Resolution on children’s rights in view of the EU Strategy on the rights of the child

2021/2523(RSP) - 11/03/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 545 votes to 24, with 119 abstentions, a resolution on children’s rights in view of the EU Strategy on the rights of the child.

A child is first and foremost a child, regardless of the child’s ethnic origin, gender, nationality or social and economic background, ability, or migration or residency status. The best interests of the child must be embedded in all EU policies, procedures and actions that concern children.

The resolution highlighted the massive toll the COVID-19 crisis is having on children, further exacerbating their risk of poverty, severely affecting access to education, compromising their physical and mental health and increasing the danger of violence and abuse.

While welcoming the Commission’s initiative to prepare a new comprehensive strategy on the rights of the child, Parliament called for adequate legislative and non-legislative proposals and binding and non-binding EU instruments to address the challenges that children face.

Improved EU Strategy

The EU Strategy should take a gender-balanced approach, integrating a gender perspective across all programming sectors, targeting the well-being and empowerment of girls, addressing their specific needs and recognising their rights. Overall, it should address structural inequalities and prioritise public investment in education, healthcare, housing, family support and childcare, and to invest in high-quality universal services that reach all children and strengthen the capacities of the social service workforce in order to support children and families facing special challenges and to support frontline operators in child protection services.

European Child Guarantee

Parliament stressed that it is crucial to include in the EU Strategy concrete measures to invest in children in order to eradicate child poverty, including the establishment of a European Child Guarantee with appropriate resources. It called on the Commission to present its proposal for establishing the European Child Guarantee in the first quarter of 2021 and called s on the Member States to speed up its implementation and to invest all possible resources, including EU funds, in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion.

Right to education

Parliament emphasised that digital education should never permanently replace in-person learning, particularly where access to technologies is limited, and should only be used in times of great difficulty such as pandemics, or in a way that is complementary to in-person, face-to-face learning. It called on the Commission to make a thorough assessment of how the right to education has been affected by the crisis and to propose recommendations to Member States based on the results of this analysis.

Member States are called on to:

- guarantee the right to education for every child and to establish measures to combat and prevent early school leaving and to ensure gender equitable access to quality, inclusive education from early childhood to adolescence, including for Romani children, children with disabilities, stateless and migrant children and those living in humanitarian emergency settings;

- put in place specific 'safe school' operations, including providing hygiene supplies and sharing information in a child-friendly manner on handwashing and other hygiene measures during the COVID-19 pandemic;

- guarantee the right to inclusive education and to ensure access to comprehensive, age-appropriate information about sex and sexuality, and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and relationship education.

Ending violence, sexual abuse and poverty

Parliament reiterated its call for the EU to step up its action to end all forms of violence and discrimination against children, including physical, sexual, economic and psychological violence, injury, abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation perpetrated both online and offline, forced marriage, trafficking, abuse and exploitation of migrant children, torture, honour killing, female genital mutilation, incest, forced school leaving and the use of children as soldiers.

The resolution stressed that the protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse is essential. In this regard, Parliament welcomed the Commission's intention to propose a more long-lasting legislative framework to combat child sexual abuse in the first semester of 2021.

Inclusion of migrant and refugee children

The resolution stressed that measures must be included in the EU Strategy to improve the situation of children in migration and protect their interests both within and outside the EU, and at every stage of asylum procedures.

Focus should be put on family reunification and adequate reception conditions, removing barriers to access basic services and integration measures. Parliament called the Member States to avoid detention of children and guarantee that unaccompanied minors benefit of legal representatives and guardians.