

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 289 (2009)¹ Preventing violence against children

1. Violence against children is a global problem of immense proportions whose true magnitude can only be guessed at since the majority of cases remain unreported. Moreover, the extent of the known phenomenon varies according to the definitions adopted and the reporting procedures in place.

2. What is clear is that such violence, much of which occurs in the context of punishment by parents, is a violation of children's rights which has a direct impact on the physical and mental health of the victims as well as a socio-economic impact on the community as a whole.

3. While penal and most civil procedures are usually the responsibility of the state, there are some crucial issues in the field of child protection which may come under the remit of regions or of local authorities, such as the regulation and organisation of social and health services and the adoption of specific quality standards for childcare services.

4. In addition, regional and local governments usually have significant institutional competencies that can be used to balance the distribution across their territory of resources earmarked for the protection of children, harmonising local needs, resources and priorities with national and international standards.

5. The Council of Europe's Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence, rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, are designed to promote the development and implementation of holistic national frameworks to protect children from violence.

6. The aim of the Congress' report, recommendation and resolution is to give its full support to the guidelines and to contribute to and complement them by exploring some of the specificities of the role of local and regional authorities in the context of the above-mentioned national frameworks.

7. The Congress therefore calls on local and regional authorities to make the guidelines, and in particular those points relating to regional and local authorities, known to the relevant actors within their territories and establish contact with the national focal point mandated to act as a liaison between their child-protection authorities and the Council of Europe.

8. The Congress further invites local and regional authorities to incorporate the following three dimensions into their child-protection strategies:

Networking and participative planning

a. lobby for the establishment of permanent mechanisms of co-ordination with the state in order to harmonise specific policies for children and those general policies affecting their living conditions and mainstream prevention and children's rights in national and regional laws, programmes, and administrative and regulatory acts;

b. promote analogous inter-institutional and multidisciplinary co-ordination and networking within decentralised levels of government by setting up several mechanisms which would work on different levels to ensure:

i. at administrative level, the integration of different policies, assessment of ongoing processes and results and promotion of specific initiatives such as training, data collection and the adoption of procedural protocols; and

ii. at services-management level, a multidisciplinary team optimising professional resources when it is not affordable or efficient to create a specialised, permanent team, and limiting the risk of overlaps and delays in interventions;

c. establish formalised co-operation between child protection services, women's refuges and services for female victims of domestic violence in order to clearly address the issue of witnessing violence and mobilise all available resources for emergency interventions and responses;

d. define a local plan of action via a "participative planning", that is an inclusive, consensual, approach, with the main actors, including relevant professional and voluntary associations and non-governmental organisations, formalised by a framework agreement outlining the strategic objectives, action priorities, allocation of financial, structural and professional resources, service standards and quality requirements and co-ordination procedures between local services and all the other relevant actors;

Regulation and quality standards

e. implement, in accordance with national and international standards, a set of parameters and quality indicators designed for the adoption of quality management systems by all childcare services both in the public and private sectors including accreditation procedures for the setting up of such services and supervision of staff;

f. develop regional guidelines clearly setting out the procedures, roles and objectives of interventions for the detection of cases, their assessment and the provision of protection, including the response to be made in emergency situations to reduce the margin for arbitrariness or unjustified delays;

g. consider the development and promotion of a set of ethical guidelines for dealing with disclosure of abuse, to be used in the justice system, education, social work and health-care sectors;

h. create child-friendly benchmarks and quality standards to encourage organisations, industries and private companies to adopt "child-friendly and anti-violence/anti-exploitation" policies and demand, for example in the case of sexual tourism, that tour operators and local tourist agencies adopt

a code of conduct and make their clients aware of such exploitation;

i. ensure that all the measures of protection adopted by local services meet the special needs of children with disabilities, refugee and other displaced children, children from minority groups or unaccompanied minors;

Monitoring and evaluation

j. perform ongoing monitoring and evaluation of prevention plans and policies through a review-based, bottom-up process involving all the main stakeholders;

k. introduce a regional ombudsperson or independent mechanism to monitor the implementation of children's rights and instruments, as well as the avenues that exist for children to report violence suffered inside or outside the family, for example in school or in childcare services.

9. The Congress invites the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) of the European Union to promote an analysis of the impact of the present social and economic crisis on the level of social protection and welfare for

children and families, with particular attention to the most vulnerable, such as children with disabilities, migrants and unaccompanied minors.

10. The Congress calls on associations of local and regional authorities to disseminate the contents of this resolution, the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201) and its Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence.

11. The Congress pledges itself to continue to contribute to the work of the programme "Building a Europe for and with children", through its Committee on Social Cohesion and 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).