



## Reaching the heights for the rights of the child

### Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021

#### High-Level Launching Conference

Sofia, 5-6 April 2016

#### Statements

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Honourable Presidents, Deputy Secretary General, Commissioner,  
Excellencies, dear children,

First, I would like to thank the Republic of Bulgaria and the Council of Europe for organizing this important event and for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Finnish Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services.

The new Strategy is an important achievement and demonstrates the fine and persistent work the Council of Europe has done over the years to protect and promote children's rights. The new priority areas of the strategy reflect well the current situation in Europe as well as the challenges that lie ahead.

Legislation and strategies alone are not enough to safeguard children's rights. We need to ensure their effective implementation and develop practices and services that promote children's rights.

This is what we are currently aiming at in Finland. Last year, the government initiated a key project aiming at a fundamental change in the whole service system for children and families. The goal is to commit the public sector to an approach that better promotes children's rights in decision-making and services and reduces health and wellbeing inequalities. We want to provide



**Bulgarian Chairmanship**  
Council of Europe  
November 2015 – May 2016  
**Présidence de la Bulgarie**  
Conseil de l'Europe  
Novembre 2015 – Mai 2016



low-threshold child, youth and family services that work seamlessly together. We will also give more support to parenting, improve services for divorcing families and strengthen school and early childhood education. We are creating tools for monitoring children's wellbeing, assessing how decision-making impacts children and devising child-focused budgeting. In light of the current refugee situation in Europe, services for migrants will be an important part of this reform. For example, education is the key in increasing social cohesion and inclusion.

As a comprehensive reform that covers different administrative sectors and concerns different groups of children, the project will strongly support the implementation of the new Strategy.

We must also protect all children from all forms of violence. Although corporal punishment of children in the home was prohibited in Finland by law over thirty years ago, challenges remain. We have been developing our legislation, raising awareness on the problem and educating professionals who work with children and will continue this work.

An alarming issue that has emerged in Finland recently is the migrant children's frequent experiences of discrimination, bullying and violence in schools and public places. One of the key projects of the Government concerning knowledge and education aims at new learning environments and digitalization in schools. In this framework, steps will be taken to improve the emotional and physical wellbeing of children. We will also be producing support material on migrant children, for schools.

Another worrying phenomenon in Europe are the disappearances of the underage asylum seekers, which may raise the risk for children to become a victim of human trafficking. We have a newly renewed and improved legislation concerning the assistance of victims of human trafficking. We carry on educating the professionals on the phenomenon.

Another current challenge is digitalisation and the new "threats" it poses to the well-being of children. In children abuse cases in recent years, a significant amount has been estimated to relate to the Web. The visible police work in the internet in Finland aims to prevent crimes, to lower the threshold of contacting the police and intervene especially on social media crimes. The ongoing reform of data protection rules in the EU too will address some of these issues. By acting together with the civic society, we also promote media literacy and act against hate speech on the Internet.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear children,

Let me conclude by applauding the Secretariat for its outstanding work. It is important that we continue to work together to protect and promote children's rights. We need to reach out to children and young people at risk of marginalization and alienation and to protect children from all forms of violence and exploitation. Well-functioning services and education are vital in making sure that each and every child and adolescent feels empowered and an active member of society.