

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 272 (2009)¹ Preventing violence against children

1. Although violence against children is a problem of global proportions, it is also a hidden one; many cases go unreported, and in many places such maltreatment is sadly still widely accepted and perceived as normal.

2. A policy document, rooted in and synthesising the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe's *acquis*, as well as other relevant international standards, designed to promote the development and implementation of multidisciplinary national frameworks to prevent and respond to all acts of violence against children, was well overdue.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe therefore welcomes the Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence drafted in the framework of the Programme "Building Europe for and with children", and the action and practice they outline at national, regional and local level.

4. It is frequently central government that is in charge of defining the main thrust of public policies or the basic levels of services to be delivered throughout the country in the field of social and health policies. Nevertheless, the front-line prevention of violence against children and their protection are responsibilities of local and regional communities.

5. Strong welfare policies based on the development of a local, integrated system of services for children and families can be an effective response for optimising scarce resources in a period of increasing risk of social exclusion and poverty. Improvements in these areas address some of the major risk factors for family violence against children and should therefore lead to reductions in the rate of child maltreatment.

6. Furthermore, regions and local authorities often have specific legislative and regulatory powers in the fields of social and health policies, welfare policies and education and can therefore promote a mainstreaming action in order to make the prevention of violence against children a transversal objective for all the policies directly or indirectly affecting the lives of children and families.

7. The aim of the Congress' report, recommendation and resolution is, therefore, to give its full support to the Guidelines and to contribute to them and complement them by exploring some of the specificities of the role of local and regional authorities in the context of the national frameworks and by highlighting several key aspects.

8. In light of the above, the Congress asks the Committee of Ministers to give their full support to the Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence presented to them for adoption in November 2009.

9. The Congress further asks the Committee of Ministers to invite the member states to:

a. ensure that a national action plan is instituted or, where it already exists, properly implemented, as a result of a collaborative process involving central administrations, regions and local authorities, as well as representatives of civil society, in accordance with the guidelines and paying particular attention to the special needs of children with disabilities, refugee and other displaced children, children from minority groups or children without parents;

b. establish a co-ordination mechanism among the ministries with specific responsibilities for implementation of any national prevention strategy, in order to guarantee an optimal integration of policies, their shared monitoring and evaluation, as well as co-operation in adopting the action plan;

c. consider the prevention of violence, the protection of children and their treatment essential, not temporary, services and make them an integral part of the normal activities of health and social services;

d. make the requisite legislative changes to national laws so that:

i. reporting of cases of suspected violence against children becomes mandatory for all professionals working with them in both the public and private sector;

ii. child-friendly judicial procedures are put in place;

iii. children are kept informed and made aware of what is happening throughout their contacts with social services and judicial authorities;

iv. children are accompanied and supported along the whole judicial pathway by a mediator representing their interests, legal and otherwise;

e. define a national set of minimum standards and level of services to guarantee uniformity of interventions to support families at risk, and to protect vulnerable children and child victims of violence;

f. ensure that any national decentralisation reform undertaken reflects their global commitments and obligations to European and other international and regional instruments that reaffirm children's rights, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols, and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201);

g. guarantee stability of funding for child-protection services, and ensure that local and regional authorities have the necessary human and financial resources in this respect,

especially in the case of devolution of responsibilities to decentralised levels;

h. guarantee permanent political and administrative co-ordination between state and decentralised governance levels by setting up a mechanism to monitor the national/regional action plans, create consensus, share responsibilities and mainstream violence prevention and children's rights in national and regional laws, programmes and administration;

i. ensure that their regional and local authorities are aware that a national focal point has been mandated to act as a liaison between their child-protection authorities and the Council of Europe and that they know who it is.

10. The Congress is committed to the two main aims of the Council of Europe's initiatives, which are to support the

implementation of international standards in the field of children's rights, emphasising authorities' responsibility and accountability at the national, regional and local levels, and to introduce a child rights perspective into all policies and activities of the member states and support such an approach at a regional and local level. It therefore pledges itself to continue to contribute to the important work of the programme "Building a Europe for and with children", through its Committee on Social Cohesion and its participation in the Platform on Children's Rights launched in June 2009.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 14 October 2009, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(17)9, explanatory memorandum presented by C. Tascon-Mennetrier, France (L, SOC) on behalf of Pia Bosch I Codola, Spain (R, SOC), rapporteur).