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Children without Parental Care: Urgent need for Action

Motion for a recommendation

presented by Mr Pieter OMTZIGT and others

> This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

1.   Member States are increasingly concerned about the large number of children without parental care and the lack of appropriate alternative care and the too limited reduction of institutionalisation in Europe.

It is recognised that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding[1].

This is also recently demonstrated in the new programme "Building a Europe for and with Children", devoted to promote children's rights in Europe.

2.   In Europe all forms of children without parental care exist. Including:

–   *Unaccompanied Children:*

There are about 3.5 million Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Other of Concern in Europe. Nearly half of this number is children and adolescents under the age of 18, and 13 % of these children are under the age of five[2]. An estimated 2 to 5 % of the refugee population are unaccompanied children, that is between 70 000 and 175 000 children.

–   *Street Children*

Every city in Europe has street children. There is no reliable data regarding their

numbers and their identity[3].

–   *Trafficked Children*

There is no quantitative and qualitative data on trafficked children in Europe. Children are mainly trafficked from east to west for cheap labour, child prostitution or illicit international adoption[4].

–   *Children in public (institutional) care*

In Central and Eastern Europe alone, almost 1.5 million children live in public care. In some States, the annual number of 'children left without parental care' has more than doubled over the last 10 years, despite falling birth rates[5]. A disproportionate number of children in institutions are Roma.

3.   Children without parental care are at greatest risk, since they lack the protection, physical care and emotional support provided by the family[6]. There is an increasing number of unaccompanied minors who disappear from reception centres and run a high risk of becoming victims of trafficking[7]. Street children are exposed to the worst forms of violations of their human rights. They may be killed, exploited, abused or tortured, and yet their suffering remains invisible[8]. Trafficking always violates the child's right to grow up in a family environment. In addition, children who have been trafficked face a range of dangers, including violence and sexual abuse[9]. Many children are placed unnecessarily and for too long in institutions, where they receive less of the stimulation and individual attention needed to grow to their full potential. Inadequate care environments can impair children's emotional and social development[10].

4.   The lack of quantitative and qualitative data on children without parental care in Europe is one of the main constraints to effective intervention and evidence-based policy making. A lack of available information also limits the ability to determine if implemented strategies are indeed improving the protection of these vulnerable children[11].

5.   The overall picture is that most countries do not have a comprehensive and effective plan of action to prevent and reduce the phenomenon of children without parental care with alternative care in a family setting. *e.g.* within the context of the extended family or via foster care, Kafalah or (inter country) adoption. Progress in the development of appropriate alternative care and the reduction of institutionalisation is too limited. More must be done[12].

6.   The Council of Europe should exert the maximum effort to assist and protect children without parental care and to expedite the return to and reunification with their families. The Council should take appropriate steps to mobilise resources commensurate to the needs and interests of children without parental care and for their reunification with their families.

7.   The Council of Europe should welcome all efforts to undertake actions aimed at prevention and to improvement of the plight of children without parental care, with a sense of urgency.

In order to make effective decisions and to improve the provision of alternative care for children without parental care, academical research on country level in each Member State is needed. World Initiative for Orphans (WIO), a Global Partnership on Children without Parental Care, has experience in such a studies in Latin America and Africa[13].

8.   The Assembly, therefore, urges the Committee of Ministers to call on Member States to:

– share information needed to initiate a full study on (alternative care for) children without parental care and to compare and review related policies;

– develop a knowledge sharing network of best practices and scientific research and updated databases;

– bring together a diverse group of experts in child welfare issues yearly, to review the progress and any gaps identified, including sharing of best practices;

– promote multilateral co-operation in the field of (care for) children without parental care;

– initiate cooperation with WIO to guide these studies.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed[14]*:*

OMTZIGT Pieter, The Netherlands, EPP/CD

AZZOLINI Claudio, Italy, EPP/CD

BEMELMANS-VIDEC Marie-Louise, The Netherlands, EPP/CD

BONDARENKO Olena, Ukraine, EPP/CD

Van den BRANDE Luc, Belgium, EPP/CD

CAPARIN Karmela, Croatia, EPP/CD

CLIVETI Minodora, Romania, SOC

de POURBAIX-LUNDIN Marietta, Sweden, EPP/CD

DONABAUER Karl, Austria, EPP/CD

FILIPIOVÁ Daniela, Czech Republic, EDG

GROSS Andreas, Switzerland, SOC

KOX Tiny, The Netherlands, UEL

van der LINDEN René, The Netherlands, EPP/CD

MARQUET Bernard, Monaco, ALDE

STANTCHEVA Darinka, Bulgaria, ALDE

URBÁNI Milan, Slovak Republic, NR

WODARG Wolfgang, Germany, SOC

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[1] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

[2] UNHCR of January 1st 2007.

[3] Council of Europe: Building a Europe for and with Children 2006-2008.

[4] UNICEF, Innocenti Research Centre.

[5] UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2005.

[6] UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency.

[7] International Organization for Migration.

[8] Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Mrs. de Boer-Buquicchio at CEO Spring Session 27.03.2007.

[9] UNICEF.

[10] UNICEF Child Protection Information Sheets 2006.

[11] UNICEF Innocenti Research Center.

[12] Prof. dr. Jaap E. Doek, Chairperson UN Committee on The Rights of the Child (05/2001-03/2007).

[13] See sideletter.

[14]   SOC: Socialist Group

EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party

ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

EDG: European Democratic Group

UEL: Group of the Unified European Left

NR: not registered in a group