensuring continuing care and protection for children in institutions and deinstitutionalisation;
- policies promoting equal access of children to education and leisure activities;
- situation of specific vulnerable groups, such as migrant children (asylum processes, management of cases, right to education and welfare, access to social and health services, unaccompanied children) and children with disabilities;
- participation of children, in particular participation through schools, and the participation of children from families which have been seriously affected by the health emergency situation;
- actions to support member states in better detecting, preventing and combating all forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse of children (online and offline) and cyberbullying;
- policies for child protection case management and emergency care arrangements;
- support provided to vulnerable children during the recovery period;
- ensuring contact of children with their parents (in situations of joint custody, presence of parents in hospitals with small children, contact of children in institutional care or contacts with imprisoned parents) ;
- policies and measures involving access and use of technologies and the digital environment, including digital safety and security, how to bridge the digital divide and ensure equal access to internet to all children, and policies promoting online learning.

10. The Bureau took note of the proposals put forward, inter alia about the need to reflect on the standards for the enjoyment of social and civil rights by children in the current situation, as well as the measures required to ensure the implementation of the right to education in the longer term perspective, should the COVID-19 pandemic last longer than anticipated. Cooperation with other relevant CoE bodies, including other steering committees (i.e. the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice) was considered important.

11. The Bureau discussed whether the current Terms of reference of the CDENF should be adapted to take into account the situation, created the Covid-19 pandemic. They considered that the needs and priorities outlined by member states in this context should be addressed as much as possible through the implementation of the existing tasks of the

Committee, and of its working group and subordinate body. At the same time, the Bureau also considered that the Committee should be prepared to examine an adaptation of its workplan and working methods in order to ensure that its actions satisfy the needs expressed by delegations, and that a prioritisation of the CDENF's deliverables is agreed.

12. The Bureau noted that proposals touched upon the creation of new working groups and/or reviewing the tasks of existing groups to ensure that the situation created by the pandemic would be addressed in the CDENF's work. The Bureau agreed that the current CDENF working groups and subordinate bodies should examine and contribute substantively to address priority issues identified by member states that related to their current deliverables.

13. They noted that one delegation proposed to consider establishing a CDENF working group focusing on new vulnerabilities arising from the epidemiological emergency or integrating this issue into already existing groups. The Bureau members exchanged on domestic challenges to uphold the rights of the child in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. They agreed that although the situation appeared to have aggravated existing vulnerabilities and situations, it remained yet to be assessed whether new vulnerabilities per se had emerged. Several Bureau members considered that this proposal would have a clear added value if examined from a broader perspective to cover other situations of emergency that are not specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic (such as for example natural catastrophes), whereby a dedicated group could exchange on lessons learnt and good practices to address such situations from a child rights perspective, and if possible develop guidance to support states in such situations. It was also considered that such a proposal could be relevant in the context of examination of future terms of reference, possibly under a new strategy.

14. The Bureau took note of the numerous expressions of interest from delegations to exchange views and experiences on the situation in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and asked the Secretariat to make the necessary arrangements for CDENF to be able to hold an online exchange with a thematic focus on sharing experiences on the management of the COVID-19 situation and children's rights. The secretariat informed that the earliest possible date would be to hold this exchange in the afternoon of 26 June 2020.

15. The Bureau instructed the Secretariat to circulate the compilation of responses to all CDENF delegations, and to prepare a revised proposal outlining additional possible actions for CDENF's agreement, and clear concept notes on possible thematic webinars.

##### **5. State of implementation of the CDENF activities according to its terms of reference and consideration of priority deliverables and workplan**

16. The Secretariat presented a programme and specific work plan for the period 2020-2021 which took into account the decisions agreed during the first plenary meeting of CDENF and the latter's' main and specific tasks. The Bureau agreed that the current workplan would have to be revised to include any necessary adaptations as a result of additional actions to be decided upon by the CDENF. The Bureau examined also a provisional workplan of deliverables at each plenary meeting during the biennium and discussed options for the planning of future activities.

17. The Chair thanked the Secretariat for the detailed workplan and provided further suggestions for inclusion.

18. In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- the Committee should be prepared to accommodate different scenarios, including organising several CDENF videoconferences during the rest of 2020, in case of continued travel restrictions across Europe;
- additional CDENF virtual thematic exchanges should prioritise the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and children (possibly in June 2020);
- make progress on the examination of the priorities under the future Strategy for the Rights of the Child should be made through a virtual exchange (possibly September 2020) so that a solid concept proposal be approved in November and a first draft strategy be ready for examination at the first plenary meeting in 2021;
- the 2<sup>nd</sup> CDENF plenary meeting (16-18 November) would be held by video conference if travel restrictions would remain applicable across Europe in November, over 3 days, during the Greek Presidency;
- resort to additional and in advance written consultations should be made in order to make progress on the development of the draft standards on age assessment and other relevant agenda items - and in case of lack of consensus, clarity on processes to be applied to facilitate the decision-making process should be provided;
- the calendar should not exclude the need to re-schedule the examination of the draft standards on age assessment during a physical meeting in 2021.

19. A provisional calendar was discussed which included specific proposals for online thematic exchanges, practical webinars and CDENF plenary sessions, together with possible working methods, which will be submitted as a proposal from the Bureau to all delegations.

20. The Bureau agreed to re-examine the situation in member states at its next meeting in July 2020 and any related implications for online or virtual meetings to be planned.

## **6. Work of the subordinate committee of experts and of working groups, methodology and working methods**

### **6.1. CJ-ENF/ISE (joint subordinate body with CDCJ)**

21. In line with the decision taken during the last plenary meeting, the Bureau examined the nominations received from member states for the CJ-ENF/ISE, for which the CDENF is expected to designate a list of 5 experts, while the European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ) is expected likewise to designate the remaining 5 experts. The Bureau reviewed 23 country nominations<sup>1</sup> and the experts' professional background, experience and most up to date expertise (as indicated in the CV provided by their authorities) against the criteria of the terms of reference of the subordinate committee, that is their seniority and/or independence as well as established expertise, including at international level, in law, policy and practice relating to family law and children's rights.

22. The secretariat informed the Bureau that the CDCJ Bureau would meet on 28 May and examine the proposed list by the CDENF Bureau, so that a proposal by consensus on selected experts could be achieved by both the CDCJ and CDENF's Bureau and circulated to both committees shortly after.

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<sup>1</sup> Nominations were received from Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia (2), Hungary, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy (5), Latvia, Moldova (2), Norway, Poland (2), Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland, Russian Federation. The gender balance was 15 women, 8 men.

23. The Bureau members were impressed by the wealth of experience of nominated candidates, which rendered the selection process very complex. The secretariat informed the Bureau that in line with existing rules, any member state whose expert was not a member of this group would nevertheless be able to take part in meetings at their own expense.

24. The list of experts, as agreed by the Bureau in consensus with the CDCJ Bureau (following their meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> of May), is included in Appendix III.

25. The Bureau took note of the provisional workplan and working methods of the CJ-ENF/ISE, which should be further developed and detailed jointly with the CDCJ. The Bureau instructed the secretariat to communicate the list of experts to CDENF for tacit approval, in line with the decision taken during the last plenary meeting.

### **6.2. Working Group on responses to violence against children (CDENF-GT-VAE)**

26. The Secretariat explained the procedure that had been followed to establish the new working group and presented the final list of experts selected, as well as next steps envisaged. The first (virtual) meeting of the CDENF-GT-VAE would be held on 23-24 June; a draft agenda would be circulated in the coming days.

27. In line with the mandate adopted by the CDENF when establishing the working group, the chairperson of the Group should be a Bureau member. The Bureau unanimously designated Matthew Vella as Chair of the working group. Ms Ružica Boškić (Slovenia) communicated during the meeting in writing that she would support the candidature of any other interested Bureau member, and that she would not be a candidate herself.

### **6.3. Working methods and functioning modalities**

28. Working methods and functioning modalities were discussed when considering the CDENF workplan, adaptation measures and working methods. For further details, see agenda item 5.

## **7. Preparation of the next CDENF meeting**

29. The Bureau considered the priority themes of the draft agenda of the next CDENF meetings taking into account the work programme and deliverables for 2020-2021. The Secretariat was instructed to update the workplan to take into account Bureau's proposals as regards priority topics, the chairmanships when the plenaries would be held and any written consultations required.

30. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to prepare a list of topics for the exchange of views of good practices, on the basis of the identified needs by delegations, and prepared a proposed concept notes.

## **8. Date of the next Bureau meeting**

31. The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting by videoconference in the first week on July, as a three hours session (date to be confirmed based on availabilities of members).

## **9. Any other business**

32. The Bureau discussed the fact that the Vice-Chair position of the Committee was left vacant following the resignation of Mr Eduard Israyelyan (Armenia) communicated on 6 March 2020. It was agreed that a call for expressions of interest should be issued as soon as possible, while modalities for organising the election should be communicated to the CDENF.

33. Ms Regina Jensdóttir informed the Bureau members of the Lanzarote Committee's current work. The Lanzarote Committee is finalising the collection of countries' inputs on with respect to measures taken in the context of the Covid-19 situation, which includes information on child sexual exploitation and abuse, information related to violence against children and information not directly related with Lanzarote Committee's mandate but that could be interesting for CDENF work. A compilation will be sent in the next days. Furthermore, she informed about a dedicated section on the Children's Right website which collects information on various countries' initiatives and proposed that the responses by CDENF members could also be included there. The Chair proposed that such information should only be published with the approval of the issuing authority.

34. The Chair thanked the Secretariat for the smooth organisation of this first online meeting of the Bureau and working documents, and the members for their contributions.

## **APPENDIX I – Agenda**

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Adoption of the agenda
3. Statement by the Secretariat
4. The COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on children and their rights and possible actions to be considered by CDENF
5. State of implementation of the CDENF activities according to its terms of reference and consideration of priority deliverables and workplan
6. Work of the subordinate committee of experts and of working groups, methodology and working methods
  - 6.1. CJ-ENF/ISE
  - 6.2. Working Group on responses to violence against children (CDENF-GT-VAE)
  - 6.3. Working methods and functioning modalities
7. Preparation of the next CDENF meeting
8. Date of the next Bureau meeting
9. Any other business

## **APPENDIX II - List of participants**

### **BUREAU MEMBERS**

Ms Maria-Andriani Kostopoulou (Chair)  
Attorney at Law, Supreme Court of Greece

Ms Ružica Boškić - apologised  
Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia

Mr Matthew Vella  
Chief Executive Officer, Social Care Standards Authority, Malta

Ms Hanna Vseviov  
Head of Department, Children and Families Department Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonia

### **DGII – Directorate General of Democracy**

Ms Regina Jensdottir  
Children's Rights Co-ordinator, Head of the Children's Rights Division

Ms Livia Stoica Becht  
Secretary to the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child  
Programme Officer / Responsable de programme

Ms Maren Lambrecht-Feigl  
Co-Secretary to the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child



Programme Officer / Responsable de programme

Ms Aroa Fandiño, Legal assistant, Children's Rights Division

**APPENDIX III – List of proposed selected experts of CJ/ENF – ISE  
(selected by consensus by the CDEF and CDCJ Bureaus)**

Armenia	Ms Susanna TADEVOSYAN
Croatia	Ms Alma BERNAT
Ireland	Mr Seamus S. CARROLL
Italy	Ms Federica FIORILLO
Latvia	Ms Dagnija PALCEVSKA
Portugal	Ms Catarina PRAL
Austria	Mr Ewald FILLER
Norway	Ms Bente Therese BEKKHUS
Greece	Mr Christoforos LINOS
Switzerland	Mr David RÜETSCHI