Special place for children in EU external action

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This staff working paper on children's rights in external action is a contribution to the development of the EU's strategy on the rights of the child.

The EU is called upon to address questions relating to children's needs and rights in a range of different circumstances. The European Union is fully committed to reaching the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are intimately related to the well-being and full development of children and adolescents. As not all countries are likely to reach the MDG targets in time, it is clear that unless children are places at the heart of the EU's development policies, the likelihood of achieving the MDGs will be significantly reduced.

Promoting and protecting children's rights through the European Union's external policy should be seen in the broader context of the EU's commitments to promote human rights using all available instruments, and particularly in the framework of the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict and the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child and its Implementation Strategy; which sets for an initial period of two years as a first priority area the issue of "all forms of violence against children".

The Paper addresses 3 key issues on children's rights in the context of the European Union's external relations and development cooperation.

Key guiding principles:

I. the application of a holistic and coherent children's rights-based approach rooted in the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC);

II. respect for the views of the child;

III. gender mainstreaming;

IV. local ownership.

These guiding principles should be respected during the planning, implementation and evaluation of all EU relevant external actions. These can range from political dialogues with partner governments, actions in international fora, development programming and crisis management and will also include implementation methodologies and tools such as quality checklists or terms of reference for evaluations. Given the wide variations in circumstances and contexts between different countries, sub-regions and regions, the effective application of these four guiding principles can only be achieved within the framework of a comprehensive analysis of the specific situations confronting children and adolescents. The report provides further details regarding these guiding principles and their practical application.

Priorities actions at regional, national and global levels: the EU should identify actions which deserve specific attention through regional and global initiatives and which complement the political and policy dialogue and the mainstreaming of children's rights at country level. The priorities for regional and global EU action are selected on the basis of their regional and global implications and the link to already existing partnerships with e.g. UN agencies and regional organisations, especially the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

The selected priority areas are:

- preventing all forms of child labour;
- prevention of and fight against child trafficking;
- children affected by armed conflict
- all forms of violence against children including sexual exploitation and harmful traditional practices.

Monitoring, coordination and accountability: a children's rights-based approach in external relations must be supported by appropriate feedback and monitoring. Monitoring should be undertaken jointly by both the EU and the beneficiary government. The European Commission will work with Unicef to develop a "Children's Rights Toolkit" which will provide a variety of important actors - the EC, EU Member States, other donors, governments, civil society and international organisations - with instruments to help them integrate children's rights into a whole range of political, legal, budgetary and programmatic actions. The actions programmed under the EC's thematic budget line "Investing in People" will act as a catalyst: complementing and supporting other actions on children's rights implemented through geographic and thematic instruments. Coordinated and joint EU actions to promote children's rights are of paramount importance. The coordination should include sharing of information (e.g. mapping) on policies and programmes and identification of areas for common action such as assessments, strategies, tools, evaluations and reporting. The EU will develop its cooperation and policy dialogue with the UN bodies most concerned.