



DELIVERING FOR CHILDREN: AN EU STRATEGY ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Author and Contact Person:

Michiel Matthes,
Chairman

Alliance for Childhood European Network Group

Office in Brussels:

Troonstraat 194

1050 Brussels

Tel: +32.473895179

Office in the Netherlands:

Amsterdamseweg 6B,

3812RS Amersfoort

michiel.matthes@allianceforchildhood.eu

www.allianceforchildhood.eu

1. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A EUROPEAN AGENCY ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD AND THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

In this paper we propose that the European Commission establishes a European Agency on the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children. This is a paper from the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, which is a group of some 30 NGO's that work together on improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe (www.allianceforchildhood.eu).

1.1 Importance and Tasks of the European Agency on the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children

This Agency could fulfill the following roles:

- To be a European knowledge centre on the topic of the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children;
- To be a hub of a network of knowledge centres of the Member States;

- To be a platform for dialogue between the scientific institutes, policy makers, Ombudsmen for Children and politicians on the level of the European Union and the Member States;
- To advice to the European Commission, the European Council, the European Parliament and the Member States;
- To act as an agency that promotes a continuous improvement regarding the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children in the Member States / the European Union.

At this moment the well-being of children in the European Union is much better than in other parts of the world. The establishment of this Agency would be another step on this road and in this way the European Union will stimulate other countries to follow the example of continuously improving the situation re the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children in their own situation.

2. ARGUMENTS FOR THE PROPOSAL

When we consider the development of a child we realise that it grows up in many different environments, such as:

- Home and family environment
- Early childhood and care environment outside the home
- Physical and natural environment
- Cultural environment
- Spiritual environment
- Art and play environment
- Digital environment
- Financial environment
- Legal environment
- Social environment
- Political environment
- Relationships and psychological environment
- Free time environment
- Environment of work and the economy

If the quality of a specific environment or in all environments is improved this would be good for the development of the child. Within the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group (AFC-ENG) we have not fixed the definition of the quality of childhood because living contexts are different. In general a good quality of childhood refers to conditions that promote the child's positive development and well-being.

Children and childhood are studied by various scientific disciplines such as:

- Psychology,
- Sociology
- Educational Science
- Pedagogy and others.

Within the AFC-ENG we found that these different scientific disciplines often function in silos, sometimes even only national silos, and scientific breakthroughs in one discipline do not reach the scientists in another silo.

We found furthermore that the situation regarding the Rights of the Child and the Quality of Childhood / the Well-being of Children differs from one Member State to another.

As far as policy making is concerned many different ministries in the Member States play a role with regards to all of these domains. Also in this case it often occurs that policies are developed and implemented in silos and in a compartmentalized way.

Within the European Commission I distinguish a.o. the following DG's that are responsible and / or active with regards to some aspects of the environment of children:

- DG Climate Action (DG CLIMA)
- DG Budget (DG BUDG)
- DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD)
- DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC)
- DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)
- Eurostat (ESTAT)
- DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT)
- DG Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE)
- DG Justice and Consumers (DG JUST)
- DG Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)
- DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)
- DG International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO)
- DG Environment (DG ENV)
- DG Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)

Conclusion:

There is a need for more coordination in order to bring more consistency and coherence to the research efforts and the policy making processes on the level of the Members States and the European Institutions and this will also foster a dialogue between the various scientific disciplines, policy makers and politicians that work on the subject of the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children.

3. THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE EUROPEAN AGENCY ON THE RIGHTS THE CHILD, THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD AND THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

When shaping the European Agency it is important to clarify the philosophical basis of it. In this context we would like to draw the attention to two considerations.

3.1 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

In Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) it is stated that *“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions,*

courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.” The same article defines ‘*the best interests of the child*’ as the child’s well-being, and the means of supporting well-being as through protection and care: “*State Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being*” (CRC Art. 3). A child refers to everyone below the age of eighteen.

3.2 The image of the child that policy makers hold

Another key question in this respect is how one perceives the child / what image of the child does one hold. Each organisation working for or with children holds implicitly or explicitly an image of the child and that image will steer all actions.

The educational system may look at the child primarily as a learner, the health system as a potential patient, the justice system as a potential delinquent, the business sector as a consumer, the media as a media consumer, and the national government as a future worker in the economy, which may be of primary concern for that government. But how do we, as society in general, look at the child?

As AFC-ENG we do not want to convince others to take over the image of the child that we have developed, but instead we want to encourage them to do the exercise themselves and to formulate an image of the child that is in accordance with their own reflections. Before setting up any institution this exercise should therefore be undertaken by the constituting parties.

For ease of reference we mention below the image of the child that was formulated within the AFC-ENG:

- Children are endowed with inner potential to grow, learn and communicate and to participate in their own way and with their own integrity, and rights and responsibilities within society.
- The child is an agent of his/her own life in relation to others. The child is not an object to be pushed around and modelled into shape by adults.
- Adults who are sensitive to children’s needs are there to help them unfold their uniqueness.
- The quality of children’s relationships with adults and other children affects their growth as human beings in either a positive or negative way.
- Children are co-creators of our world and transform it.
- Human development is a process of unfolding an individual’s uniqueness in which mutually interacting biological, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, and societal factors interplay.

4. PROPOSAL IN DETAIL

4.1 Introduction

The European Institutions have good experience by setting up specialized institutions to advise the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European

Parliament and the Member States. In the publication “Zo werkt Europa, Derde uitgave”, published by INNI Publishers (p. 151) 42 different specialized agencies are mentioned. Today there is so much interest in the subject of children policies and the area is so vast and complex that the establishment of a specialized policy agency for the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children is warranted.

4.2 Terms of reference of the European Agency on the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children

The terms of reference could be:

- To be a European knowledge centre on the topic of the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children;
- To be a hub of a network of knowledge centres of the European Institutions and the Member States;
- To be a platform for dialogue between the scientists, policy makers, Ombudsmen for Children and politicians in the European Union and the Member States;
- To give advice to the European Commission, the European Council, the European Parliament and the Member States;
- To act as an agency that promotes a continuous improvement regarding the Rights of the Child, the Quality of Childhood and the Well-being of Children in the Member States / the European Union.