

August 29, 2013
Bucharest

Mr. Nils Muižnieks
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe

Re: Child labour in Europe: a persisting challenge

Excellency,

ChildPact, The Regional Coalition for Child Protection in the Wider Black Sea Area, represents over 600 NGOs from: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kosovo¹, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Serbia. Collectively, ChildPact directly serves over 500,000 of the most vulnerable children in these countries.

At ChildPact we would like to show our support for your declaration² from August 20, 2013 on child labour in Europe. We work in most of the countries mentioned by your report and we share your concerns regarding the lack of data, as well as the limited attention to the many risks faced by vulnerable children and their families.

For the last years we witnessed as you did an increasing number of working children. The numbers of children who drop out from schools to help their families survive also increased and it is true that the situation of too many Roma children is dire. Moreover, we see an increase in children used for begging, work in toxic conditions, small criminality and prostitution. At the same time we witness a decrease in funding, research and social services targeting the most vulnerable children in Europe. The future looks grim and we think that change is only possible if all stakeholders intensify their efforts for addressing the issues rightly underlined in your message.

Excellency,

ChildPact would like to bring three ideas to help intensify such efforts: **1.** A Child Protection Index; **2.** An EU Agency for Children's Rights, Social Inclusion and Innovation; **3.** A regional mechanism for child protection, with a task force against child exploitation.

¹"This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice's opinion on Kosovo 2008 declaration of independence".

² Child labour in Europe: a persisting challenge, available at:
<http://humanrightscomment.org/2013/08/20/child-labour-in-europe>

With the Child Protection Index we aim to create a region-wide monitoring instrument with a common framework to anchor policy debates, verify needs and gaps in protection systems, create cross-national comparisons for advocacy and funding purposes, push for new efforts on data population, and ultimately offer incentives and answers for qualitative and quantitative growth in child protection systems.

An EU Agency for Children's Rights, Social Inclusion and Innovation would provide significant input to the process of improving the life of children in Europe, at a time when the Lisbon Treaty has put further emphasis on the rights of the child, while in the field we witnessed the dim picture mentioned above.

Attached to this letter you can find our brief regarding the creation of a Regional Cooperation Mechanism for Child Protection in the wider Black Sea area. 1000 people signed our petition for this mechanism and we would be grateful if you and members of your team could add their names: <http://www.childpact.org/sign-our-petition>. Equally important, various governments, as well as the European Commission, have shown us encouraging signs of support and again we hope we can count on your support as well.

Most importantly, we would like to underline that our members work at the grassroots. They have invaluable experiences and they developed good practices that prove without doubt that change can happen even in the most difficult communities and worst environments. Our members represent a strong voice within their countries and we feel that now is a good time to examine, review and improve some if not most of the child-related policies in Europe as well as the way these are implemented.

We strongly believe that your observations need to be discussed by governments and civil society and we would be happy to help organising or participate in such discussions, particularly in our region (Western Balkans, South Caucasus, South-East Europe). We also believe that we need much stronger European and regional mechanisms able to research, design and implement policies focus on children well-being. Mechanisms able to monitor and evaluate the situation of children in the countries are also of utmost importance.

We hope that our letter will generate not just a reply but also multi-stakeholders actions targeting the many shortcomings that you rightly identified in you message.

Thank you for considering this letter! Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Oprea', is displayed on a light blue rectangular background.

Mirela Oprea
ChildPact Secretary General