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HDGE contribution

Draft Speaking Points

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**Mid-term review conference of the Council of Europe Strategy for
the rights of the child 2022-2027**

***Welcome address during the high-level opening session
3 April 2025, 9.30-10.15, Agora Room G03***

✓ **Speaking points**

- Dear Minister, dear Special Representative, ladies and gentlemen, dear children +
Intro niceties
- Three years ago, in February 2022, the Committee of Ministers adopted this Strategy, setting forth an ambitious agenda to address the multifaceted challenges faced by children today. Our commitment was clear: to build a Europe where every child can grow up free from violence, enjoy equal opportunities, access safe technologies, experience child-friendly justice, have their voices heard, and have their rights protected, especially in times of crisis and emergency.
- Today, we stand at the halfway point of this six-year Strategy. This conference provides us with a unique opportunity to reflect on our achievements, identify the challenges that persist, and to recalibrate our efforts accordingly, to ensure that the rights of every child are upheld.

- Since we convene under the auspices of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, I wish to convey to you, Minister Claude Meisch, my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for the Luxembourg Government's support in making this important event possible.
 - I am delighted to welcome our esteemed international partners and sister organisations, represented today by Najat Maalla M'jid, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, [and Glenn Micallef, EU Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture, and Sport (to give a video message)]. In these challenging times for effective multilateralism, our unity is more crucial than ever. Together, we must stand firm in upholding and defending the values we share.
 - I also want to warmly welcome the children and young people who have travelled to Strasbourg for our event today, to enrich our discussions with their expertise and experience. Your voices are invaluable, and your participation makes all the difference.
 - Over the next two days, we will engage in six interactive workshops, carefully examining the implementation so far of our Strategy's objectives. Based on this review, we will be able to more effectively make progress on what remains highly topical issues under each of these objectives.
1. Digital technologies and artificial intelligence are shaping our world at an unprecedented pace. But how can we unlock their full potential for children while keeping children safe from risks? This is a question we need to tackle collectively, bringing in diverse expertise and critical views, including those of the children themselves, who might have a better understanding of this new digital world. Dear children and young participants, we need your input as we launch the preparations for a tool for assessing the impact of artificial intelligence on the rights of the child.

2. [Child poverty](#) remains a stubborn barrier to equal opportunities and social inclusion. We should continue working transversally and join forces, in particular with our colleagues working with the European Social Charter, as well as with the Parliamentary Assembly, to tackle this deeply troubling issue. We need to take further steps to transform policies into real, tangible accountability for children in need. We will seek inspiration and guidance from your discussion when continuing our supporting efforts to member states.
3. Protecting children from violence, in particular sexual violence and harmful behaviours, remains high among our priorities. The mandate given to the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child to draft a [Recommendation on comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education](#) stresses the importance of self-awareness and respect for others as prerequisites for preventing and protecting children from violence. While building on existing norms and tools, a wide consultation is currently ongoing. This conference is the occasion to voice views, inputs, concerns or support in relation to the first draft. This is the moment to effectively contribute to shaping a legal instrument that will be instrumental for policy-makers, teachers and educators, families and children. With your help, let's make this Recommendation an essential tool in safeguarding children from violence.
4. Since 2010 and the adoption of Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice, the Council of Europe is in the forefront to guide Member States in [adapting their justice systems to the rights and needs of children](#). As the World changes, our standards need to evolve to take into account new challenges. Let us take the opportunity of this gathering to provide meaningful input to our ongoing review of the Child-friendly Justice guidelines.
5. Children's right to have a say in matters that affect them is a core principle throughout this event. In [healthcare](#), this right is especially crucial and needs to be improved. To support children's participation in healthcare decisions, a guide was

drafted in partnership with the Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO). Tomorrow's session will mark its official launch - along with a version created by and for children - helping young people take an active, informed role in their own health and well-being.

6. As our Strategy calls for the protection of children in times of crisis, specific attention was given to the [situation of children of Ukraine](#), and even more specifically to their access to education. While looking at how to guarantee quality learning for children from Ukraine present in other Council of Europe member states, and while reviewing challenges to it, we should also share promising practices. What we need to do is to outline, and then take concrete steps, to ensure that every child receives the education they deserve, no matter their circumstances.

- All of these six sessions are designed to foster open dialogue, and to allow the sharing of best practices, as well as to, importantly, develop innovative solutions to the challenges we face. As such, the outcome of every session is meant to be a step towards building a World where children's rights are protected, their voices are heard, and their futures are secured;
- We are privileged to have among us national experts, international partners, academics, representatives of civil society, including survivor-led NGOs, and, importantly, children and young people. The insights and active participation of all of you are invaluable;
- The conference will cover some sensitive and challenging topics. I invite us all to be mindful that there may be people present in the different sessions with lived experience of the very issues under discussion;
- As we deliberate, let us reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the principles enshrined in this Strategy. Let us strive to create an environment where every child,

regardless of their background or circumstances, can thrive and realise their full potential;

- I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all participants for your dedication and contributions. Together, we can and will make a tangible difference in the lives of children across our continent.