

Mid-Term Review Conference for the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)



Conference report

Council of Europe
Strasbourg, 3-4 April 2025

Organised by the Children's Rights Division
of the Council of Europe, under the
auspices of the Luxembourg Presidency of
the Committee of Ministers

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**Building a Europe
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**Construire une Europe
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Introduction

On 3 and 4 April 2025, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg hosted the Mid-Term Review Conference on the [Strategy for the Rights](#) of the Child (2022–2027). Organised in the framework of the Luxembourg Presidency to the Committee of Ministers, the event gathered over 200 participants - including national representatives and politicians, international organisations, NGOs, academics, child-rights professionals as well as children and young delegates themselves - for two days of intense exchange, collaboration, and reflection.

As part of the Council of Europe's long-standing Programme "[Building a Europe for and with Children](#)", the conference marked the halfway point in the implementation of the fourth Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022–2027). Since 2006, this programme and its multiannual strategies have provided a framework for enhancing the protection and promotion of children's rights across Europe - through standard setting, monitoring, and co-operation with the 46 member states. The current strategy aims to encompass the full spectrum of children's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, while aligning with broader Council of Europe goals and national priorities. In this framework, the 2025 Mid-Term Review Conference offered an opportunity to take stock of progress, identify gaps, and prepare the ground for renewed action.

Multilateralism, co-operation, and intergenerational dialogue were at the heart of the Conference. In their opening addresses, high-level officials - Marja Ruotanen, Director General of Democracy and Human Dignity of the Council of Europe, Claude Meisch, Minister of Education, Children and Youth of Luxembourg, Najat Maalla M'jid, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, and Glenn Micallef, the European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport - highlighted the importance of collective efforts to promote and protect children's rights. A strong emphasis was placed on shared responsibility: While states have the legal duty to uphold children's rights, their fulfilment also depends on meaningful co-operation between institutions, child-rights professionals, civil society - and children themselves.

The Conference programme was structured around six parallel sessions to allow for deeper and interactive engagement. Each one aligned with one of the six strategic objectives of the Strategy:

- Freedom from violence for all children
- Equal opportunities and social inclusion
- Access to and safe use of technologies
- Child-friendly justice
- Giving a voice to every child
- Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations

The sessions featured expert panels and open-format discussions to create space for sharing promising practices and identifying innovative solutions and co-constructing possible new standards for children's rights in the 21st century. What truly set this event apart was the strong emphasis on genuine and structured involvement of children and young people. They were not just participants, they took on roles as experts, moderators, presenters, and full contributors to offer insights grounded in lived experiences and peer consultations. The presence of children and young people in all sessions - alongside member states representatives and child-rights experts - was a visual and symbolic reminder that the Strategy's motto "Their rights, our responsibility" must be taken literally.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg provided invaluable support throughout the event, demonstrating its commitment at international, national and local levels.



Children's rights in the era of digital technologies and artificial intelligence

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SESSION

How to create a safer digital world for children across Europe?

This session addressed child protection online and the impact of AI on children's rights. In their opening speeches, Claude Meisch, Luxembourg's Minister for Education, Children and Youth, and Mathias Kloth, Head of the Council of Europe's Department for Digital Governance, reaffirmed the political will to enable a rapid evolution of national and international legal tools and public policies to guarantee effective protection of children online. National best practices were then shown in action. To explore ways to prevent and address online risks, participants could attend four different workshops: an escape game on data protection, an activity on sexting, sextortion and grooming, a practical seminar on artificial intelligence animated by [BEE Secure](#), Luxembourg, and a conversational [card game on digital parenting](#) presented by Digital Parents, Slovak Republic. These workshops allowed the participants to exchange on national promising practices in digital safety and explore ways to prevent and address online risks.

The ensuing stakeholder consultation on a future Council of Europe Child Rights Impact Assessment tool on artificial intelligence created space for young delegates and participants to provide input on its future design. One of the key questions raised during the consultation tackled the interaction between children and AI. Both the positive aspects (such as education and entertainment) and the negative ones (including child sexual abuse material and deepfakes) were discussed. Participants concluded that digital technologies and artificial intelligence can be used as a shield as well as a sword. It is the duty of policymakers to provide adequate, robust and evolving responses to create a climate of confidence for children to use digital technologies.

YOUNG DELEGATES 'INSIGHTS

- ✦ "AI is transforming many aspects of life, with **positive implications**, but unfortunately, I am not given the awareness to learn how to manage it **ethically and responsibly**."
- ✦ "AI **should not be a replacement for knowledge** or a threat to our critical thinking, but an **aid** that will allow all young people to reach their full potential."
- ✦ "It is essential that institutions, including the Council of Europe, **promote policies** that encourage a **responsible and conscious use of AI**, ensuring equitable access to technology and protecting the rights of everyone, especially **future generations**."



MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ International standards such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the Court's case law, the [Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (Lanzarote Convention) and the [Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence](#) have proven their ability to defend children's rights, but many legal and political challenges remain to protect children more effectively.

- ✓ Additional tools, such as a Child Rights Impact assessment tool (CRIA+), are needed to **protect children** in today's swiftly **changing digital landscape**.
- ✓ It is crucial to actively **involve young people** in the drafting and design of legal frameworks. Despite the many challenges that still lie ahead in fully drafting and implementing the CRIA+, there is a promising shift: policymakers are now showing a genuine willingness to engage directly with children and young people and to integrate their perspectives into decision-making processes.



Combating child poverty and promoting social inclusion of all children

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SESSION

How can Europe end child poverty as a human rights violation?

Child poverty remains one of the most urgent and morally unacceptable challenges that Europe is facing today. Despite the continent's wealth and its long-standing commitment to protect human rights, a significant number of children wake up each day facing hunger, inadequate housing, limited educational opportunities, and social exclusion. This session aimed to reframe child poverty not merely as a socioeconomic issue, but as a fundamental violation of children's rights, calling for immediate and co-ordinated responses from European institutions, national governments and local authorities.

Participants were reminded that the [European Social Charter](#) includes a right to protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30) and the right of children to social, legal and economic protection (Article 17). Speakers presented recent alarming data indicating that **one in four** children in the EU is at risk of poverty, with significantly higher rates in several member states ([The State of children in the European Union, UNICEF report \(2024\)](#)). Behind the statistics are real children whose lives are being shaped by deprivation. The session highlighted the complex and interdependent impacts of poverty on these children's lives: poor nutrition, limited access to education, unstable housing, and social exclusion. Experts and stakeholders emphasised that poverty is not inevitable: it is a policy failure that can be addressed with the right tools and the political will.



The session highlighted how the European Social Charter collective complaints procedure and the UN [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure](#) can trigger concrete change. It also showcased effective strategies to combat child poverty, including strengthening social protection systems, investing in early childhood development, ensuring access to quality housing and nutrition, and simplifying access to existing support mechanisms. During the session, it appeared crucial to involve children meaningfully in policy development, acknowledging their role as active participants in identifying challenges and contributing to concrete solutions.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Poverty is a multidimensional and intergenerational phenomenon that undermines the most basic rights of children - rights enshrined in legally binding instruments such as the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [European Social Charter](#). Despite these safeguards, the implementation of these standards remains uneven across Europe. Strategic litigation, as seen in landmark cases of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) for [Greece](#) and [Czechia](#), has triggered action. However, systemic change also requires political courage to implement the existing legal standards and a shift in societal priorities.
- ✓ Subsequent and overlapping crises (financial, health, cost-of-living) exacerbated existing inequalities, with over **1.5 million additional children falling into poverty since 2019 in Europe**. The discussion highlighted those current policies, while often well-intended, are not adequate in scope or design to meet the scale of the problem.

- ✓ Participants called for transformative reforms, including policies such as a universal basic income, wage policies that ensure families can afford basic necessities and public investment in early childhood services, from healthcare to school meals. Equally crucial is the fight against invisible barriers - bureaucracy, stigma, and lack of information, that prevent eligible families from accessing the help they are entitled to. Housing policy reform, especially ensuring affordability and long-term stability, was also flagged as a key priority.
- ✓ Throughout the session, speakers stressed that **solutions** must not only be comprehensive and *evidence-based* but must also be **designed with children**, not just for them. The session echoed a powerful message: the persistence of child poverty in Europe is not only a policy gap to fill it is a sign of an ethical or moral vacuum.



Protecting children from violence through age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SESSION

What if comprehensive sexuality education, through self-awareness, was the first step to prevent violence?

The session focused on the importance of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education as a key element in protecting children from violence and abuse. Emphasising the need to integrate this education into broader frameworks of gender equality, human rights, and sexual health, speakers discussed the significant role of age-appropriate education in fostering awareness of consent, boundaries, and personal autonomy. This session aimed to contribute to shaping the [Draft Recommendation on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for inter-alia preventing and combating violence against children](#), to be finalised by end 2026. It engaged key stakeholders - including persons with lived experience, teachers, psychologists, scholars and children - who shared their views on why and when sexuality education should be provided, who should teach sexuality education and how it should be done in an appropriate and comprehensive manner. A [video](#) prepared by children illustrated their views. The session also highlighted the essential role of well-trained educators in delivering these programmes and stressed that comprehensive sexuality education should be seen as a fundamental human right.

YOUNG DELEGATES' INSIGHTS

- ✦ “**Age-appropriate sexuality education** is a tool to make informed decisions by giving children ways to speak and giving them **the possibility to make the right decisions** as well.”
- ✦ “**All young people need comprehensive sexuality education.** In fact, it is legally required because this education protects **the rights of children and young people to life, to health, to education, to equality, and to be free from violence.**”



MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education was reaffirmed as a recognised right and a key tool to **identify sexual violence and abuse** and **prevent violent behaviour** among peers. Grounded in a broader framework, it aims to empower children with the knowledge and confidence to **make informed choices** throughout their development, thus balancing the information provided through - often violent - online pornographic content.
- ✓ Stakeholders emphasised that education should not be limited to schools, but extended to homes, youth centres, cultural, faith-based and sports settings and that all professionals should receive adequate training.
- ✓ Participants also advocated for the introduction of sexuality education from an **early age, continuing** throughout the child's development, while also recognising the importance of engaging families and communities in the process.
- ✓ Children consulted on a future Recommendation on comprehensive sexuality education (through a [child-friendly guide](#)), expressed the need for an education that addresses **respect, consent, and**

boundaries, and that evolves with their age and maturity. They called for dynamic, real-life approaches - not traditional textbook lessons - and highlighted the importance of safe, inclusive spaces led by trained, unbiased professionals.

- ✓ The session underlined that effective sexuality education must be **co-constructed with children** and their active participation is essential to ensure that policies are relevant, accessible, and truly responsive to their lived experiences.



Advocating for the rights of children in contact with the law

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SESSION

How can we ensure that children in contact with the law feel safe, respected, and empowered to participate in legal proceedings that affect them directly?

The session focused on the need to adapt justice systems to the specific rights and needs of children. Building on [the Council of Europe's Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice \(2010\)](#), and in light of their upcoming thematic review, participants examined how justice can be accessible, protective, and empowering for all children in contact with the law. Speakers, including government representatives and "Young Justice Transformers" (young people aged between 15 and 22 who have been in contact with the justice systems as a child (civil, administrative, or criminal), emphasised that legal proceedings can have a profound and lasting impact on children - whether they are victims, witnesses, or in conflict with the law. They also underlined that justice systems must adapt to children - rather than the reverse. Building truly child-friendly justice means guaranteeing children's rights to be heard, to understand proceedings, and to be protected from harm, discrimination, and secondary victimisation. The Council of Europe's commitment to revising and strengthening the Guidelines, especially with input from children themselves, was welcomed as a timely and necessary step to align legal practices with the evolving landscape of children's rights across Europe.

YOUNG DELEGATES' INSIGHTS



✦ “**Too often, laws and legal institutions** are designed **without taking into account the specific needs of children**, as if they were never meant to come into contact with the justice system. Yet, when they do, it is essential to treat them truly as children - **with respect, dignity, and full recognition of their rights.**”

✦ “**I felt a deep sense of loneliness** not because I had no voice, but because **the adults around me didn't listen.**”

✦ “**Child participation should be meaningful** - it's not just about listening, but also about **taking action**. Adults need to inform themselves about these issues to improve both their understanding and the legal system. Every child has **the right to receive information, regardless of age - as long as it is adapted to their level of understanding.**”

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ For justice to be **truly adapted to the children**, it must go beyond procedural formalities to ensure safety, understanding, dignity, and active participation at every stage.
- ✓ Children should be **meaningfully involved** at every stage of the proceedings as full bearers of rights. This includes, among other things, understanding the process, being informed of their rights, and having appropriate means to access justice. They must be empowered to participate in ways that are age-appropriate, safe, and supportive. These principles are not optional - they are obligations grounded in human rights law.
- ✓ Achieving this **requires well-trained professionals, inter-institutional co-ordination**, child-sensitive procedures, and an ongoing commitment to **listening to children's lived experiences**.

- ✓ **Restorative approaches and alternatives to detention** were recognised as vital tools for reducing harm and promote rehabilitation. These approaches do not only address the needs of children but also help rebuild trust and **foster reintegration into society**.
- ✓ **The thematic review** of the Council of Europe's Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice offers a crucial opportunity to reaffirm and update standards in with the light of current realities. Importantly, children's own views - on what makes justice truly fair and respectful - must be placed at the heart of this process. Their insights are indispensable for building systems that work for them and with them.



Promoting children's participation in decisions about their health

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SESSION

How does one ensure that children effectively and meaningfully participate in decisions about their health?

This session addressed the meaningful participation of children in decisions specifically related to their own health. While international legal instruments such as the Convention on Human rights and biomedicine ([Oviedo Convention](#), in particular article 6) and the [General comment No. 15 on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health \(2013\)](#) recognise the importance of considering the child's opinion in health-related decisions, in practice, children are still too frequently sidelined in discussions and in decisions. The session underscored how participation is not only an ethical and legal obligation, but also a condition to ensure effective, child-centred healthcare. It focused on implementation and experience-sharing and was an opportunity to further promote the [Guide to children's participation in decisions about their health primarily intended for health professionals](#), and to launch its [Child-friendly summary](#).

A particularly impactful moment of the session was when two young delegates demonstrated in a role play how adults often discuss the situation of a child in their presence, without including them, leaving the child feeling confused and powerless. This short exercise served as a powerful reminder that it is crucial that healthcare professionals explain things in an age-appropriate manner, invest time to do so, and make sure children understand and are engaged in their own care. Participation is not just about giving the child a voice - it is about creating the conditions for their voice to be heard, understood, and valued.

YOUNG DELEGATES' INSIGHTS

- ✦ "To sum up everything we as young advisors and the experts think that it doesn't take a lot of resources to help children **you just need to hear them, show empathy and tell them the truth**. We can't have a high-quality healthcare without **the children's participation and not involving them could have long term consequences**."
- ✦ "**Knowledge is power**, which is why **every child must have access to information** about their health. The children all agreed that it is **important to ensure broad and free participation**. Children, regardless of their age, must be able to **express their opinions on any health-related decision** that concerns them."
- ✦ "As children, we believe **it is possible to ensure our protection** while **also guaranteeing our participation**."



MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Children's participation in health-related decisions is both a right and a requirement for effective and respectful healthcare.
- ✓ When properly supported, children feel more informed, less anxious, and empowered. Both the [Guide to children's participation in decisions about their health](#), and its [Child-friendly summary](#)

stress the importance of ensuring that children receive age-appropriate explanations, that they can **express themselves freely and be listened to**, and that they are informed about their rights in healthcare situations.

- ✓ Meaningful participation means more than simply listening - it requires **trained professionals**, accessible communication, and consideration of all forms of expression, including non-verbal cues. This is important in all healthcare situations, including in complex or sensitive situations.
- ✓ By allowing the space for children's voices, healthcare systems not only protect rights, but **increase trust** and **improve healthcare outcomes**.



Children of Ukraine's access to education in Council of Europe member states

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SESSION

How could all displaced children of Ukraine have access to in-person education in schools of host member states while preserving their cultural identity and language?

The session focused on the complex issue of integrating Ukrainian children into in-person education across Council of Europe member states. As a result of the ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, millions of children of Ukraine have been displaced, with many of them finding refuge in other Council of Europe member states. Despite efforts to ensure access to education, various barriers, such as language differences, trauma, and lack of appropriate infrastructure to welcome children of Ukraine remain. After hearing from a Ukrainian student's experience about dual education (in the host country and Ukrainian online), the session explored the different strategies adopted by Council of Europe member states. It focused on how host countries balance the need for integration into local education systems with the preservation of Ukrainian language and cultural ties. While sharing best practices, experts, along with national delegates, delved into practical strategies for implementing key recommendations from the [Mapping study on access of the children of Ukraine to education in Council of Europe member states](#). The discussion emphasised the importance of trauma-informed care, specialised teacher training, and collaboration between governments, civil society, and international organisations to create effective educational frameworks for these children.

YOUNG DELEGATES' INSIGHTS



✦ “I had **not enough time** to manage to be in **both schools**. In-person schooling is already very demanding and do not let space to fit our Ukrainian curriculum in.”

✦ “I am glad to be **able to maintain a connection** with my Ukrainian peers and former teachers. I am also grateful that my Ukrainian teachers are **very supportive** and understand the situation we are going through.”

✦ “It has been very helpful for me to make **new friends and connections** when I started school in France”

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ The integration of Ukrainian children into in-person education across Council of Europe member states is hindered by several challenges.
- ✓ Countries have adopted dual education systems combining in-person schooling with Ukrainian online education, balancing integration with cultural preservation. Programmes like Poland's [Spilno Hub Gdynia](#), demonstrate the value of **holistic approaches** to education for children from Ukraine.
- ✓ Small-group discussions during the session highlighted the importance of trauma-informed education and the need for **personalised approaches** to support children's emotional and educational needs.
- ✓ The Mapping Study should be further disseminated with the aim to inform existing promising practices and promote exemplary initiatives.
- ✓ The session emphasised the importance of inclusive policies and specialised teacher training to address the needs of children and ensure their **cultural continuity**. It has been underlined that both

immediate responses and long-term strategies are crucial, bearing in mind the necessity of sustainable educational solutions that integrate psychosocial support, cultural preservation, and social integration. **Collaboration among governments, civil society, and international organisations** is key to ensure sustainable solutions that support the children's well-being and educational success.



Conclusion

In an international environment increasingly characterised by multifaceted crises, including heightened violence, armed conflicts, democratic backlash, and transformative digital advancements, this Conference demonstrated a shared commitment of member states to place the rights of children at the core of their political agendas. This commitment is further strengthened by the contributions of civil society, including NGOs and, crucially, children themselves. The Mid-Term review Conference was not only an affirmation of shared values but also a concrete and strategic step to review the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027. The six sessions held during the two days of the Conference provided a valuable opportunity to examine the main elements of the Strategy.

- The Conference provided a strong commitment to guaranteeing effective and comprehensive **protection against all forms of violence** for all children, including through the provision of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education adapted to the development and the needs for children, in all educational settings.
- It highlighted the importance of **ensuring that equal opportunities and promoting social inclusion** are seen as fundamental preconditions for the dismantling of entrenched structural inequalities, including child poverty.
- The Conference also focused on **children's safe access to digital tools and AI** and underscored the need for a digital transition that is firmly grounded in respect for children's rights, ensuring that technological progress does not come at the expense of their safety, dignity, or privacy.
- Exchanges on **child-friendly justice** highlighted the necessity of reinforcing judicial and legal mechanisms that are attuned to the child's unique needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities. This approach calls for a cultural shift in which adults adapt their communication to children's level of understanding, fully acknowledging them as active rights-holders who can meaningfully engage in legal processes that affect them.
- A recurrent and resonant theme throughout the Conference was the critical importance of respecting and giving more weight to the **voices of children** in all matters that concern them, highlighted in particular during the event on child participation in decisions concerning their health.
- In a context of war where children's rights are under the greatest threat, securing Ukrainian children's **access to safe and continuous education**, is of paramount importance. This education must be provided using a holistic approach, ensuring their well-being as well as the educational and cultural continuity.

The diversity of the exchanges and the high quality of contributions from different sectors, as well as the consistently high level of interventions, reflect a strong and enduring commitment by the Council of Europe member states and partners to promote children's rights in their many dimensions. By hosting this Conference, Luxembourg has demonstrated its continued support for upholding and promoting children's rights in Europe. The Council of Europe expresses its gratitude to Luxembourg for its support and contributions, which made this event possible. The Conference highlights the importance of sustained cooperation, meaningful exchange, and shared commitment among states and stakeholders to ensure that the rights of all children are fully respected, protected and guaranteed in all circumstances.



Conference website



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