

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



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Preventing violence against children

Committee on Social Cohesion
Rapporteur : Pia BOSCH I CODOLA, Spain (R, SOC¹)

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Summary

Violence against children exists in every state and cuts across cultural, class, education, income, ethnic and age boundaries.

The Council of Europe has drafted a series of *Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence*, proposing a multidisciplinary and systematic national framework to prevent and respond to all acts of violence against children.

This report aims to support and contribute to the finalisation and adoption of the Guidelines by exploring the specificities of the role that European local and regional authorities can play in the prevention of such violence and protection of their most vulnerable citizens.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



A. DRAFT RESOLUTION²

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 phenomena 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 child-care 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 on 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.

² Preliminary draft resolution and preliminary draft recommendation approved by the Committee on Social Cohesion on 28 April 2009.

Members of the Committee :

Valerio Prignachi (Chair), E. Haider (Vice-Chair), V. Rogov (Vice-Chair), C. Aksoy, M. Aliev, S. Altobello, A. Antosova, S. Barnes, B. Belin, S. Berger (alternate: P. Schowtka), S. Bohatyrchuk-Kryvko, J.-M. Bourjac, S. Casey, M. Castro Almeida, A. Clemente Olivert, L. Chunaeva, A. Colucci, I. Dragunkina, A. Esen, J. Eugster-Van Bergeijk, P. Filippou, M. Gerasymenko, S. Geirsson, M. Gojkovic (alternate: D. Davidovic), I. Henttonen, U. Hiller (alternate: G. Krug), G. Horvath, T. Karol, M. Khan (alternate: J. Edney), W. Krochmal, I. Kuret, F. Lastra Valdes (alternate: P. Bosch I Codola), B.-M. Lövgren, D. Lloyd-Williams, E. Maurer, A. Mimenov, V. Panciuc, D. Ronga, R. Roperio Mancera, E. Simonetti (alternate: P. Muratore), J. Smyla, C. Tascon-Mennetrier, G. Thum, R. Tirle, A. Toader, E. Van Vaerenbergh, F. Wagner, J. Warmisham, P. Wies, C. Yusifov.

N.B.: The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Committee : D. Rios and M. Grimmeissen

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 multi-disciplinary team optimising professional resources when it is not affordable or efficient to create a specialised, permanent team and limiting the risk of overlapping 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 inclusive, consensual, approach, with the main actors, including relevant professional and voluntary associations and NGOs, 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 modes 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 child-care services both in the public and private sectors including accreditation procedures for the setting up of such services and supervision of workers;

f. develop regional guidelines clearly setting out the procedures, roles, and objectives of interventions for the detection of cases, assessment and 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 on-going monitoring and evaluation of prevention plans and policies through a review-based, bottom-up process involving all the main stakeholders;

k. introduce regional ombudsmen or independent mechanisms 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 child-care services.

9. The Congress invites the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) of the European Union's Committee of Regions 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 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 Europe for and with children", through its Committee on Social Cohesion and participation in the Platform on Children's Rights launched in June 2009.

B. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION³

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 and designed to promote the development and implementation of multidisciplinary national frameworks to prevent and respond to all acts of violence against children was well over-due.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities therefore welcomes the *Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence* drafted by 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 that central government 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 territorial 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.

³ See footnote 2.

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 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 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;

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 know who it is.

10. The Congress is committed to the two main aims of the Council'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 in all policies and activities of the member states and support such an approach at a regional and local levels. It therefore pledges itself to continue to contribute to the important work of the programme "Building 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.

C. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁴

1. Introduction

1.1 Violence against children, the phenomenon, the context

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 and the extent of the known phenomena vary according to the definitions adopted and the reporting procedures in place.

2. The limited availability of data collection and monitoring systems in most European countries makes it difficult to truly understand the problem and address it. There is therefore a strong demand for research on incidence and prevalence of the phenomenon, on long-term effects and causes of violence against children, as well as on protective and risk factors.⁵

3. For the purposes of this report the Congress considers violence against children to encompass: "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power".⁶

4. This definition covers a wide range of behaviours, which damage the social, psychological, cognitive and physical development of a child. The definition includes attitudes and behaviours which have an active or omissive/neglecting nature, and which can happen within or outside the family circle. Moreover, it also addresses acts of violence committed by an adult or a minor – it must not be forgotten that children can also be victimised by siblings.

⁴ Prepared with the contribution of Donata Bianchi, Researcher, Istituto degli Innocenti, Florence, Italy.

⁵ Risk factors are those which may contribute to child abuse and neglect, including the nature of parents, caretakers, families, or communities. Protective factors are those which promote safe and supportive families and resilience in children.

⁶ Report of the consultation on child abuse prevention, 29–31 March 1999. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1999 (document WHO/HSC/PVI/99.1).; Krug EG *et al.*, eds. World report on violence and health, Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002.

5. Many events of physical and mental violence against children occur in the context of punishment and control by parents. Humiliating forms of punishment or treatment which do not involve physical attack can be just as harmful to children, as stated at the end of the Council of Europe's Forum for Children and Families (held in Vienna in April 2004), which concluded that mental violence constitutes a serious health problem in Europe, requiring awareness-raising and prevention measures.

6. Attention must be paid also to the emergent problems of certain traditional practices, prejudicial to the physical, mental, emotional and social health of a child such as female genital mutilation, forced and early marriage or honour-related violence. Experiences in the field suggest that in these cases a prosecutorial approach alone is not sufficient, rather it is essential to modify the model of parenting and change well-rooted beliefs, as well as to support the victims.

1.2 Prevalence of violence against children

7. A Unicef opinion survey in 2001, conducted through interviews with 15,200 children aged 9 to 17 years in 35 countries in Europe and Central Asia, indicated that 59% of children had experienced violent or aggressive behaviours within their families; of these children, 61% resided in Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia and 54% in Western Europe. Research allows us to estimate that about 20% of women and 5 to 10% of men have suffered sexual abuse as children.⁷

Short and long-term consequences of violence

8. Evidence shows that violence against children has serious, short and long-term consequences on the physical, mental, emotional and social health of the victims. The Adverse Childhood Experiences⁸ (ACE) study in the United States demonstrated a strong relationship between maltreatment in childhood and smoking, obesity, alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, depression and suicide in later life. In addition, individuals who had experienced childhood abuse and in particular a high number of adverse experiences were more likely to develop heart disease, cancer, strokes, diabetes, liver disease and generally poor health.

9. Violence against children also has immediately fatal consequences; a World Health Organization estimate indicates that in 2000 around 57,000 children under 15 years died from injuries. The risk is much greater for very young children. The most common causes of death are head injury, abdominal injuries, and suffocation.

10. Furthermore, the costs to the individual cannot be disassociated from the social and economic costs engendered by violence which include: medical care; mental health and substance abuse care for victims, perpetrators, and families; criminal justice system expenditures; social welfare costs; child protection expenses; and special education in school systems.⁹

⁷ See footnote 6.

⁸ The ACE Study reveals a powerful relation between emotional experiences as children and adult emotional health, physical health, and major causes of mortality in the United States. Moreover, the time factors in the study make it clear that time does not heal some of the adverse experiences found in the childhoods of a large population of middle-aged, middle-class Americans.

⁹ In 1996, research in the United Kingdom calculated that the total economic burden deriving from violence against children, could be estimated to be £735 million; *Report of the National Commission into the Prevention of Violence to Children*, London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1996.

2. International action

11. The obligations of government and decentralised authorities are clearly articulated in Article 19, Section 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed and ratified by all the members states of the Council of Europe. The UN Convention and its Optional Protocols¹⁰, along with the activities and the general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, have played a major role in sensitising communities, professionals and the general public, as well as governments and international organisations.

12. The 2002 World Report on Violence and Health by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the 2003 World Health Assembly resolution on implementing the report's recommendations, addressed the public health consequences of child maltreatment and stressed the role of public health in prevention, research and planning services for victims.

13. A milestone has been the United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children, which has helped to increase awareness of the phenomenon at global, regional and national levels, highlighting the contribution of each actor. The central message of the study is that no violence against children is justifiable, and all violence against children is preventable.

14. Mention should also be made of the Council of the European Union Framework Decision on combating sexual exploitation of children and child pornography (2004/68/JHA) and the Council of the European Union Framework Decision on the standing of victims in criminal proceedings (2001/220/JHA).

3. Action by the Council of Europe

15. The Council of Europe has been very active in fighting all expressions of violence against children promoting legislative innovations, prevention strategies and direct actions across a wide range of preventive areas, with a view to encouraging international co-operation, as well as reforms and policies at national and subnational levels.

16. Among the most noteworthy of the Council's standard-setting texts, awareness-raising activities and pilot projects in this field are the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS 197), the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (CETS No. 160), the transversal Programme "Building Europe for and with Children" launched in April 2006 by the Council of Europe to mainstream children's rights throughout the organisation's work,¹¹ and the Stockholm Strategy: Provision, Protection and Participation for Children in Europe 2009-2011 adopted by the Committee of Ministers in November 2008. The Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201), the first international treaty to criminalise sexual abuse, has not yet entered into force.

¹⁰ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, G.A. Res. 54/263, Annex I, 54 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 7, U.N. Doc. A/54/49, Vol. III (2000), *entered into force* February 12, 2002; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, G.A. Res. 54/263, Annex II, 54 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 6, U.N. Doc. A/54/49, Vol. III (2000), *entered into force* January 18, 2002.

¹¹ See "Building a Europe for and with children – 2009-2011 Strategy": www.coe.int/children

3.1 Council of Europe Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child

17. Following the recommendations contained in the UN Study on Violence against Children and the above-mentioned work of the Council of Europe and recalling the 2007 EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe drafted its *Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence*. These were officially presented to a high-level conference on children's rights in Stockholm (September 2008)¹² and are expected to be endorsed in June 2009 by the newly-created Council of Europe Platform on Children's Rights in which the Congress will take part.

18. Although primarily intended for decision makers at national, regional and local levels, the Guidelines are also addressed to all professionals working for and with children, as well as to families, civil society, communities, the media, and children themselves.

19. The Guidelines propose a multidisciplinary and systematic national framework to prevent and respond to all acts of violence against children. They are also expected to stimulate a much-needed cultural change in the perception of children as actors of change and of childhood in society as a whole.

20. The Guidelines propose action and practice in various areas: legal frameworks for the protection of child victims and the effective prosecution of crimes; policy-making for prevention, the promotion of children's rights, their well-being and the role of the family, the definition of child-care standards, the endorsement of policies for children of migrants and of immigrant background and the development of integrated national, regional and local action in the context of the constitutional framework of Council of Europe member states.

21. The Guidelines underline the value of building a culture of children's rights and prevention through awareness-raising initiatives, training and the sensitisation of the media and new technology sectors; the importance of implementing child-friendly systems and mechanisms for reporting abuses, for guaranteeing access to recovery and rehabilitation and for supporting children involved in judicial proceedings. They also deal with the problems connected to data collection and monitoring, the building up of national databases, the promotion of research and international co-operation.

22. Member states are asked to appoint a national focal point on children's rights and the protection of children from violence whose mandate should include acting as a liaison person between the Council of Europe and child protection authorities at national, regional and local levels, and to work with the Council of Europe on the development, implementation and monitoring of national integrated strategies for the protection of children against violence.

3.2 Action by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

23. The issue of preventing violence against children and implementing their rights is not new for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities which adopted a recommendation on the issue of violence in the family in 1985 and has since focused on many related issues such as youth participation, policies for deprived children/ adolescents and families, preventing and combating violence at school, participation and integration of young people in local and regional life, the social reintegration of children living and/or working on the streets and child-friendly cities.

¹² The drafting process was facilitated by two meetings of an Editorial Group composed of four pilot countries, local and international experts, Unicef, OHCHR, European Commission, ENOC and NGO representatives.

24. With the texts contained in the present explanatory memorandum, the Congress therefore wishes to support the general implementation of the Council of Europe's Programme, "Building a Europe for and with children", and to contribute to the finalisation and adoption of the Guidelines by exploring the specificities of the role that European local and regional authorities can play in the prevention of violence against children.

4. Action at local and regional level

25. The process of decentralisation has changed the political and institutional context for endorsing the full and equal rights of children in many societies around the world. By transferring functions and resources in strategic sectors for the prevention of violence against children to regional, local, or municipal governments, decentralisation may influence the degree and quality of protection and care for children at risk and victims of violence.

26. The process of transferral can be a new opportunity for children and their families to be represented and active on the matters that most closely affect their lives, but at the same time can pose the potential risk of increasing the social divide among territories having different levels of resources and different degrees of interest in the problem. Consideration must be given to the effects of decentralisation of powers in term of availability of resources and equal access to services.

27. While central government frequently continues to be in charge of defining the main thrust of public policies or, in the field of social and health policies, the basic levels of services to be delivered uniformly throughout the nation, regional and local authorities are tasked with ensuring these service levels through regional legislation, norms and planning, and on the basis of national financial transfers and regional funds.

28. The challenge, therefore, is to optimise co-ordination and convergence among the regions within a country and in a European perspective. This can be achieved by means of state/region co-operation, interinstitutional integration, multiprofessional networking, monitoring and evaluation.

29. These are crucial functions in order to put into practice international commitments and make the most of international, national and local best practices. Last but not least, co-operation and networking can help reduce the risk of fragmentation and patterns of inter and intra regional divide in providing preventive and care services to children and their families which are sources of discrimination since they lead to inequality in access to recovery and protection facilities, and amplify the short and long-term, devastating effects of violence.

30. The state/region or state/regional/municipal fora can be suitable contexts for planning effective strategies against violence against children. These bodies facilitate the dialogue between central and decentralised administrations and allow governments to be made aware of the regional perspective on the most significant administrative and regulatory acts affecting them.

31. There are at least six crucial sectors, which should build up a strong multidisciplinary networking: the health sector, providing early detection and health care for children, their families and, possibly, offenders; the legal sector, endorsing norms and law enforcement and providing legal services and counselling for child victims and their families; the social sector, making available child protection services and social care; the education and leisure time sectors, providing primary prevention actions and supporting early prevention; policy makers, assuring political relevance to the issue, as well as policies and resources; and last, but not least, the media sector, contributing to change towards a child rights approach and a child-centred culture for the implementation of their human rights.

32. The decentralised level allows the definition of actions which are the most appropriate to the characteristics and resources of a local community and enables the empowering of the local community, and supporting the active involvement of children and families as actors of preventive and protective strategies, and not only as passive beneficiaries.

33. Local and regional authorities need to define regularly monitored quality standards for child protection services and base their prevention policies and programs against violence on a wide range of disciplines such as public health, psychology, psychiatry, criminal justice, social work, forensic medicine and policing: engaging multiple sectors strengthens cohesion and social capital.

34. Local and regional authorities should enhance a multisectoral approach, extending beyond service providers working strictly on the prevention of child maltreatment, to involve actors working on the well-being dimensions of children (sport, leisure time, and so on) and family policies, and those working with other types of violence, including domestic violence and offenders.

35. Intermediate state actors, regional governments, federated states, international cities and metropolitan areas are beginning to play an increasingly important role in guiding domestic and international decision-making. Due to on-going decentralisation processes these actors have acquired and are acquiring a greater capacity to manage development in a national and transnational perspective, as occurred on the occasion of the Third World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Rio de Janeiro in November 2008, where thousands of local actors met together with representatives of NGOs and central governments.

36. This transnational dimension is crucial both for enhancing local and regional action through the development of joint projects or exchange of experiences, and for giving efficient responses to some forms of violence that have a transnational nature, such as trafficking and sexual exploitation.

5. Conclusion

37. The ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and the future adoption of the *Policy Guidelines on National Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children against Violence*, call for a strong support by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in order to encourage and facilitate, respectively, their enforcement and the implementation of actions at national and decentralised level.

38. The Congress is conscious of the risk of a reduction of financial resources for child-protection policies as major competencies are gradually devolved, and encourages regional and local governments to network their actions in order to negotiate with their central governments the resources, reforms and all other institutional and political ingredients necessary for an effective protection of children, and to assist local agencies to carry out their function equitably and effectively with a well-trained workforce and with quality standards and mechanisms of control.

39. Any guidelines and recommendations need to be adapted to the local context: the regional and local political structure of power, administrative organisation, as well as regional and national financial and legal frameworks, but the following fundamental principles should underpin any strategy designed to prevent the intentional harm, violence and exploitation of children:

- A child rights approach should be used;
- child centeredness: the child's best interest must be the basic guiding principle;
- policies and actions should be evidence-based;
- there should be co-ordination and networking (both horizontal and vertical);
- action should be integrated and comprehensive;
- intersectoral and multidisciplinary co-operation should be the norm;
- gender and cultural sensitivity must be shown.

40. In conclusion, the Council of Europe and the Congress should continue their dialogue with central and decentralised government in order to raise awareness of this issue among decision makers: the first step is for policy makers to provide the climate, policies and resources for children and their families in relation to violence against children, failing this, any strategy, no matter how good, will not be effectively pursued and implemented.