Parliamentary Assembly
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Recommendation 1532 (2001)[1]

A dynamic social policy for children and adolescents in towns and cities

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is concerned that young people in towns and cities are becoming increasingly anti-social and is worried about the many social ills connected with urban life and the emergence of suburban "ghettos".

2. Deprived urban areas across Europe are repeatedly highlighted by national media reporting cases of child violence; juvenile delinquency, sometimes involving very young children; possession of weapons and drugs, in particular in educational establishments; and the severe living conditions of street children.

3. However, the phenomena linked to urban youth malaise have to be seen in a wider context of rapid social and economic change, which has imposed the consequences of acute poverty on many families and children in Europe, both in the well-established democracies and in the new Council of Europe member states.

4. Unemployment, poverty, family break-up, adult violence, the weakening of social welfare and other public infrastructure and the lack of adequate community spirit and support all influence the life experience and behaviour of children and adolescents in towns and cities.

5. Youth violence does not always aim at misappropriation but most often is a means of protest and self-assertion. It takes different forms: against oneself (suicide, drug use), within groups (bullying at school, youth gangs in ghettos), or against society at large in the form of "hate-crime".

6. Furthermore, statistics show that children and young people are more often the victims than the perpetrators of violence.

7. Youth violence is therefore not a phenomenon to be considered in isolation but instead as a strong indicator of adult malaise, intolerance, fear and violence.

8. There is a growing recognition that juvenile justice or criminal justice agencies will not of themselves resolve the problems posed or experienced by children and adolescents who offend.

9. In this respect, the Parliamentary Assembly is concerned by the development of law-enforcement policies that are in breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which every member state of the Council of Europe has ratified, and more specifically by the situation of children in prison, especially when awaiting trial. Internationally recognised non-judicial measures and community-based alternatives to custody for children ought to be introduced.

10. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that the response to youth violence needs to be based on prevention rather than repression or punishment, addressing at the earliest possible stage the situation of children facing disadvantage and risk.

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1. Assembly debate on 24 September 2001 (25th Sitting) (see Doc. 9192, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mrs Gatterer). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 September 2001 (25th Sitting).

11. Moreover, a dynamic social policy for children and adolescents should not only focus on children who offend, who have been abused or who experience poverty, but equally on preventive measures for all children at risk (targeting violent households, poor parental support, negative early life experiences, etc.). Such measures should also address the specific situation and experiences of girls in the family, community and society in general.

12. A shift in political will is needed to focus resources on the introduction of multidisciplinary measures at an early stage, providing children and young people with positive life experiences, restoring democratic and civil values, fostering creativity, solidarity, and positive community participation.

13. In this connection, the Parliamentary Assembly commends the work undertaken by the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe, in particular with regard to education, culture, youth activities, social cohesion and the prevention of crime and drug misuse.

14. Crime and urban security have also been addressed by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), which recently adopted a manual on local government policies aimed at reducing crime.

15. The Parliamentary Assembly is convinced that appropriate responses to urban youth malaise can only be found through the concerted action of different partners at local and national levels, further assisted by the exchange of experience and guidelines established at European level.

16. While also recalling the issues raised in Recommendation 1286 (1996) on a European strategy for children and Recommendation 1460 (2000) on setting up a European ombudsman for children, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

16.1. give suitable priority to social policy for children and adolescents in towns and cities and instruct the appropriate body to develop guidelines in this policy area on the basis of pan-European information regarding the lives and experiences of children;

16.2. urge the member states of the Council of Europe:

a. to guarantee, through explicit recognition in their constitutional texts or domestic laws, children's civil and political rights, as well as their economic, social and cultural rights, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

b. to ratify all relevant Council of Europe conventions on the rights and protection of the child, in particular the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights;

c. to engage in an exchange of experience at European level involving both national and local authorities (European crime prevention network;, European observatory on urban security, etc.);

d. to develop a dynamic social policy for children and adolescents in towns and cities based on the following elements:

measures and policies based on the partnership and involvement of all sectors

local and national, public and private;

measures to address the whole range of risks faced by children and adolescents in the social and physical environment in which they live;

the development, for children who offend, of alternative forms of dispute resolution: alternatives to judicial processes; alternatives to custody; and community-based measuresin line with internationally recognised standards for children in the justice system;

harmonised standards and practices (for example, specialised courts for minors) in all the Council of Europe member states with regard to children who commit, or who are victims of, offences (for example, family violence, sexual abuse);

promoting the role of formal and non-formal education in preparing children for adulthood and their role in civic and political society, in promoting values of tolerance and respect for others, and in addressing inequalities based on disadvantage and gender;

assistance in the transition from school to employment, providing children and adolescents with skills necessary for the labour market;

leisure pursuits (culture, sports, etc.) for children and adolescents;

programmes and projects which assist children and young people to address the negative effects of social exclusion and marginalisation;

mechanisms by which policies affecting all areas of social and political life

employment, housing, crime, health, education, etc.

can be "child-proofed";

the establishment of a national children's ombudsman for promotion and monitoring of the rights of the child;

the positive values of the Internet, the World Wide Web and the new information and communications technologies in providing information for children and young people and in providing a mechanism for co-ordination of their activities;

the participation of children and adolescents in decision making and policy development; – fostering of the supporting role of extended families and the local community;

taking into account gender-based issues and family planning;

measures to improve the situation of street children.