

Brussels, 15 February 2011

## European Commission sets out EU agenda for the rights of the child

***How can the EU help protect children's rights in the courtroom? How can we make sure that decisions on cross-border custody cases are enforced as quickly as possible? And how can we prevent kids from getting bullied online? The European Commission today presented an EU agenda for reinforcing the rights of the child by putting the principles of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights into practice. It includes a series of concrete actions where the EU can provide added value to policies for children's well-being and safety, including promoting child-friendly justice, better informing children about their rights, and making the internet safer for kids.***

*"Children's rights are fundamental rights," said Vice-President Viviane Reding, the EU's Justice Commissioner. "The EU and its 27 Member States need to make sure they are protected and that the best interests of the child are our guiding principles. Notably, child-friendly justice should make sure that the rights of the child are taken into account whenever children are involved with justice systems, either as victims, suspects or when their parents divorce and disagree over custody."*

Vice-President Antonio Tajani emphasised the need to fight the sexual exploitation of children linked to tourism. *"Sexual exploitation is a crime, a gross violation of human dignity and of children's physical and mental integrity. It is an area where we need joint strategies and international cooperation, awareness raising and firm action,"* he added.

Today's EU Agenda lists 11 actions that the Commission will take over the coming years. The initiative aims to reaffirm the strong commitment of EU institutions and Member States to promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of the child in all relevant EU policies and to turn them into concrete results. In the future, EU policies that affect children directly or indirectly should be designed, implemented, and monitored taking into account the principle of children's best interests.

Children can face severe obstacles when they are involved with justice systems. Their rights may even be violated if they face non child-friendly justice systems. In addition, particularly vulnerable children – either growing up in poverty, social exclusion or disabled – require special protection. The Commission will take special account of children as part of a proposal on protecting victims of crime, proposing safeguards for child suspects and revising existing rules in cross-border custody cases.

The Commission will actively protect and empower children as users of online technologies and counter cyber-bullying, grooming, exposure to harmful content, and other uncomfortable experiences of using online technologies. To raise awareness and promote active citizenship among children, the Commission will establish a single entry point for children on the EUROPA portal with easily accessible information on children's rights and EU policies.

The Commission's action on the rights of the child is part of its efforts to implement the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is legally binding on the EU's institutions when they propose laws and on Member States when they are implementing EU law. In October 2010, the Commission adopted a strategy for effectively implementing the provisions of the Charter ([IP/10/1348](#)). Next month, it will publish the first annual report on fundamental rights, which will also monitor progress on applying children's rights.

## **Background**

The Treaty of Lisbon requires the EU to promote the protection of the rights of the child. The rights of the child also form part of the fundamental rights that the EU is committed to respect under Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In addition, all 27 EU countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Europe 2020 Strategy ([IP/10/225](#)) and the Commission's Action Plan to implement the Stockholm Programme ([IP/10/447](#)) set out a vision for the 21st century of a Europe in which the children of today will have a better education, access to services and resources that they need to grow up as well as a solid protection of their rights.

## **For more information**

Children's rights in the EU:

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/children/policies\\_children\\_intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/children/policies_children_intro_en.htm)

Justice Newsroom:

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/news/intro/news\\_intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/news/intro/news_intro_en.htm)

Homepage of Viviane Reding, Vice-President and Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/reding/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/reding/index_en.htm)

### Overview of 11 actions

The Commission will contribute to making the justice systems in the EU more child-friendly and to improving children's well being notably by:

1. adopting, in 2011, **a proposal for a Directive on victims' rights** raising the level of protection of vulnerable victims, including children;
2. tabling, in 2012, **a proposal for a Directive on special safeguards** for suspected or accused persons **who are vulnerable**, including children;
3. revising, by 2013, the **EU legislation facilitating the recognition and enforcement of decisions on parental responsibility** with a view to ensuring, in the interest of the child, that decisions can be recognised and enforced as quickly as possible, including, where appropriate, the establishment of common minimum standards;
4. **promoting the use of the Council of Europe Guidelines of 17 November 2010 on child-friendly justice** and taking them into account in future legal instruments in the field of civil and criminal justice;
5. supporting and encouraging the **development of training activities for judges** and other professionals at European level regarding the optimal participation of children in judicial systems.
6. supporting the exchange of best practices and the **improvement of training for guardians, public authorities** and other actors who are in close contact with unaccompanied children (2011-2014);
7. paying particular attention to children in the context of the **EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies**, which will be adopted in spring 2011 and will notably promote the more efficient use of structural funds for the integration of Roma;
8. strongly encouraging and providing support to all Member States to ensure the **swift introduction and full functioning of the 116 000 hotline for missing children** and the child alert mechanisms (2011-2012);
9. supporting Member States and other stakeholders in **strengthening prevention, empowerment and participation of children to make the most of online technologies and counter cyber-bullying** behaviour, exposure to harmful content, and other online risks namely through the Safer Internet programme and cooperation with the industry through self-regulatory initiatives (2009-2014);
10. continuing the implementation of the 2007 **EU Guidelines on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child** that focus on combating all forms of **violence against children**. The EU will also evaluate the implementation of the Guidelines. The EU will implement the **EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflicts** based on the 2010 Revised Implementation Strategy;
11. setting up, in the course of 2011, a **single entry point on EUROPA with information for children on the EU and on the rights of the child**. The Commission will invite other EU institutions to join this initiative.