

COM-7/017

Brussels, 30 November 1999

OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 18 November 1999

on

**Local and regional cooperation to protect children and young people from abuse
and neglect in the European Union**

The Committee of the Regions

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its Bureau of 2 June 1999, under the 5th paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an Opinion on "local and regional cooperation to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect in the European Union" and to direct Commission 7 - Education, Vocational Training, Culture, Youth, Sport and Citizens' Rights to draw up an Opinion on this subject;

HAVING REGARD TO its Opinion on Cross-frontier and International Co-operation between Local Authorities (CdR 145/98 fin)¹;

HAVING REGARD TO its Opinion on the Communication from the Commission on violence against children, young persons and women and the Amended Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting a programme of Community action (the Daphne Programme) (2000 - 2004) on measures aimed to prevent violence against children, young persons and women CdR 300/98 fin)²;

HAVING REGARD TO the Draft Opinion (CdR 225/99 rev. 2) adopted by Commission 7 on 1 October 1999 (Rapporteur: **Ms Henig (UK - PES)**);

unanimously adopted the following Opinion at its 31st plenary session of 17-18 November 1999... (meeting of 18 November):

1. Introduction

1. The European Union encourages greater movement of citizens within Europe, but

until recently little had been done to co-ordinate practice, to promote the welfare and rights of children, and to consider ways in which children can be better protected from abuse.

2. The Committee of the Regions is pleased with the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting a programme of Community action (the Daphne Programme) (2000 - 2004) on measures aimed to prevent violence against children, young persons and women, as indicated in its Opinion on the subject. It represents an important step forward in preventing violence and abuse. It will bring a European added value in establishing and strengthening cooperation, coordination and exchange of information at local and regional level in this field.
3. The Daphne Initiative has already contributed to the development of practice and exchange of information in the European Union in the field of protection of children's welfare and rights. The Committee of the Regions has worked with Non Government Organisations on regional cooperation to protect children from abuse as a result of the Daphne Initiative.
4. There are over 120 million children and young people in the European Union who are entitled to a childhood free from cruelty and neglect. The completion of the Single Market, the increasing freedom of movement across national frontiers, and the creation of a common European Union citizenship with the right to live and work in any Member State highlights the urgent need for a European Union wide strategy in relation to the prevention of child abuse and neglect.
5. While the Daphne Programme will make an important contribution, the COR's Opinion on the subject has expressed concern about the limited budget (25 million ECU for 2000-2004 in the original proposal; 20 million ECU for 2000-2003 in the Council common position 26.7.1999) and the proposed legal base Article 129 (public health) owing to the lack of an appropriate legal base for actions concerning the protection of human rights. It is important that the European Commission ensure that the definition of public health is given a wide interpretation so that actions to prevent all forms of violence are covered under the programme, as stressed in this Opinion.
6. Child abuse occurs in all settings: in the family; in day and residential institutions; and in leisure settings. Those who abuse may be adults, or young people, they may be family carers, or others in employment bringing them in contact with children. Child abuse is prevalent in all European States. Attention should also be paid to types of abuse involving child labour, forcing children into begging or prostitution and the exploitation of children by their families or others. This phenomenon is linked to the presence in many European countries of economic refugees, minorities and, in more general terms, groups experiencing social exclusion and poverty. Such conditions lead to the exploitation of children, from as early as infancy, and expose children of pre-school and school age to a variety of dangers, depriving them of their basic rights to normal development and laying the ground for their marginalisation as adults

2. General Comments

1. Child abuse

1. The COR has already acknowledged that violence against children and young people in its Opinion on the Daphne Programme is a real social problem across Europe, widespread in all social classes regardless of socio economic and cultural development.

2. Children are vulnerable because of their dependency. As such they are exposed to a host of risks and hazards. But children are given little voice or opportunity to express how they perceive, cope and act on a daily basis - and without adult assistance - in relation to such experiences.
3. Child abuse is not an absolute concept. With the exception of some sexual abuse it should also be clear that maltreatment is seldom an event, a single incident that requires action to protect the child. Types of abuse overlap so that a child who has been physically maltreated will almost certainly have suffered emotionally, and sexual abuse may involve physical force or threat of punishment.
4. Most behaviour has to be seen in context before it can be thought of as maltreatment. Yet decisions about the threshold for intervention are reached without consultation with children or engagement with them in the decision making process. Long term family violence for example with children regularly seeing their mother beaten can affect children as much as if they had been frequently and severely hit, but rarely perceived as abusive.
5. Additionally abuse is a major factor in driving young people to run away from their homes and into possible danger. Bullying, mistreatment and abuse of children looked after away from their homes also causes children to run away.

2. Citizenship

1. Until recently there was no competency within the European Union Treaty to address issues affecting children even though the completion of the Single Market and the increasing freedom of movement across national frontiers affected children and young people, and resulted in new problems for child protection agencies. Europe's children were not mentioned in European Treaties, or heard by European institutions. It was as if 120 million children and young people in the European Union were invisible and ignored.
2. The Treaty instructed the Union to pay particular attention to policy formation in such areas as equal opportunities between men and women, the elderly, ethnic minorities, and the disabled, but there was no such provision for children. Thus while there was general consensus that children and young people were covered in the European Union Treaty, their position as European citizens was far from clear.
3. This lack of reference has made it difficult to legislate directly in children and young people's interests, and to direct European structural funding towards the promotion of equal opportunities for them.
4. The Amsterdam Treaty, October 1997, introduces a new non-discrimination clause, Article 13 which includes discrimination based on age, clarifying that children should be included within the provisions of the Treaty. While this progress may be limited, it is an important marker to a recognition that children are Europe's citizens too, and must be valued, enabled to fulfil their potential and protected from cruelty.
5. Article 3 of the UN Convention emphasises 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 the primary consideration' This principle provides a test against which adults need to evaluate their decisions and actions in respect of children.

6. Children need to be involved in the decisions affecting their lives. Listening to children and hearing what they have to say is at the root of developing effective human rights for children. This process values the views of children, but is not achieved easily or accepted universally.
7. Empowering children, giving them a voice, so that they know how and where to seek help contributes to prevention. Local politicians can contribute effectively to the empowerment of children by encouraging their participation in the planning and development of local services, and responding to children's concerns about problems or issues. Children and young people should be aware of their rights, have access to complaints systems and independent advocacy. Local and regional authorities can support children and young people's rights in different ways, according to the way measures to help and support children and young people are organised in the individual Member States. For example, local and regional authorities might support children and young people by appointing an independent Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson.
8. Local and Regional government should develop integrated and comprehensive plans for children and youth, putting together and articulating all actions to promote rights and prevent problems, ensuring their co-ordination and supervision. Incorporation of the subsidiarity principle in the European treaties has given local and regional authorities additional responsibilities. The "Citizens' Europe" is to be achieved through the establishment of decentralised machinery. This process gives a new dimension to cross-border and transnational co-operation and demonstrates an important "bottom up" approach to European integration. Increasingly decentralised systems will bring government closer to the people and further democratic responsibility. Children and young people should not be ignored in this process, and the EU should encourage local and regional authorities to promote children and young people's rights in ways appropriate to Member States, which may include the establishment of local Children's Ombudspersons who will share knowledge and practice about issues concerning and affecting children and young people across Europe.

3. Role of local and regional government

1. Local and regional government in Europe, because of its closeness to and representation of local communities is in a unique position to take positive action on behalf of children to support the key principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to take action to ensure that children are protected from abuse and neglect.
2. Local and regional government provides a wide range of services for children and young people, for example, social welfare, education and leisure, and needs to ensure that children and young people using these services are safe from harm. Additionally there is a responsibility to ensure that any children or young people suffering abuse or neglect within their jurisdiction will be responded to and helped in a careful and sensitive way.
3. The recommendations for action by local and regional authorities across the EU to combat child abuse (annexed), put forward at the Committee of the Regions

seminar on 'Local and Regional Co-operation to Protect Children from Abuse' held on 4th December 1998 demonstrates the commitment to cross border co-operation and sharing of practice between authorities in a Europe in which the subsidiarity principle in the European Treaties has given local and regional authorities additional responsibility. These recommendations should be considered at both local and European levels.

4. Where there are diverse systems and different agencies with responsibility for children in different countries, effective co-ordination and communication between authorities is of vital importance. Co-operation for mutual benefit, for promoting the welfare of children involves exchanges of experience and where possible the adoption of 'best practice'.
5. Local and regional co-operation across the EU in combating child abuse must be strengthened. Such co-operation should involve the candidate countries, in particular the Associated Countries of Central and Eastern Europe for whom it would bring particular benefit, in their efforts to strengthen the protection of human rights within the framework of the pre-accession strategy.
6. The EU should support co-operation between local and regional authorities, across the EU and within the candidate countries, working in partnership with NGOs, in order to combat child abuse through the dissemination of best practice and exchange of information and the promotion of public awareness campaigns, in particular within the framework of the proposed Daphne programme.

2.3.7 Given that there are a significant number of children who fall victim to economic and sexual exploitation by adults, suffer all types of abuse or live in abject poverty (cf. point 1.6 of this opinion), the COR feels that this should be a matter of particular concern both within the framework of the DAPHNE programme and in legal provisions in this field. Local and regional authorities are the best placed to tackle this and they must be supported so they can take the initiative to set up mechanisms to locate, monitor and support children who remain excluded from education and social welfare.

3. Specific comments

1. Information needs - the scale of the problem

1. Child abuse is a significant problem within the European Union. Child abuse knows no frontiers and therefore requires a concerted effort at all levels across the EU - including local and regional government - to tackle it effectively.
2. Information about the extent of abuse within the European Union is not available, and information should be collected and monitored. All countries have different ways of classifying and recording information about child abuse. The EU should report on current data collection with a view to identifying what information is relevant to an understanding of child abuse on a Europe wide basis. Eurostat, working in collaboration with local and regional authorities could support this process.
3. Child abuse can lead to children running away from their carers, and to ensure that these children are not forgotten, and to assist the relevant authorities in different countries in finding them a European Register of missing children

should be established. Another helpful move would be to explore the secure use of the internet by police forces across Europe to have available photographs and other details of vulnerable missing children.

4. In the UK the government has introduced a system for registering convicted sex offenders. This approach recognises that sex offenders pose a high risk of re-offending after conviction or release and has worked well in tracking the movements of sex offenders, and establishing their whereabouts. The Member States are called upon to make an appraisal of whether and to what extent this system, modified where appropriate, should be introduced throughout the EU.
5. Police forces currently record information on individuals relating to criminal convictions for paedophile activity, child pornography, child prostitution and trafficking in women and children. However there is no pan European system, and a protocol for information exchange - a formal agreement about information to be recorded and shared - between police forces within the European Union would enhance the protection of children. Europol could lead the development of such a protocol, and a special unit within Europol should be established in relation to child protection.
6. It is recognised that local authority data bases will not currently demonstrate the incidence or prevalence of child abuse since they work with very different definitions, and may contain both alleged and confirmed cases. However they will become increasingly useful once definitions are standardised and they are recording only confirmed cases.
7. Under current circumstances, a Europe wide study of a representative sample of the general population would provide a way of obtaining appropriate, relevant and valid data on the incidence of abuse.

2. Help for children in reporting abuse

1. In 1996, in the UK, the Report of the National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Abuse was published. More than 10,000 people, including a number who had themselves been abused as children, made their views known, by letter, written submission or in person. The National Commission concluded that, 'any balanced examination of child abuse must come to terms with some uncomfortable truths.' In particular it has to be accepted that, 'over half of the abuse that occurs, sometimes over lengthy periods of a child's life, goes undisclosed at the time it is occurring, and additionally those who tell as children remain in a minority'.
2. The Commission concluded that the benefits of telling need to be emphasised and it reported that in a quarter of the cases the Commission had received information about, telling stopped the abuse continuing. Telling is seen as the first step in the process, and can be beneficial in stopping abuse. The Commission found that although those who told were more likely to be younger, fear and an ignorance and lack of knowledge, overlapped to prevent telling.
3. The challenge for child protection systems across Europe is the creation of systems which help children to speak out about their abuse, and to feel confident about getting support, and in which the public has confidence so that all suspected cases are reported. Examining current practices across Europe, and consulting with children and young people about their effectiveness to identify

'best practice' provides a way forward. Local and Regional Authorities are well placed to do this work, and should be encouraged to report, by the EU. Such activity could be co-ordinated by the Committee of the Regions

3. Children telling and accessing help

1. Children of different ages have different needs. For example children aged over 12 years, and in secondary education, are more mobile, independent and more able to access and use the range of services provided by youth and community departments within local authorities, and other organisations.
2. Children in primary education, aged from 4 to 5 years upwards towards secondary education are more restricted in their independent opportunities and merit particular attention. With this age group the role of the school, where they spend most time, and the teacher is very significant. Teachers can help identify those children currently experiencing abuse, and create environments where children can share concerns at an early stage. A communications medium such as television, which can reach children directly and easily in the home, offers a further effective instrument for encouraging children to report abuse. However, children should always be directed to a facility which they already use, i.e. the school
3. In research reports, children have described the responses they want from 'professionals' - careful listening, availability, and a non-judgemental and non-directive attitude. This has implications for teacher training, ensuring that 'listening skills' are developed. There are opportunities to develop and adopt 'best practice' approaches in teacher training institutions across Europe.
4. School also has an important part to play in enhancing young people's knowledge of the adult world and relationships, decisions about becoming a parent, and understanding rights, abusive relationships and responsibilities, and where help may be accessed if a young person has worries or concerns. The diversity of families and cultures within Europe should be respected, but understanding differences can aid learning about adult life and decision making.
5. In many Member States there is general welfare service provision directed to families with pre-school children. In particular, specially trained youth welfare workers, community nurses or health visitors play an important role in supporting families under stress, identifying potentially abusive circumstances, as well as identifying and treating developmental problems and mental illnesses. The value of these services to the prevention of abuse cannot be overestimated.
6. Children also have access to computers, frequently without supervision. The Internet is an increasingly accessible and important source of information, but there is also a need to raise awareness of the fact that the Internet can be misused to disseminate illegal material.
7. Children can be exploited through the portrayal of abuse, especially child sexual abuse. Children can come across 'adult' material unintentionally, receive e-mails inviting them to access pornographic sites, and be unaware of adults posing as children in children's discussion fora. To protect children and young people from such abuse, an EU-wide legal framework should be drawn up facilitating the prosecution of producers and service providers who permit the storage and

retrieval of child pornography via the media which they make available

8. Local and regional authorities have an important role in raising awareness, particularly with their responsibility for education services. There is a role in familiarising teachers with new information technologies, the use of suitable arrangements for access to the Internet at school and home, and the ways in which children and young people can be educated in responsible use.

4. **The role of responsible adults**

1. It is important that there is an effective network of well co-ordinated local services to respond to concerns about abuse, to ensure that concerns are properly enquired into, and if action is necessary to protect children, to ensure that this is taken.
2. When children, or other adults raise concerns these should be taken seriously. These concerns may be raised with teachers, health professionals, social welfare workers, leisure service workers or the police. Children will approach those people they believe they can trust. They should not be let down.
3. These professionals need training to understand child abuse, to know that concerns should be taken seriously, and to know how to respond. Local protocols or procedures for responding to concerns help professionals to understand what to do. Training for professionals is important.
4. Those working with children, in schools, nurseries, in residential units and in health settings need to be trained to recognise abuse, and be able to respond to ensure concerns are acted on. Current practices of local and regional authorities in this area should be exchanged and 'best practice' approaches identified and adopted.
5. Personnel and training departments in local and regional government can promote multi-agency training of staff in different departments and organisations to ensure all staff are competent to recognise abuse.

5. **"Best practice" in helping children and families**

1. Non-stigmatising services are necessary for children and families where abuse has occurred. An assessment of and response to the needs of the child should be planned and monitored. The safety of the child is central, but the majority of families can be helped and supported on a voluntary basis. Work with families needs to be resourced and supported if future abuse is to be prevented. The child is only removed from the family in extreme cases. However, less serious cases must not be underestimated; in order to protect the child in such cases it is often necessary to tackle the root cause of the problem by remedying communication problems within the family which sadly in the long term often lead to physical or mental cruelty
2. Manuals of good professional practice, drawing on and sharing practice from individual States would be very beneficial to practitioners in the field, and should be encouraged and developed. Equally learning from 'bad practice', learning the lessons from circumstances in which children are killed is important. Such information could lead to the development and establishment of recognised standards and quality assurance programmes.

3. There are examples of Children's Ombudspersons having a role in collating and disseminating information about practice - 'best' practice, and 'bad' practice - and this is a further reason why consideration could be given to the establishment of this role at a European, State and local or regional level.

6. **Selecting with care - staff recruitment and selection**

1. The duty of care in recruiting and providing staff to deliver services, in residential, day or community settings, rests with the provider, the regional or local authority or other organisation, to ensure that children are protected. It is helpful to think in terms of barriers. The more barriers that are in place, the harder it is for paedophiles to cross them, and the greater the protection afforded to children and young people.
2. An essential requirement is to ensure that, as far as possible, through efficient and rigorous recruitment practices the right people are chosen to work with children, and the wrong deterred or rejected.
3. The formal selection process should include a mixture of assessment methods: written exercises; oral presentations; group exercises; psychometric testing; ~~and~~ individual interviews, or other methods appropriate to the circumstances. Competency based approaches identify the qualifications, skills, knowledge, behaviours and values required to do a job successfully, and these competences can be described and assessed through a selection process.
4. Because sexual abusers target the most vulnerable children, they also seek employment opportunities that will enable them to have regular and easy contact with children, and which will enable them to build relationships which they can exploit.
5. An important safeguard for children is to ensure that those who have relevant convictions do not work with children in any community, day or residential setting. This is an important responsibility for regional and local authorities, but difficult to apply reliably because offences committed in other countries are unlikely to be uncovered. If someone has lived and worked elsewhere in Europe, 'good conduct certificates' may be produced and EUROPOL should have a role in verifying these.
6. It is important to recognise that these processes have limitations. Many adults working with children and offending against them never come to the attention of employers. Even if they do they may still not be reported to the police. Because of this there is a need for authorities to ensure that there are good supervisory processes in place, so that any concerns about the practice or performance of members of staff are identified. There are opportunities for local and regional authorities to exchange 'best practice' information, and promote this within authorities.

7. **Campaigning to raise awareness about child abuse**

1. Local and regional authorities because of their closeness to and representation of local communities are in a unique position to take positive action on behalf of children, and in particular to promote campaigns to raise awareness about child abuse within their communities, about the dangers to children, and address the taboo of interfering in families. The public need information, and need to be

encouraged to report abuse. They need to know where to report, and need to know that their concerns will be taken seriously.

2. Local and regional authorities can initiate campaigns to combat abuse, for example advocating zero tolerance of violence to children in all its forms, and can initiate and lead Europe wide campaigns working with Non-Government Organisations as appropriate.

8. **Pan European legislative requirements**

1. There is currently a diversity of legislation across Europe concerned with child protection, the powers of local and regional authorities and the police, and the extent to which court systems and processes are child centred and child friendly, for example the use of video taped evidence from children, or the availability of specialist judges. The EU should analyse existing legislation, identify the benefits for children and recommend measures for each country to consider to work towards a Europe wide legislative framework for the protection of children.

4. **Conclusion**

1. The European Union encourages greater movement of citizens within Europe, but little has been done to co-ordinate practice and to promote the welfare of children, and to consider ways in which children can be better protected from abuse.
2. The key role of local and regional government in Europe in taking positive action on behalf of children to support the key principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to take action to ensure that children are protected from abuse and neglect should be more clearly recognised and acted upon.
3. The "Citizens' Europe" requiring more decentralised structures also requires more co-ordination, cross-border and transnational co-operation. Children and young people should not be ignored in this process, and the EU should consider the ways in which the rights of children and young people can be promoted in Member States and in Europe. This could include the establishment of local Children's' Ombudspersons who will share knowledge and practice about issues concerning and affecting children and young people across Europe. Local and regional authorities are well equipped to launch specific schemes to assist children because of their closeness to the population and expertise in the social sector. The European Union encourages such schemes and we hope that it will commit itself to supporting local action by these authorities or cross-border exchanges of experiences, in addition to the funding envisaged under the future DAPHNE programme
4. The Committee of the Regions has a role in co-ordinating the development of models of 'best practice' from authorities and organisations across Europe, and making these available for local authorities to consider. The recommendations for action by local and regional authorities across the EU to combat child abuse (annexed), put forward at the Committee of the Regions seminar on 'Local and Regional Cooperation to Protect Children from Abuse' demonstrates the commitment to cross border co-operation and sharing of practice between authorities, and the effective role of the Committee of the Regions in co-ordinating activities.
5. In the past the lack of reference to children in European Treaties has made it difficult to focus directly on the needs and interests of children and young people, and to direct European structural funding towards activities directed to the promotion of their

welfare. The Amsterdam Treaty, introducing a new non-discrimination clause, clarifies that children should be included within the provisions of the Treaty, recognising that children are Europe's citizens too. This position could be further enshrined in legislation, and the urgent need for a European Union wide strategy in relation to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, without impinging upon the responsibilities of national, regional and local authorities, should be recognised and acted upon.

6. The Committee of the regions welcomes the opportunities that the Daphne programme will bring to strengthen cooperation between NGOs and local and regional authorities across the EU. The COR is pleased to note that the call made in its Opinion (CdR 300/98 fin) for the promotion of cooperation between local and regional authorities and NGOs in the implementation of the programme and in information networks have recently been endorsed by the European Parliament (first reading), the Commission (amended proposal) and the Council (common position). In addition to such cooperation between local authorities and NGOs, networking among authorities is important to give value-added to the activities currently under way in the individual Member States.
7. The COR feels that the resources available must be increased in order to make it easier for local and regional authorities to set up mechanisms and services to locate, register, monitor and support children suffering abuse, exploitation or abandonment and their families. These mechanisms must:
 - ensure that children who are forced to work, beg, prostitute themselves or live in poverty are able to access the apparatus of social welfare, health and education;
 - provide for the healthy physical, emotional and intellectual development of children;
 - extend the provision of services to all children within the geographical boundaries of their jurisdiction (whether legally or illegally, temporarily or permanently)
 - collaborate with the corresponding mechanisms or services in the places where children are moving to so that their care can be followed.
8. The COR also feels that the specific problems of children from migrant groups (economic refugees, travellers e.g. gypsies etc.) moving between different areas of the same country or from one EU state to another, should also be tackled by means of legal measures at national and European level.
9. Information about the extent of abuse within the European Union should be collected from existing data, recognising that currently there are different ways of classifying and recording information about child abuse. The EU should report on current data collection with a view to identifying what information is relevant to an understanding of child abuse on a Europe wide basis.
10. Other Europe wide data bases would support the protection of children: a European Register of missing children; the possible introduction of an EU system for registering and tracking convicted sex offenders; and a protocol for information exchange between police forces, which would also enhance the vetting of staff.
11. In many areas of activity, manuals of good professional practice, drawing on and sharing practice from individual States would be very beneficial to practitioners in the field, and should be encouraged and developed. Examining current practices, for example in service provision, the recruitment and selection of staff, and basic training, across Europe to identify 'best practice' provides a way forward. Local and Regional

Authorities are well placed to do this work, and should be encouraged to do so by the EU. Such activity could be co-ordinated by the Committee of the Regions.

12. The important role of schools in preventing abuse, listening to and responding to children's needs, should be recognised and supported. Schools not only enhance young people's knowledge of the adult world, relationships, and potential dangers, but can also inform them about and encourage access to sources of help. Ensuring teachers are trained, equipped with resources and supported by "best practice" guidance to provide this personal and social education should be a priority. For this important role of the school to be truly effective, communication and information swapping between schools and social services must be optimised. This means closer cooperation between operators in the two fields, who often act in parallel rather than together
13. Local and regional authorities because of their closeness to local communities are in a unique position to take positive action on behalf of children, and in particular to promote campaigns to raise awareness about child abuse within their communities. Local and regional authorities can initiate campaigns to combat abuse, for example advocating zero tolerance of violence to children in all its forms, and can initiate and lead Europe wide campaigns working with Non-Government Organisations as appropriate.
14. The legislative framework for child protection in Europe should be reviewed, and recommendations made, taking account of existing international agreements and the responsibilities of national, regional and local authorities and their scope for action which would support a coordinated strategy within the EU for the protection of children's welfare and rights and the prevention of abuse.

Brussels, 18 November 1999.

The President

of the

Committee of the Regions

The Acting Secretary-General

of the

Committee of the Regions

Manfred Dammeyer

Vincenzo Falcone

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N.B.: Appendix overleaf.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

On 7 September 1998 and 4 December 1998 members of Commissions 3, 5 and 7 of the COR met together to consider ways to promote a Europe of Regions where children are protected from cruelty. The seminar was organized by the National society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (UK), and the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Ireland) in cooperation with the COR, with funding from the European Commission Daphne Initiative.

As a result of the discussions that took place during these seminars, the following local and regional action plan to combat child abuse was agreed upon:

Recommendations to local and regional government

- 5. To establish a shared understanding of child abuse within the European Union, and to collect, monitor and exchange information about the extent of child abuse**

Action:

- Local and regional authorities should work together to promote the development of common databases in this field in cooperation with Eurostat.
 - Local and regional authorities should work in cooperation with police authorities and Europol on the development of databases on criminal convictions concerning paedophile activity, child pornography, child prostitution and trafficking as well as information on missing children.
- 6. To ensure that legislation in the European union is adequate to protect children in danger**

Action:

- Local and regional authorities should support the development of specific legislation on child protection at EU level basing those recommendations on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This legislation would provide a consistent approach across Europe.
 - Local and regional authorities should promote the development of common guidelines at EU level for professional action to be taken by those involved in cases of child abuse.
7. **To ensure that children in Europe are protected from abuse by those caring for them and providing services by establishing good recruitment practice.**

Action:

- Recruitment and selection practices should be shared between local and regional authorities across the EU, and "best practice" recommendations developed for consideration and implementation.
 - Police forces to develop common recording systems of criminal convictions that relate to children, and methods of exchanging this information
8. **To ensure that all those caring for children or providing services are trained to recognize abuse and know how to act on concerns**

Action:

- Local and regional authorities to develop the key competences, that address the necessary skills and knowledge in this area. Once developed these competences could be standardized across Member States, so that "good" practice is exchanged and brought together.
 - Personnel and training departments in local and regional authorities can promote training of staff in different departments and organizations to ensure all staff are competent to recognize abuse and ensure that all staff receive information about child abuse in induction training.
9. **To ensure that there are local policies and procedures for the management of cases of child abuse which address the roles of staff in all professions and organizations**

Action:

- Local and Regional Authorities should promote the development of common guidelines, standardized protocols and roles and responsibilities for professional action to be taken by those involved in cases of child abuse, whether in the field of health, education, police or

social work.

10. **To ensure that post abuse services are available for children and their carers**

Action:

- Local and regional authorities across the EU to share information about effective practice in supporting families in which abuse has occurred, and helping children overcome the effects of abuse so that learning between authorities can take place.

11. **To take action to establish programmes to prevent abuse**

Action

- Local and Regional Authorities to initiate policies to ensure that every child receives information about family life, relationships, their rights, and what to do and who to talk to if they have concerns.
 - Local and regional authorities to share current practice, and develop resources that teachers can use to inform children and develop their skills and understanding about parenting.
 - Local and regional authorities across Europe can cooperate to develop programmes which ensure schools and librarians have effective internet safety policies; develop internet safety campaigns and help promote the work of hotlines where concerns can be reported.
12. **To give children a more active role in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Action:

- Local and regional authorities should provide access to counselling services responding to children's concerns about problems or issues and encouraging their participation in the planning and development of local services;
 - Local and regional authorities should support children and young people by raising awareness of their rights, providing access to a complaints system and independent advocacy, for example by appointing an independent Children's Commissioner/Ombudsman.
13. **To take responsibility to promote regular public awareness campaigns**

Action:

- Local and regional authorities to cooperate, share current practice, and to initiate Europe-wide campaigns to combat abuse.

10. To strengthen local and regional cooperation across the EU in combating child abuse

Action:

- To contribute towards strengthening cooperation between local and regional authorities across the EU and the candidate countries, working in partnership with NGOs, in order to combat child abuse through the dissemination of best practice and exchange of information and the promotion of public awareness campaigns.

¹ OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p.21

² OJ C 198, 14.7.1999, p.61

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CdR 225/99 rev. 2 E/o .../...

CdR 225/99 fin E/o

CdR 225/99 fin E/o .../...

CdR 225/99 fin E/o .../...

CdR 225/99 fin Appendix E/o .../...

CdR 225/99 fin Appendix E/o .../...

CdR 225/99 fin Appendix E/o