COUNCIL OF EUROPE STRATEGY FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (2022-2027)

"Children's Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation"

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Building a Europe for and with children

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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French edition:

Stratégie du Conseil de l'Europe pour les droits de l'enfant (2022-2027)

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1. INTRODUCTION – THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

1. Protecting the rights of the child is at the core of the Council of Europe's mission to safeguard human rights, uphold democracy and preserve the rule of law. Since the launch of the programme "Building a Europe for and with children" in 2006, the Council of Europe has striven to advance the rights of the child in its member States through subsequent multiannual Strategies, implemented through standard-setting, monitoring compliance and supporting implementation through co-operation projects.

2. Children in Council of Europe member States are entitled to enjoy the full range of human rights safeguarded by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other international and European human rights instruments. Their rights include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. This Strategy seeks to encompass all these categories of human rights and outlines the goals and priorities of the Council of Europe and its member States on protecting the rights of the child and making these rights a reality for all children, through six priority areas for action for the period 2022 to 2027.

1.1. Key references of the Council of Europe

3. The current **Secretary General's Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe for 2021-2025** has a strong focus on preventing discrimination and ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups, including children. "The protection of the rights of national minorities, LGBTI persons, refugees and migrants, especially unaccompanied minors" and "the promotion of equality between women and men" will also be in the focus. Particular emphasis is placed on enhancing the fight against the sexual exploitation of children, in particular through the implementation of the Council of Europe Conventions on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) and on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).-

4. The Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027 will aim at developing actions supporting relevant provisions of this Strategic Framework as well as Protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the digital environment: Draft Council of Europe Digital Agenda 2022-2025 while, at the same time, finding synergies with priorities and actions proposed by **other Council of Europe Strategies and Action Plans**, such as the Disability Strategy (20172023), the Counter-terrorism Strategy (2018-2022), the Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023), the Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025), the Strategic Action Plan on Human Rights and Technologies in Biomedicine (2020-2025), the Youth Sector Strategy 2030, the Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe (2021-2025).

1.2. Strategic context – The added value of a Strategy

5. Weaknesses in legislation, family and social protection services and in justice, education and health systems increase children's vulnerability to human rights violations. This, together with the pervasive social norms that condone violence against children and deny their agency as human rights holders, makes children the category of people the hardest hit by any social, economic or health crisis.

6. At national level, the adoption of integrated strategies has been identified as key to effectively promote and protect the rights of the child. The adoption of a Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child serves the same purpose: that of gathering all key stakeholders (internal and external to the Council of Europe) to agree on a **shared vision** and develop a **common reference framework** with specific and time-bound objectives and mobilising all those who have a role to play in achieving them.

7. A strategy is needed **to address complex and cross-cutting issues**. One of the obstacles to the effective protection of the rights of the child is the tendency to work in silos, happening at all levels - international, European, national, regional and local. By bringing all key stakeholders on board, a strategy can effectively address issues that have multiple dimensions and assign clear roles to all actors. Strong political commitment and good governance paired with the allocation of sufficient resources and a broad societal awareness of the rights of the child are thus fundamental to ensuring that children are seen and treated as full rights-holders.

8. Strategies help to **identify needs and to find adequate responses**, to set priorities and to effectively mainstream the rights of the child within the Council of Europe, mobilising all its forces around a shared vision and agenda. Strategies set clear milestones which can be periodically evaluated and reviewed to ensure progress and success. They also allow to "pioneer", "experiment" or "innovate" policy measures in new areas, to initiate dialogues aimed at **triggering changes** in both legal and social norms on highly sensitive topics and to increase the visibility of children in particularly vulnerable situations.

9. Finally, to the extent that Strategies are designed and implemented through an **inclusive process**, they build ownership, address needs and provide clear guidance to member States and other stakeholders, whilst creating accountability. These features will create fertile grounds for them to result in major breakthroughs and gains, **increasing impact of action** and laying a sustainable basis for effective action, not only through immediate short-term responses, but also by changing attitudes and systems in the long run.

1.3. Strategy design and process

10. This Strategy is the result of a broad and inclusive process including consultations and active engagement with different stakeholders. Similar to previous strategies, a multi-level consultation process took place from September 2020 to June 2021, starting with governments represented by national delegations on the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), Council of Europe bodies and international organisations invited as participants, as well as official observers to the CDENF (notably NGOs and delegations from non-member States). Internal consultations involved the Secretariats of other Council of Europe bodies as represented on the Inter-secretariat Task Force on the Rights of the Child, who provided substantive input and support in reaching out to their respective members and observers. A total of **220** children were consulted through a participatory process organised between February and June 2021 with the active support of 10 national CDENF delegations[1] and their respective partner organisations facilitating the step of reaching out to children, as well as specialised consultants accompanying the overall process until the adoption of the Strategy. Their contributions and proposals have been included under each strategic objective under the title "Highlight: What children suggest", but also, in some cases, have been added to the description of challenges and objectives. The quotations added at the beginning of each thematic chapter also come from the children consulted.

11. This inclusive process was aimed at and has been effective in identifying a set of strategic objectives (from overall goals to specific objectives and proposals for action) which not only respond to the actual needs of children and priorities identified through various intergovernmental activities, literature review, and by consulting children themselves, but also contribute to high levels of transparency and accountability. Previous editions of the Strategy had been praised, in relevant audits, for their comprehensive and inclusive character and their clear structure. Based on guidance received from the Council of Europe Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO) in 2020, an attempt to further improve these features, based on lessons learned under similar strategic processes, was made in the present Strategy. This has, amongst others, resulted in the Strategy presenting clear and comprehensive "result-chains" which will allow all stakeholders and a larger professional public to understand how the Council of Europe intends to get from the overall goals to actually generating an impact on children's rights and well-being.

12. Furthermore, the Strategy links up strategic objectives with relevant articles of the UNCRC, the ECHR and targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) as laid out in Agenda 2030, thus responding to the Council of Europe's role as a regional organisation which has the confidence of various UN bodies to support and facilitate the implementation of a global agenda.

13. To become a formal reference in the rights of the child, for all internal and external stakeholders, the Strategy was approved by the CDENF at its meeting on 16-18 October 2021, then submitted to and adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 23 February 2022 and officially launched at a High-level Launching Conference in Rome/Italy on 7-8 April 2022.

1. Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain.

14. The Strategy's implementation shall be closely followed through another collaborative and inclusive process overseen by the CDENF under its new 4-year terms of reference (2022-2025) on the basis of an Action Plan prepared in consultation with other Council of Europe bodies and where relevant, with international partner organisations. In order to make it more accessible and accountable towards children, a child-friendly version of the Strategy will be also produced with them. Finally, as implementation by member States progresses, the Strategy and its relevant Action Plans could possibly serve as model tools for the development of similar, comprehensive and integrated approaches to protecting and promoting the rights of the child at national level. During the six-year implementation period foreseen for the Strategy, the Council of Europe will explore opportunities and possible formats for continuing the consultations with children.

1.4. How to read, understand and use the Strategy?

15. The Strategy is based on six priority areas and refers to several cross-cutting dimensions or approaches. It thereby follows the integrated approach that is promoted by the Council of Europe in various areas and with regard to numerous challenges faced in the complex 21st century world.

16. For each priority area, a brief introduction to the overall objectives is followed by several elements:

- ► references to relevant key articles of the UNCRC and the ECHR (non-exhaustive list),
- ► relevant UNSDG targets,
- ► a description of the key challenges identified through the inclusive process,
- ► specific objectives at two levels:
  - – *implementing objectives* focusing on existing standards and instruments and how to step up their implementation,
  - – *innovating objectives* aimed at deploying new action and essential synergies,
- ► a spotlight on proposals coming directly from the children consulted *("What children suggest")*,
- ► relevant cross-cutting issues the respect of which should be "counter-checked" in each priority area.

17. Comprehensive tables presenting detailed results-chains (including outcomes and indicators) contributing to transparency and accountability are meant to complete the priority areas. They need to be read jointly to fully understand what action the Council of Europe wishes to deploy in each area and what outcomes it wishes to achieve.

18. It is important for all beneficiaries and stakeholders of this Strategy to fully understand the different "building blocks" and how they are interrelated. Ownership of the Strategy can only be assured if all stakeholders involved in the implementation process fully understand it and can recognise their respective roles and harness their own potential to contribute to this process. This is also critical to mobilise the adequate political leadership and resources for not only making a positive impact, but also achieving major strides in the protection of the rights of the child in the years ahead. Making the Strategy accessible to all will also be an essential pre-requisite for creating opportunities for children to express their views and to continue informing the implementation process.

19. The overall vision of this Strategy is to make a profound and long-lasting positive impact on children's lives, in the fulfilment of their rights, their protection against any harm, and the promotion of their well-being – and to achieve this for all children across Europe and beyond. It aims at moving all those who can make a difference "from words to action"! An ambitious undertaking, but not impossible – let's move forward!

2. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTION

Key references

20. The UNCRC represented a paradigm shift in the way children are being treated and perceived. Children, i.e. persons under the age of 18, are not just recipients of protection or charity, but subjects of rights and agents of change. More than 30 years after the entry into force of the UNCRC (1990), this understanding finds more and more supporters but also remains questioned by too many. Moreover, evidence shows that, despite all progress achieved, **the rights of the child are still violated on a daily basis, not least due to gaps in children's legal protection**, but even more so because of the gaps between law and practice. The UNCRC will remain a key reference for any action deployed by the Council of Europe in this area.

21. At Council of Europe level, despite the obstacles that children face to access international justice, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Committee of Social Rights remain constant reminders of how the rights of the child continue to be breached.[2] It is the Council of Europe's commitment to build its work on the case-law of these two important treaty bodies.[3] The Lanzarote Convention binds its Parties, and the findings and recommendations of its monitoring body will also guide the implementation of the Strategy.

22. This Strategy follows a comprehensive human rights approach based on the understanding that all children's rights are indivisible and interdependent. While aiming to protect all the rights of the child, work undertaken within this Strategy will in particular address the following:

European Convention on Human Rights	
Article	**The rights of the child to:**
2	Life
3	Not being subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
4	Prohibition of slavery and forced labour
5	Liberty and security
6	A fair trial
8	Respect for private and family life
10	Freedom of expression
14	Prohibition of discrimination
2 of Protocol 1	Education

2. Department for the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, Thematic Factsheet Children's Rights, February 2021.
3. See also the joint Council of Europe-FRA Handbook on European Law Relating to the Rights of the Child.

European Social Charter (revised)	
Article	**The rights of the child to:**
7§10	Receive special protection against physical and moral dangers
11	Protection of health
15	Independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community (for children with disabilities)
17	Social, legal and economic protection, and to grow up in an environment which encourages the full development of their personality and of their physical and mental capacities
17§1.a	Have the care, assistance, education and training they need
17§1.b	Be protected against negligence, violence or exploitation
17§1.c	Receive protection and special aid from the state when deprived of their family's support
19	Protection and assistance (for migrant children)
30	Be protected against poverty and social exclusion

Key references and priority areas

23. Through a broad consultation process, the Council of Europe has identified **six priority areas** to guarantee the rights and the best interests of the child, as well as **three cross-cutting issues** to be mainstreamed across the priority areas to guarantee all children equal access to and enjoyment of their rights. All priority areas are anchored in the international treaties constituting the key references for any Council of Europe work undertaken on the rights of the child: the ECHR, the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols,[4] and in particular **the four general principles of the UNCRC - Non-discrimination (Article 2), Best interests of the child (Article 3), Right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and Right to be heard (Article 12)**. All priority areas are also linked up with specific targets of the UNSDGs and have received special attention and input from children in ten Council of Europe member States who have been explicitly consulted on the Strategy.

The six priority areas for the Council of Europe to guarantee the rights of the child are:	
1.	**Freedom from violence for all children**
2.	**Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children**
3.	**Access to and safe use of technologies for all children**
4.	**Child-friendly justice for all children**
5.	**Giving a voice to every child**
6.	**Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations**

24. According to the wish expressed by key stakeholders, the five **priority areas of the previous Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)** are maintained, as there is still room for progress to be made, both in legislative and policy action. Keeping the same strategic structure while widening the current priority areas to reflect new challenges will allow Council of Europe member States and other stakeholders to build on previous achievements and ensure continuity of action, while seeking innovative responses to address new challenges.

25. Other emerging issues requiring a response by the Council of Europe to provide guidance to member States have led to the inclusion of a **sixth priority area on children's rights in crisis and emergency situations** to cover issues such as access to a healthy environment and taking action to fight climate change, the right

4. Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

to protection in conflict zones, migration or forced displacement or the impact of a public health crisis on the rights of the child.

26. The global pandemic that all countries have faced since early 2020 has shown that new and widely unexpected challenges can suddenly emerge, and that despite strong standards and references for upholding the rights of the child, law and policy makers should always "expect the unexpected" and be prepared, responsive and ready to adapt. Through the aforementioned priority areas, the Strategy therefore also addresses **new challenges having emerged over the past years**, including issues prompted by the COVID-19 crisis. Children have been particularly affected by public health measures implemented to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be so in the years to come. Children's well-being, their safety, access to education, their equal opportunities, their right to be heard and their physical and mental health have been affected in multiple ways: their rights are more at risk than ever, even though they are often only "passengers" in political, social and economic systems run by adults and suffering the consequences of adult decisions.[5]

Transversal approach

27. The complex challenges met by children and by those protecting their rights require a systemic and structural response. The Council of Europe will have a closer look at these multiple, often interrelated challenges, but also at strengthening the role of children and enhancing their right to be heard and influencing decisions made by adults, as well as at the interdisciplinary and interagency responses that are required to take effective action. The present Strategy is therefore taking a cross-cutting approach under each of its priority areas, mainstreaming transversal challenges throughout. The following tables will therefore come back systematically under each chapter.

IN FOCUS: Cross-cutting issues to be mainstreamed across all thematic priorities	
Gender-sensitive approach	Achieving gender equality[6] begins in childhood: boys and girls have specific individual experiences and needs, whose fulfilment can be hampered by the persistence of harmful gender stereotypes.[7] Girls often face **additional barriers** and higher levels of discrimination in their access to and enjoyment of human rights in comparison to boys. In order to mitigate these barriers and improve equality, the Council of Europe will employ a **gender equality perspective** in all objectives and actions proposed under this Strategy to contribute to the implementation of relevant Council of Europe instruments and standards[8] and the achievement of UNSDG no. 5.
Anti-discrimination approach	Complying with article 2 of the UNCRC, the Council of Europe will account for **children's varied situations and fight discrimination** of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. All appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians or family members.

5. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on children's rights. Resolution 2385(2021) and Recommendation 2206(2021).
6. "Gender equality entails equal rights for women and men, girls and boys, as well as the same visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life. It also implies equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men." (Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, Introduction, point 2).
7. "Gender stereotypes are preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex." (Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, Strategic objective 1, point 38).
8. Including Council of Europe Recommendation on preventing and combatting sexism (CM/Rec(2019)1).

Child participation approach[9]	Even though child participation is covered through specific objectives defined under priority 5 of the Strategy, the Council of Europe considers that it should be mainstreamed throughout all the work that affects children and their well-being, to fully comply with article 12 of the UNCRC. **Children's contributions are a unique resource** for strengthening human rights, democracy and social cohesion, and for enhancing the delivery and accountability of services and policies in all thematic areas. The Organisation will continue to mainstream the concept of child participation throughout all priority areas of the Strategy, including by promoting its use in the work of different bodies and institutions and by developing **child-friendly versions** of its standards, instruments and reference texts, guidelines and handbooks, as well as encouraging member States to disseminate them in the children's national languages, by starting from the present Strategy.

HIGHLIGHT: What children suggest	
Challenges to be addressed urgently	► Recognise the legitimacy of children's experiences, views and recommendations; ► Promote an understanding of children's agency and competence in contributing to all matters that concern children, families, communities and society at large.
Possible action to be taken	► Continue developing accessible documents and resources for children, to enable them to fully access information, express their views and participate; ► Support and strengthen peer education among children on the rights of the child and the socio-political participation of children; ► Develop and roll out training for officials and professionals in Council of Europe services and bodies, and at the national level of member States on how to engage and consult with children; ► Promote child rights-based and evidence-informed working methods and tools to support officials and professionals in hearing and consulting children; ► Create concrete spaces and opportunities for children to inspire change in the best interests of the child, within member States and the Council of Europe.
How children can be involved	► Develop and establish a permanent structure or mechanism for the participation of children in the Council of Europe's dynamic triangle – standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation projects; ► Engage children progressively in the analysis of strengths and weaknesses in policy making and implementation processes at all levels of public administration, from national policy making to service delivery at the local level; ► Promote opportunities for children to inspire innovative approaches in policy making, administration and implementation, including the design and delivery of services for children, families and communities; ► Support the collaboration and exchanges between existing structures and mechanisms for child participation at the national, regional and local levels.

9. Child participation is both a cross-cutting issue recurring under each priority area and a priority of its own of the Strategy, notably with regard to specific dimensions or measures of participation.

2.1. Freedom from violence for all children

"We need governments to raise public awareness about violence against children, for justice to be swift and for the child to be put at the centre of the response".

"Violence, throughout the pandemic, has been rising. Children were closed in flats or houses with threatening parents or siblings and had no place to go to and no trustful people around to talk with."

28. Violence against children constitutes a violation of their rights, compromises their social development and affects their enjoyment of other rights.[10] It often has devastating short- and long-term mental and physical health consequences, and furthermore it produces far-reaching costs for society. The Council of Europe has committed to step up its efforts in protecting children from violence, as required by the UNCRC, the ECHR, the European Social Charter, the Lanzarote Convention and other Council of Europe conventions. Given the persisting prevalence of violence against children and the new challenges arising, not least in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Organisation will continue to keep this topic amongst its priorities.

29. For the purpose of the Strategy, violence against children is understood as a **human rights violation** including all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.[11] The Council of Europe will continue promoting a **policy of zero tolerance** for violence in its member States, including by supporting the implementations of the recommendations of the Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children 2020 and the mandates of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children and of the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In implementing this Strategy, the Council of Europe will also look for synergies with the European Union (EU) and its actions on violence against children, considering the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-24)[12] and the EU Strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse,[13] including with respect to the possible EU accession to the Lanzarote Convention.[14]

30. The **Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in** physical, psychological and sexual violence against children and shown the vulnerability of child protection systems in times of crisis. It has shown the urgent need to address that vulnerability, in particular through an **integrated and strategic approach to violence**, by strengthening legal systems and the gathering of evidence, stepping up prevention and reinforcing reporting and response systems through multi-disciplinary and interagency approaches.

Key UNCRC Articles	The right of the child to…
19	Be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse
34	Be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse
39	Measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration

10. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence.
11. Ibid.
12. COM/2021/142 final with public friendly version / COM/2021/142 final with child-friendly and accessible version
13. COM(2020) 607 final / COM(2020) 607 final
14. As foreseen by the Council Conclusions on EU priorities for co-operation with the Council of Europe 2020-2022. / As foreseen by the Council Conclusions on EU priorities for co-operation with the Council of Europe 2020-2022.

Key ECHR Articles	The right of the child to…
2	Life
3	Not being subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
4	Prohibition of slavery and forced labour
5	Liberty and security
8	Private and family life

UN SDGs Goals	Targets that the Strategy will contribute to meet regarding protecting children from violence
4. Quality education	4.7 Promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence
5. Gender equality	5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
	5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions	16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere
	16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
	16.A Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international co-operation, for building capacity at all levels to prevent violence

The challenges faced…

- Violence against children adopts **many different forms**, including bullying,[15] hate speech, harassment, physical and psychological neglect, experiencing or witnessing domestic violence, corporal punishment, online violence, including cyberbullying and cybercrime, hate crime, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including through prostitution, sale of children, trafficking of children, as well as peer to peer violence and harmful sexual behaviour by children towards others.
- The risk of violence against children remains **present in every setting**, including in places where children should be safest: in the family and its social circle (including as direct or indirect victims of domestic and gender-based violence), in schools and care institutions, in shelters and reception facilities for migrants and asylum-seekers, in detention centres, during leisure and sports activities, as well as in the digital environment.
- Violence against children is both a driver and consequence of children going missing, which might be linked to multiples causes, such as violence, trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, early marriage, mental health, neglect or weaknesses in the child protection system.[16]
- Psychological violence is not always seen as violence. There is also a risk of "normalisation" of violence depending on who the perpetrator is or where it occurs.
- Progress towards ending violence against children is often hampered by insufficient investment in prevention, poor national policies, scarce and insufficient disaggregated data and research,

15. The Report "Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future" highlights that children are frustrated over lack of action on preventing bullying in school, even when teachers might know that bullying is happening.
16. Missing Children Europe, 2020 Figures and Trends.

insufficient attention to mechanisms for identifying abuse, counselling, reporting,[17] recovery and reintegration, inadequate opportunities for children and parents to seek timely and effective help from service providers, a lack of interdisciplinary and multi-agency collaboration as well as a lack of child participation in services design and delivery.

- **Sexism in public and private life** can contribute to reinforcing stereotypes, low self-esteem and to perpetuating the cycle of violence against women and girls. It can also influence life and career choices.
- Due to the lack of contact between non-parental duty bearers and children in times of crisis, violence against children has been less visible. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of ensuring a child-centred response, and the shortcomings of existing identification and reporting mechanisms.

… and the ways identified by the Council of Europe to prevent and protect children from violence:

IMPLEMENTING its standards, by continuously:	**INNOVATING**, by:
1.1.1. Fighting child **sexual exploitation and sexual abuse**, through the work of the Committee of the Parties to the Lanzarote Convention, acting as a monitoring body and a platform for capacity building to implement the Lanzarote Convention in all Council of Europe member States and beyond.	1.2.1. Raising awareness and adopting stronger action to end **gender-based violence** (including forced and/or early marriages), violence against children in **vulnerable situations, bullying, cyberbullying, (online) grooming, hate crime** and **peer violence**, including harmful sexual behaviour by children.
1.1.2. Raising awareness on the need to protect children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.[18]	1.2.2. Stepping up **prevention** of violence against children, by developing a model for prevention strategies at national level and by addressing hate speech (including sexist hate speech) and the risk of children falling victims to violent radicalisation.
1.1.3. Supporting States outside the Council of Europe in **acceding to the Lanzarote Convention**.	1.2.3 Promoting the participation of children and parents in designing and evaluating services for children and families, and the training of service providers.
1.1.4. Reviewing the implementation of the Committee of Ministers' **Recommendation on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence.**[19]	1.2.4 Raising awareness of the importance of psychological support to children within the public health system and schools and facilitating children's access to such services.
1.1.5. Serving as a platform for exchanging on national practices (e.g. through the "VAC Clearinghouse – online platform on responses to violence against children").	1.2.5 Devising universal **key definitions** of violence, **assessment tools** with common indicators and providing guidance for a harmonised process of disaggregated **data collection** to obtain regular, specific, and reliable information.
1.1.6. Developing and implementing specific guidance on reporting mechanisms for professionals.	1.2.6 Promoting campaigns to change mentalities about violence against children, including neglect, especially in the family[20] and institutional context.
1.1.7. Monitoring the implementation of the **European Social Charter** with respect to violence against children through the European Committee of Social Rights.	
1.1.8. Addressing **hate speech and hate crime against children** through the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.	

17. FRA's mapping child protection systems has found that in many EU member States, the anonymity of reporting professionals is not guaranteed, discouraging professionals from reporting cases of violence against children. Besides, the lack of a comprehensive document outlining the referral mechanism in place as well as the responsibilities of each of the actors involved has resulted in ineffective co-operation among professionals.
18. For example, through the celebration of a European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse on 18 November each year.
19. CM/Rec(2009)10.
20. Informing parents about alternative ways to bring up their children in accordance with the Council of Europe Recommendation (2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting.

1.1.9. Supporting its member States, as appropriate, in view of the signature, ratification and implementation of the **Istanbul Convention**, in order to protect children from gender-based violence and domestic violence.

1.1.10. Promoting the effective elimination of corporal punishment and other cruel, inhuman or degrading forms of punishment of children in all settings, including preventing regression in this area, as well as the monitoring of the implementation of the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture with respect to the prevention of violence against children deprived of their liberty.

1.1.11. Developing co-operation projects to strengthen States capacities to address violence against children, including sexual violence, in all settings.

1.1.12. Promote the adoption of child protection policies in all areas where professionals or volunteers work with or for children.

1.2.7 Developing and rolling out programmes in schools for students and their families, teachers, as well as other professionals and volunteers, to promote gender equality, and to empower them to identify and prevent violence and support possible victims.

1.2.8 Addressing the issue of **abuse in care settings,** including foster care, and drawing on lessons learned from experiences of historical abuse.

1.2.9 Supporting member States in fulfilling their obligations under the **Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings**, by adopting actions towards a strengthened prevention of child trafficking, better identification of child victims of trafficking, providing them with protection and assistance in their recovery and social inclusion and preventing re-victimisation.

1.2.10. Exploring efficient ways to prevent and combat sexual violence against children including by developing new instruments to support States in developing age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education.

HIGHLIGHT: What children suggest	
Challenges to be addressed urgently	– Prevent emotional or psychological violence, gender-based violence and neglect. – Create opportunities for children to speak out, including at legislative level (e.g. in Parliaments) and through complaints procedures, and treat the voices of children and adults equally.
Possible action to be taken	– Create child-friendly care proceedings that are easier for children to understand, allow them to form and express their opinions and participate in the proceedings, without being fully dependent on adults. – Make child-friendly reporting and complaints mechanisms available and accessible for children at a low threshold, thus preventing (further) violence before it happens. – Add psychological check-ups to regular medical check-ups to assess the mental health of children and be able to identify and respond to any concerns. – Establish a "European day of the child's voice" to raise awareness of the importance of each child's voice. – Conduct workshops and educational programmes in schools to respond to and prevent peer violence.
How children can be involved	– Train students as mediators or "peace agents" to make it easier for child victims of violence to ask for help, since confiding in peers is often easier. – Engage children in the design and evaluation of services for children, parents and families and in the training of service providers to ensure services are meaningful for children and delivered in a child-centred way. – Create opportunities and structures for children to continue advising the Council of Europe on the implementation of the Strategy in the area of violence (e.g. by investing in campaigns, the creation of visibility material, the development of guidance with the support of experts).

IN FOCUS. When fighting violence against children, the Council of Europe will implement the following approaches:
Gender-sensitive approach: with a focus on fighting gender stereotypes, gender-based violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, including online, and child trafficking, which affect girls and boys differently.[21]
Anti-discrimination approach: by taking a closer look at some groups of children in vulnerable situations, such as Roma and Traveller children, LGBTI children, children with a migration background, children deprived of liberty, children in alternative care,[22] children with disabilities,[23] children affected by migration and forced displacement.
Child participation approach: as their perspectives are needed to tackle issues of violence against children.

Key Council of Europe bodies concerned (non-exhaustive; alphabetical order)	**Other Council of Europe units concerned**
– Commissioner for Human Rights – Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) Conference of INGOs – Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee (T-ES)) – Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY) – Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) – European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) – European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) – European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) / Advisory Council on Youth – Gender Equality Commission (GEC) – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) – Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) – Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on Migration and Refugees – Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) – Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) – Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI)	– Division of Independent Human Rights Bodies – No Hate Speech Movement – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Unit

21. The Global Boys Initiative (ECPAT, 2019) evidences that there are specificities concerning violence against boys that also need to be addressed.
22. FRA estimates that around 150,000 children live in residential settings across the EU and institutionalisation increases the likelihood of children becoming victims of neglect and violence. See FRA (2015). Violence against children with disabilities: legislation, policies and programmes in the EU.
23. UNICEF estimates that children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to be victims of violence. See UNICEF (2013). The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with disabilities.

2.2. Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children

> *"It does not matter what kind of sneakers you wear, but which head wears those sneakers"*
>
> *"There are opportunities for artistic and cultural expression, but children's expressions are not as valued as that of adults and those of youngest children are not taken as seriously as that of older children"*

31. The UNCRC recognises the right of every child to an adequate standard of living for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, while the European Social Charter guarantees the right of the child to appropriate social, legal and economic protection. In line with both international instruments, the Council of Europe has already committed to step up its efforts in ensuring that children's best interests are upheld and that all children have access to the same means and services to achieve the best attainable standard of living. However, the challenges that hamper the achievement of an equal society for children are of structural nature, and they have been exacerbated by the short- and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the Council of Europe is compelled to promote the ratification and implementation of the **European Social Charter** and to intensify its work by resolutely acting on remaining challenges and expanding the themes concerned in order to **leave no child behind.**

32. Some of the main obstacles to ensuring children's access to equal opportunities are **social exclusion, child poverty and lack of equal access to quality education for all children** in Council of Europe member States.[24] Besides, child poverty being a multifaceted phenomenon, it is a complex exercise to target appropriate action. The Council of Europe shall also look at **prevention**, in order to help States adopt a systematic way of addressing all groups of children. Institutions should be enabled to have the capacity to identify and address inequalities. There is a need to continue increasing investment in children and their families, to ensure that all children, regardless of their status, have the same start in life and the same opportunities to fulfil their potential. This should be done with a targeted allocation of adequate resources and the implementation of child-friendly budgets developed with child-rights impact assessments. From this perspective, priority must be given to gateway rights, such as the eradication of child poverty. This will be done by joining forces with the EU, in particular in the context of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee[25] and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

33. The Council of Europe will look at **situations of vulnerability of children** across all of its priority areas, by applying an anti-discrimination approach in line with article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights,[26] including by tackling the situations of, among others, children in difficult economic situations or living in poverty, children affected by migration and forced displacement (including for the purpose of child labour), children without parental care (including children left behind by their parents due to labour migration) and/or living in alternative care, children belonging to national minorities, including Roma and Traveller children, children with disabilities, LGBTI children, child victims of trafficking, children living and/or working on the streets, children with imprisoned parents or children who take on a role as caretakers. These groups of children face the additional barriers of having their rights respected, in particular their right to health, education, access to legal assistance, or protection from violence and exploitation including sexual abuse; and they are at higher risk of going missing. The proportion of children at risk of poverty and excluded from social services or equal access to education remains unacceptably higher among Roma and Travellers,[27] migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.[28]

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24. According to Eurostat, in 2019, an estimated 22.5 % of children in the EU-27 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared with 21.5 % of working-age adults (aged 18-64 years) and 18.6 % of older people (aged 65 years and over).
25. Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee.
26. As well as Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights.
27. Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II): Roma – selected findings and FRA Survey undertaken in six EU member States in 2019. See also Frazer, H., Guio, A-C. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2020). Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee: Final Report, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.
28. United Nations Children's Fund (2017). *Education Uprooted*, New York.

34. Finally, there is an increasing concern, including among children themselves, regarding their access to **mental health** services.[29] Existing mental health difficulties regularly faced by children include addictive behaviours and eating disorders. Particular groups of children are more likely to experience mental health difficulties, such as children deprived of liberty, children having experienced or witnessed violence, children in care, children affected by migration and forced displacement, LGBTI children, children with disabilities, children living or working on the streets or children living in poverty. Besides, during the COVID-19 pandemic there has been increased demand for mental health support services, as many children struggle to cope with reduced social contact, reduced physical activity, anxiety and even the loss of loved ones. There was an even heightened risk for children in precarious family situations or living in care institutions. Mental health issues in Europe are regularly overlooked, despite their high impact on children's well-being and future development. Addressing the mental health of children continues to be taboo and underfunded in many countries and children concerned are often stigmatised.

Key UNCRC Articles	The right of the child to…
17	Access information and material aiming at the promotion of mental health
19	Be protected from violence and abuse
20	Protection and assistance when deprived of their family environment
23	Enjoy a full and decent life and participate (for children with disabilities)
24	The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health
27	Children's rights to an adequate standard of living
28	Education on the basis of equal opportunity
30	Enjoy their own culture, profess and practice their own religion and use their own language
33	Be protected from the illicit use of drugs and substances

Key ECHR Articles	The right of the child to…
2	Life
3	Not being subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
8	Respect for private and family life
9	Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
14	Prohibition of discrimination
2 of Protocol 1	Education
1 Protocol 12	General prohibition of discrimination

UN SDGs Goals	Targets that the Strategy will contribute to meet by fighting inequality affecting children
1. No poverty	1.1 Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere
	1.2 Reduce by at least half the proportion of men, women and children living in poverty
	1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

29. Besides, almost 1 in 10 child respondents to the survey undertaken to contribute to the EU Strategy for the Rights of the Child report living with mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, and a fifth of respondents indicate that they feel sad most of the time. See the full Report "Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future".

2. Zero hunger	2.1 End hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round
	2.2 End all forms of malnutrition
3. Healthy lives and well-being	3.4 Promote mental health and well-being
	3.5 Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse
	3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including access to quality essential healthcare services
4. Quality education	4.1 Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal 4-effective learning outcomes
	4.2 Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
	4.5 Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
	4.A Build and upgrade education facilities that are child disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
5. Gender equality	5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
	5.C Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels
10. Reduced inequalities	10.2 Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
	10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard
	10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality
	10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

The challenges faced…

- **Child poverty** remains very high in Council of Europe member States and has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in many countries there is a **lack of resources allocated to social services for children and families, and of social and political awareness** of the extent of child poverty, and related phenomena, such as homelessness or poor housing.[30]
- **Austerity** has harshly hit the social services and the educational sector, while **school dropout rates** have increased during the pandemic.[31]
- **Climate change, environmental degradation, forced displacement, migration and conflicts** are also causing inequalities and poverty among children.
- **Families at risk lack support**, to prevent family separation and placement of children in the care system. Besides, the unprecedented scale of labour migration in Europe has had a devastating impact on the well-being of the children who are left behind.

30. Frazer, H., Guio, A-C. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2020). Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee: Final Report, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.
31. According to CEDEFOP, distance learning increases dropout risk for vulnerable learners.

- Children in vulnerable situations remain **excluded from a meaningful participation** in society, face additional barriers to access education, the Internet or health services and are more at risk of having their human rights infringed.
- **Roma and Traveller children** suffer from poverty, segregation, poor housing conditions, racism and social exclusion and are overrepresented in alternative care.[32] Besides, **institutionalisation** of children remains too high in Council of Europe member States.
- **Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking** girls[33] and boys face particular vulnerabilities throughout the migration route and beyond, for example, access to services, rights and information, asylum and family reunification procedures or barriers to integration. Other challenges faced by children in migration include the risk of falling victims of trafficking, going missing, or being held in detention and the lack of effective guardianship.
- The issue of **children whose parents use drugs** is still undetected and under-referred to, despite its link to with child neglect situations.[34]
- **Difficulties in language learning** and the limited capacity of speaking the native language of a country hinders the smooth integration of foreign children, creating barriers and increasingly leading to marginalisation.
- Children are experiencing **mental health difficulties** (exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic), while at the same time lack access to mental health services.
- **Children with disabilities** are three to four times more likely to be victims of violence,[35] and they are confronted, in many countries, with limited resources allocated for their social inclusion, and facing discrimination.

… and the ways identified by the Council of Europe to ensure that all children have equal opportunities:

IMPLEMENTING its standards, by continuously:	**INNOVATING**, by:
2.1.1. Raising awareness of and **guaranteeing children's social rights and fighting discrimination** against children.[36]	2.2.1 Addressing the **root causes of child poverty**, **preventing** situations of extreme child poverty, while trying to mitigate the outcomes, as well as tackling poverty caused by environmental degradation and conflict.
2.1.2. Ensuring **access to justice** for children in vulnerable situations.	2.2.2 Supporting member States in making existing **institutions and services attentive and reactive to situations of child poverty and exclusion**, including through systematic child impact assessments and through supporting families, to avoid child-family separation.
2.1.3. Promoting an **inclusive education,**[37] by improving language learning as a precondition for children being heard and benefitting from equal access to education.	2.2.3 Encouraging States to **improve disaggregated data collection** on poverty and monitor the impact of anti-poverty measures.
2.1.4. Boosting the establishment of education programmes that include **citizenship and human rights education.**[38]	
2.1.5. Strengthening **participation and involvement of children in vulnerable situations**.	

32. European Roma Rights Centre (2021). Blighted Lives: Romani Children in State Care.
33. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 includes Strategic Objective no.5 "to protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls".
34. Pompidou Group (2021). Children whose parents use drugs: a preliminary assessment and proposals. Executive Summary (P-PG(2021)3).
35. The State of World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities, UNICEF, May 2013 - https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/children-disabilities
36. The Council of Europe will encourage member States to ratify and implement the European Social Charter, and to follow and implement the Committee of Ministers Recommendations relevant to the protection of the rights of children.
37. By implementing the Committee of Ministers Recommendations on ensuring quality education (CM/Rec(2012)13) and on developing and promoting digital citizenship education (CM/Rec(2019)10).
38. Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

2.1.6. Protecting **children without parental care and/or living in alternative care**, by continuing promoting de-institutionalisation, by analysing the issue of historical abuse of children and compensations of abuse within care settings including foster families, by reviewing the Recommendation on the rights of children living in residential institutions[39] and by following up on the work of the Committee of experts on the rights and the best interests of the child in parental separation and in care proceedings (CJ/ENF-ISE), ensuring children's participation in care proceedings.

2.1.7. Supporting the **transition of children in vulnerable situations into adulthood**, including for children leaving care.

2.1.8. Furthering the actions to **protect children on the move**, including migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children (in particular girls), by strengthening mechanisms and co-operation for the timely identification and referral of these children, and by ending immigration detention of children by, *inter alia*, promoting family and community-based care solutions.

2.1.9. Fostering the protection and participation of **children with disabilities**, including towards their full inclusion in the school setting and the digital environment.

2.2.4 Analysing **new challenges that have emerged due to COVID-19** for children in vulnerable situations (access to healthcare and guardianship of migrant and unaccompanied and separated children, detention, increased poverty, etc.).

2.2.5 Promoting policies and measures supporting positive parenting which **guarantee equal opportunities for children** irrespective of their sex, status, abilities or family situation.

2.2.6 Mapping, analysing and providing guidance on the situation of **children suffering from addictive behaviours and children of parents using drugs**.

2.2.7 Combatting racism/antigypsyism and tackling issues related to the **exclusion of Roma and Traveller children** (including poverty, inadequate access to education and healthcare, early and/or forced marriages, or human trafficking).

2.2.8 Combatting **trafficking in children** in member States.

2.2.9 Addressing the human rights challenges of **LGBTI children[40] and families**.

2.2.10 Fostering children's **access to mental health support**, dealing with the root causes of children's mental health difficulties, and promoting children's mental well-being, including through support for parents, carers, professionals and volunteers working with children to raise awareness and fight taboos about children's mental health.

HIGHLIGHT: What children suggest	
Challenges to be addressed urgently	– Promote social inclusion and equal opportunities for all children, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, social and national background, culture, colour, religion, beliefs, as well as children with disabilities or learning difficulties, in all regions of Council of Europe member States. – Educate pedagogues in schools on how to approach and talk to children in a sensitive way, how to respect their opinions and how to identify and address their difficulties, paying special attention to leave no child behind. – Educate children in kindergarten and their parents on the rights of the child in an age-appropriate language and manner, using child-friendly and playful methods; – Reduce child poverty, discrimination, and bad living conditions. – Prevent and respond to prejudices, racism and xenophobia, as well as homophobia and transphobia. – Ensure freedom of expression and of dressing while preventing gender stereotypes and accepting children's preferences without judgment.

39. Rec(2005)5.
40. According to a Survey undertaken by FRA in the EU-28 in 2019, 53% of 15-17 year-old children avoid being open about themselves as LGBTI in their family, 50% in schools and public places and 48% in public transport. Only 9% of respondents are "very open" about being LGBTI at school. Besides, the majority (53%) of young adolescents who participated in the survey (aged 15 to 17) felt discriminated against in at least one area of life in the 12 months before the survey. By contrast, 41% of adult respondents did so.

Possible action to be taken	– Provide support to children in coping with difficult life situations such as depression or other mental health issues, parental separation or divorce, a relative's death, lack of friends, or institutionalisation. – Innovate regarding the training of teachers and other professionals or volunteers in the education system so that they focus not only on the academic performance of children, but also on their mental and emotional development and life competencies. – Educate and teach children to embrace diversity and to prevent violence and discrimination (e.g. based on physical appearance, health-related problems, different national or religious backgrounds, or socio-economic family situation). – Encourage and promote youth activism, including by training and supporting children to act as peer educators. – Support cross-border exchange programmes for students via schools, or academic and vocational training faculties, to develop their understanding of different cultures. – Introduce or strengthen civic education as a compulsory subject in school curricula. – Introduce the subject of sexual education into school curricula or conduct workshops on this topic in schools more frequently. – Introduce a police unit / unit of social workers to patrol the city on bicycles, in order to prevent children from begging on the streets or from working. – Encourage and support better representation of children from minority groups, in the media, making known their culture, and preparing the grounds for a more representative participation in society and in leadership positions. – Increase resources allocated to social protection services, in particular in support of education activities and the improvement of housing conditions. – Step up investments in the education of children with speaking or hearing impairments or other types of disabilities. – Create a fund with the financial support of all Council of Europe member States to offer the same opportunities to all children in member States.
How children can be involved	– Organise more consultations with children and inform them on how their views and proposals have been taken into consideration. – Involve children in decision making on issues that concern them, increase the representation of students in school boards and child parliaments and take their suggestions into due consideration. – Enable children to visit the Council of Europe and provide them with opportunities to express their views, also in person. – Create or promote existing school prize programmes related to areas of interest at national and international levels. – Create international co-operation networks between schools and other institutions where students may develop joint projects. – Promote the socio-political participation of children in matters concerning education and schools, for instance through consultative student bodies. – Make English language a compulsory subject from the first grade.

IN FOCUS. When working towards achieving equal opportunities for all children, the Council of Europe will implement the following approaches:
Gender-sensitive approach: by preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism, linked with Strategic Objective 1 of the Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023). **Anti-discrimination approach**: paying particular attention to already identified groups of children in vulnerable situations and children with multiple vulnerabilities. **Child participation approach** by: – consulting directly with children, including children in vulnerable situations, in order to systematically prioritise issues and devise adequate solutions. – fostering child participation in decisions related to their health, education and social protection.

Key Council of Europe bodies concerned (non-exhaustive; alphabetical order)	**Other Council of Europe units concerned**
– Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) – Commissioner for Human Rights – Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) – Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO) – Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee (T-ES)) – Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY) – Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) – European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) – European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) – European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) – European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) / Advisory Council on Youth – Gender Equality Commission (GEC) – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking (GRETA) – Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women (GREVIO) – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) – Pompidou Group – Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on Migration and Refugees Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) – Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) – Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) – Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI)	– Division of Independent Human Rights Bodies – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Unit

2.3. Access to and safe use of technologies for all children

"New technologies are certainly useful tools and have many positive aspects. However, we need to know how to use them correctly without harming ourselves or others. That's why it should be explained to people (both kids and parents) how to use these tools. (..) It is also important to analyse all the dangers of social networks to understand how to avoid them and introduce new rules to make these platforms safer."

"I think everyone has the right to a stable Wi-Fi connection."

35. Children are growing up in a digital world and come into contact with technologies in many different ways. They regularly use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for **leisure** (TV, video games, tutorials), **socialising** (social media and networks), **education** (through online schooling) and **shopping** (purchasing online). Children make up roughly one third of users globally, yet the digital world often treats all users in the same way: by treating children as adults. The **COVID-19 pandemic has added further challenges**, as it has led to a higher use of technologies by children and for children (both for socialising as well as for education purposes). As schools transitioned into the digital environment, e-learning became a cornerstone to many children's education. At the same time, online violence, including online child sexual exploitation and abuse, is increasing and becoming more serious for children of all ages, especially since the outbreak of the pandemic. The digital environment offers children a wealth of opportunities to exercise and claim their rights both online and offline, but also exposes them to risks of harm that may have a detrimental impact on a significant number of human rights guaranteed by the UNCRC, the ECHR, the European Social Charter and the Council of Europe Convention for the protection of Individuals with regard to the processing of personal data (Convention 108+).

36. Many children in vulnerable situations, such as children belonging to national minorities or children with disabilities, and children having no or limited access to the Internet and other digital technologies, are not familiar with these and are left out of digital education. As recognised by the CRC in its General Comment No. 25 "if digital inclusion is not achieved, existing inequalities are likely to increase, and new ones may arise".[41]

37. The Council of Europe will continue promoting and protecting the rights of the child to non-discrimination, access to information, freedom of expression, protection of personal data, participation, leisure and play in their use of ICTs in co-operation with other stakeholders active in this field. The Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment already provides solid guidance to member States and stakeholders in maximising the full range of the rights of the child in the complex world of the digital environment. Synergies will also be built with the EU Strategy on the rights of the child as relevant.

Key UNCRC Articles	The right of the child to…
13	Express themselves and seek information
19	Be protected from violence and abuse
28	Education
31	Leisure and play

41. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.

Key ECHR Articles	The right of the child to…
3	Not being subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
8	Respect for private and family life
10	Freedom of expression
14	Prohibition of discrimination
2 of Protocol 1	Education

UN SDGs Goals	Targets that the Strategy will contribute to meet regarding the rights of the child and technologies
4. Quality education	4.4 Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
	4.A Build and upgrade education facilities that are effective learning environments for all
5. Gender equality	5.B Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women [and girls]
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure	9.C Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the internet
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions	16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

The challenges faced…

- Digital services or products may **not be designed to** meet the needs or **uphold the best interests and the rights of children**, including their freedom of expression, their right to information and their safety.
- Children access or share **inappropriate or harmful content**.
- Children suffer from **online bullying and hate speech**, including by peers, from **interference with their right to privacy and personal data protection**, from **information disorders** as well as from **overuse or even online addiction**, leading to isolation and lack of physical activity and related health and mental health issues.
- The risks and opportunities posed by the use of **artificial intelligence systems** are yet to be analysed.
- There is a **lack of equal access to technologies**, in particular in the COVID-19 context. Education should be inclusive when provided online, including for children with disabilities, children belonging to national minorities, children in migration or children from poor households. Children in vulnerable situations should also be supported in accessing socialising and playing opportunities equally.
- The risk of falling victims to **online sexual exploitation or sexual abuse** is real and has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Digital citizenship and media education** is still not sufficiently provided for children, carers, professionals and volunteers working with children. Children are aware of this gap and perceive a need to be engaged more proactively in developing and delivering training and education to different target groups, as well as in assessing training and education needs in this field.
- **Child participation in the regulation, design and innovative use of the digital environment and technology** is limited. There is a challenging balance to be struck between children's protection and privacy and their right to participate in the digital environment, whilst identifying innovative, child-sensitive ways of using the digital technologies in the best interests of the child and society.

… and the ways identified by the Council of Europe to ensure the rights of the child in their relation to technologies:

IMPLEMENTING its standards, by continuously:	**INNOVATING**, by:
3.1.1 **Protecting children online,**[42] e.g. from violence, including grooming, sexual and peer violence and cybersexism, from exposure to pornographic and other harmful content, cyberbullying, online hate speech and interference with right to privacy and personal data protection (including in the context of education settings), thus following the "4C" approach (content, conduct, contact and contract risks).[43]	3.2.1 Inviting **business and industry to fulfil their responsibilities** towards children, including by undertaking child impact assessments, ensuring the participation of children in the assessment stages, as well as involving them in the design of digital services and products.
3.1.2 Raising awareness about sexist misuse of social media and online threats for children (including online child sexual exploitation and abuse).	3.2.2 Tackling the use of internet and social media for spreading disinformation, hate speech and **violent radical ideas including for the purpose of terrorism** among children.
3.1.3 Ensuring that cases of **online child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse** are reported, investigated and prosecuted promptly, efficiently and appropriately.	3.2.3 Providing guidance and training to **build capacities for professionals** on the rights of the child in their relation to technologies, engaging children in the development and delivery of capacity-building and digital education for teachers and other professionals or volunteers.
3.1.4 **Supporting** families, teachers and other professionals, volunteers as well as children, to **prevent** cases of **cyberbullying and online hate speech**.	3.2.4 **Enhancing child participation** through technologies and in decisions related to the digital environment and technologies, in light of promising practices and mechanisms, including by facilitating exchanges between existing child participation mechanisms and institutions at different administrative levels (local, regional, national and European).
3.1.5 Providing **digital citizenship education** for children, carers, professionals and volunteers working with children.[44]	3.2.5 Analysing the risks posed by and possibilities to benefit from the use of **artificial intelligence technologies**.
3.1.6 Providing positive **digital parenting support.**	3.2.6 Promoting safe and enabling spaces for children to freely **search for information and express their views** online.
3.1.7 Fighting digital exclusion and ensuring an **equal access to the digital environment**, including for children with disabilities, children in the context of migration and children belonging to national minorities, in particular Roma and Traveller children, as well as in the context of distance learning.	3.2.7 **Exploring new issues** impacting children's well-being, i.e. online gaming, online marketing and online influencing.
	3.2.8 Ensuring the rights of children to online **play, leisure and association**.

42. The Council of Europe will continue promoting, monitoring and supporting the implementation by their States Parties of obligations and commitments undertaken within the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, the Convention on Cybercrime and its Additional Protocol, the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data, the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as the relevant Recommendations by the Committee of Ministers, including CM/Rec(2018)7 on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment and CM/Rec(2009)5 on measures to protect children against harmful content and behaviour and to promote their active participation in the new information and communications environment.
43. Sonia Livingstone & Mariya Stoilova, Children Online: Research and Evidence, https://core-evidence.eu/updating-the-4cs-of-online-risk/, accessed in September 2021.
44. Building on the achievements of the programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and the pan-European project on digital citizenship education. See also the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on developing and promoting digital citizenship education (CM/Rec(2019)10).

HIGHLIGHT: What children suggest	
Challenges to be addressed urgently	– Reduce the digital divide in order to facilitate and promote access to the digital world for all children, regardless of their social and economic situation. – Prevent addiction to the digital environment and technologies, including virtual reality, and offer support services for the children and families concerned. – Strengthen the protection from people with bad intentions, primarily by identifying and closing fake profiles on social media and developing stronger safeguards for children in the digital environment.
Possible action to be taken	– Request State institutions to regulate in national law the right of the child to privacy and protection from all forms of violence and exploitation in the digital environment and guarantee the accountability of international private actors. – Promote digital education courses, both through schools and complementary programmes, for children, parents and other adults regarding the potential of new technologies and the risks encountered on the web (e.g. cyberbullying, stalking, sexual harassment and exploitation, identity fraud or theft, and addictions) and support the access to meaningful support services. – Consult children on the design of such courses and the revision of school curricula with regard to technologies and the digital environment more generally. – Develop practical guidance for distance education, building on the experiences of children, teachers, schools and parents made during the pandemic. – Create spaces for continuous exchanges and consultations between adults and children to identify priorities, understand emerging needs, define intervention policies and regulations. – Step up efforts by the Council of Europe, national governments and institutions to ensure more widespread and stable access to digital technologies for all children by removing inequalities and closing the digital divide that became particularly visible through the COVID-19 pandemic and confinements. – Introduce a general protection for children under 13 by keeping their online profiles private or denying them unsupervised access to social media.
How children can be involved	For example, through the creation of web platforms, where it is possible for children to directly participate in public consultations on specific subjects, including the development of legislation concerning the use of digital technologies for children.

IN FOCUS. When working on children and technologies, the Council of Europe will implement the following approaches:

Gender-sensitive approach: by promoting the use of technologies to empower girls by helping them access to education and careers in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and by addressing online sexist hate speech and other forms of online violence.

Anti-discrimination approach: by

- Empowering children in vulnerable situations to access technologies, such as children with disabilities, children in migration, children in low-income families and children belonging to national minorities.
- Countering any type of discrimination in artificial intelligence.
- Guaranteeing inclusive distance education during public health crises, including for children with disabilities, children belonging to ethnic minorities or children from low-income households.

Child participation approach: by enhancing child participation in the digital environment and in decisions related to digital technologies.

Key Council of Europe bodies concerned (non-exhaustive; alphabetical order)	Other Council of Europe units concerned
– Committee on Artificial (CAI) – Commissioner for Human Rights – Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee (T-ES)) – Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT) – Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY) – Data Protection Committee (T-PD) – Gender Equality Commission (GEC) – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) – Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) – Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) – Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) – Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI)	– Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

2.4. Child-friendly justice for all children

"I would like to have a virtual space where I can voice my concerns and my opinion without shame and without being intimidated for my beliefs"

"Police officers are crueler to immigrants and refugees than to us".

38. The Council of Europe has already adopted standards, reports and recommendations to support member States in achieving child-friendly justice systems. However, **justice systems are often a world made for adults**, as they do not sufficiently recognise and address the specific needs of children in contact and in conflict with the law. The best interests of children and their views are not always sufficiently considered before, during and after justice proceedings, which include criminal (where children can be victims, witnesses or perpetrators), civil (related to family law) and administrative matters (including nationality, child protection, placement and care or migration procedures).

39. Being in contact with the justice system can be a traumatic experience for children. General Comment No. 24 of the CRC has recognised that exposure to the criminal justice system causes harm to children, limiting their chances of becoming responsible adults.[45] States resort to criminal justice too frequently, while restorative justice should be given priority in line with Council of Europe standards.[46] Deprivation of liberty for children in conflict with the law is to be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and children deprived of liberty are to be separated from adults.

40. Adapting justice proceedings to children's needs is crucial to avoid their re-traumatisation and re-victimisation. Children should be able to understand and trust the justice system, and to feel confident in using it. The **Barnahus model[47] (Children's House)** will continue to be promoted, upon the request of member States, in partnership with other organisations, including through co-operation projects, to ensure that the best interests of the child are upheld in investigations and criminal proceedings, and to provide support for child victims[48] and witnesses of sexual and other forms of violence in a child-friendly and safe environment. In the field of justice, the Council of Europe will continue promoting the ratification of the Third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a Communications Procedure, the implementation of the **Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice**[49] and the recommendations of the UN Global study on children deprived of liberty and build synergies with the EU Strategy on the rights of the child as relevant.

Key UNCRC Articles	The right of the child to…
13	Express themselves and seek information
37	Not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; not be deprived of their liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily; when deprived of liberty, they shall be treated with humanity and respect for their dignity and shall have the right to access legal assistance.
40	Be treated in a manner consistent with their dignity and worth and to promote their reintegration when alleged, accused or recognised as having infringed criminal law.

45. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system.
46. See Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 concerning restorative justice in criminal matters.
47. For more information about the Barnahus model, see Barnahus in Slovenia (EU-CoE Joint Project).
48. Synergies will be sought with actions developed under the EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025).
49. Guidelines on child friendly justice adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 17 November 2010.

Key ECHR Articles	The right of the child to…
3	Not being subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
5	Liberty and security
6	A fair trial
8	Respect for private and family life
13	An effective remedy

UN SDGs Goals	Targets that the Strategy will contribute to meet regarding child-friendly justice
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions	16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
	16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
	16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
	16.10 Ensure public access to information

The challenges faced…

- Children are not always provided with **access to the justice system** and are not always **informed** in a child-friendly manner, of their rights, the steps of the proceedings, their particular role in them or the legal decisions which affect them.
- Children experience infringements against their rights to privacy and data protection when in contact with the justice system, in particular via the media.
- Children continue to be **excluded from meaningful participation** in proceedings.
- Legal professionals **lack sufficient training,** including on the ability to hear children adequately.
- Jurisdictions **lack sufficient specialisation** and are not always adapted to the rights and needs of children.
- While there is a global decrease in the number of children in **conflict with the law,** child justice systems still present shortcomings and the criminal age of responsibility remains too low in some member States.
- **Deprivation of liberty** for children in conflict with the law is still too generalised and many children in migration are still subjected to administrative detention, frequently in unsuitable conditions.

… and the ways identified by the Council of Europe to ensure the rights of the child in their relation to the justice systems

IMPLEMENTING its standards, by continuously:	**INNOVATING**, by:
4.1.1 Promoting and developing **training programmes/national versions of HELP courses** for legal professionals in contact with children.[50]	3.1.1. Reviewing or developing new standards in the area of family law and children's rights, where appropriate.

50. The HELP (Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals) Programme currently includes courses on Child-friendly justice, Family law, Refugee and migrant children and Alternatives to immigration detention. The HELP Methodology permits the contextualisation of the courses at national level ensuring the application of the principle of subsidiarity by the HELP Network members (judicial schools and Bar associations).

4.1.2 Improving **access to justice** for children in vulnerable situations and ensuring the meaningful participation of children in proceedings concerning them, through the use of child-friendly language and information material.

4.1.3 Supporting the development of **diversion measures and alternatives to detention** of children in conflict with the law and encouraging member States to raise the age of criminal responsibility.

4.1.4 **Monitoring places** where children are deprived of liberty,[51] ensuring children's access to child-friendly complaints mechanisms, and encouraging member States to end immigration detention of children.

4.1.5 Further developing and promoting, where appropriate, the **Barnahus model**, including through co-operation projects.

4.1.6 Undertaking reviews and follow-up actions on **family law** (on the best interests of the child in parental separation situations and care proceedings, on relocation of children) **and on migration** (implementation of the Recommendation on Effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration[52]).

4.1.7 Promoting **child-friendly approaches in migration procedures**, including by strengthening access to legal representation and guardianship, information and participation as well as effective remedies.

4.1.8 Supporting **prevention** of juvenile justice proceedings, by developing a model for prevention strategies, in particular for children in vulnerable situations.

4.2.2. Promoting the **exchange of good practices** among member States on child-friendly justice systems and initiatives, including with regard to their transparent evaluation, effectiveness and any changes required.

4.2.3. Developing **codes of conduct** or equivalent tools for legal professionals and media to guarantee respect of the rights of the child during judicial proceedings.

4.2.4. **Capturing and analysing data** on the relation of children with the justice systems in Council of Europe member States and providing guidance where necessary.

4.2.5. Developing **restorative justice** for children, including, where appropriate, for children who display harmful (sexual) behaviour, including against other children.

4.2.6. Measuring the **impact of emergency measures**, during times of COVID-19, on children's access to justice, including for children in migration.

4.2.7. Implementing strategies for improving access to **legal aid and representation** for children, including by offering legal aid through **legal clinics** and strategic litigation.

4.2.8. Conducting research and improving a common understanding to uphold the rights and the best interests of donor-conceived children.

4.2.9. Undertaking actions for legal issues relevant to **children in crisis or conflict situations**, such as guardianship, housing, land and property rights, registration, national identification and citizenship or preventing statelessness.

4.2.10. Zooming in some specific topics, such as the needs and challenges of **child victims and witnesses** of violent crimes (including sexual violence) within the justice system, including the re-integration and rehabilitation of children affected by terrorism and children's access to justice in relation to **environmental harm**.

4.2.11. Clarifying the use of **alternative dispute resolution** mechanisms in disputes involving children.

4.2.12. Introducing **child-friendly justice as a cross-cutting issue** in every co-operation project related to justice developed by the Council of Europe.

4.2.13. Improving children's access to the **European Court of Human Rights**.

51. The Council of Europe will continue promoting the implementation of the Standards of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT).
52. CM/Rec(2019)11.

HIGHLIGHT: What children suggest	
Challenges to be addressed urgently	– Address the attitudes and conduct of officials and professionals in the justice system and law enforcement towards children through training on the rights of the child and by promoting a zero-tolerance policy against violence, humiliating and degrading treatment of children and their discrimination in the justice system. – Ensure that children in contact with the justice system are fully informed of their rights, the steps of the proceedings and their roles in the proceedings, in a child-friendly and timely manner, throughout all phases of their contact with the justice system. – Redress infringements by the media against the rights of the child to privacy and data protection and strengthen accountability.
Possible action to be taken	– Continue training law enforcement officers and all relevant groups of officials and professionals in the justice system on the rights of the child and child-friendly justice. – Issue recommendations to all police stations to identify and respond to conduct of law enforcement officers that is not conform with national law and the rights of the child, such as acts of violence or discrimination against children, and strengthen accountability. – Ensure that the right of the child to privacy and data protection is clearly regulated by law, including in the context of the justice system and, in the case of infringements, strengthen the accountability of the media, journalists, as well as officials and professionals in the justice system and other service providers. – Ensure cultural mediation to all children that need it. – Promote alternative measures to detention and ensure that the detention of children is a measure of last resort.
How children can be involved	Creation of an Internet platform where children could upload questions, comments, non-legal complaints and proposals regarding child-friendly justice, in an anonymous way, and obtain access to child-friendly information and qualified advice.

IN FOCUS. When working on child-friendly justice, the Council of Europe will implement the following approaches:

Gender-sensitive approach: by ensuring that girls and boys in conflict with the law or in contact with judicial systems receive equal treatment and are protected and supported according to their specific needs.

Anti-discrimination approach: by considering the needs of children in vulnerable situations when designing the justice procedures and environment (street children, children belonging to national minorities, including Roma and Traveller children, children in migration, children with disabilities or children in crisis or conflict situations).

Child participation approach: by ensuring that children understand and that they can freely participate in civil, criminal and administrative proceedings that affect them and that their views are given due weight.

Key Council of Europe bodies concerned (non-exhaustive; alphabetical order)	Other Council of Europe units concerned
– Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) – Commissioner for Human Rights – Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) – Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT) – Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE) – Council for Penological Co-operation (PC-CP) – Council of Europe Commission for the Efficiency of Justice Systems (CEPEJ) – European Committee for Education (CDEDU) – European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) – European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) – European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ) – European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC) – Lanzarote Committee (T-ES) – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) – Pompidou Group – Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) – Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) – Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination and Inclusion (CDADI)	– Programme on Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) – Division of Independent Human Rights Bodies

2.5. Giving a voice to every child

"Children have limited experience, but that doesn't mean they can't help."

"Talking more as equals no babytalk. Adults should trust children more."

"We are not just children."

41. Children have the **right to be heard, participate and have their views given due weight** in accordance with their age and maturity in all decisions affecting them. Children also have the right to freedom of expression, information and opinion as guaranteed under articles 10 of the ECHR and 13 of the UNCRC. The CRC General Comment no. 12 on the right of the child to be heard[53] highlights that the right of all children to be heard and taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the UNCRC, establishing not only a right in itself, but also a criterium for interpretation and implementation of all other rights. Child participation also builds children's capacity for dialogue, develops their confidence in democratic institutions, fosters their sense of social belonging[54] and empowers them to take an active role in protecting themselves and others from harm. Moreover, there is increasing evidence and conviction amongst key decision makers that consulting children in law and policy design will lead to a more appropriate approach which better responds to children's actual needs, thus more effective interventions.

42. The Council of Europe is committed to increasingly provide children with opportunities and space for participation in all the activities within the Organisation's dynamic triangle – standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation projects – and has already benefitted of the added value of their input. Different activities have been developed to strengthen child participation mechanisms and practice in member States. Over the past years, this has contributed to **children's voices being better heard** in the justice system, schools (e.g. to fight bullying and abuse), health services (e.g. to respect children's wishes about their treatment) or in the online environment (e.g. to develop solutions which are effective in ensuring children's access to digital tools and in protecting them from harm).[55] The voices of **children as defenders of human rights** have been increasingly heard, although many have faced numerous challenges as a consequence of their activism, a matter that should be further explored.

43. Despite the positive results achieved, child participation is still often overlooked and fragmented at national level, and there is still room for improvement in terms of **children's democratic engagement**[56] through safe, ethical and enabling child participation processes. The Organisation will undertake further actions, looking for synergies with the EU Strategy on the rights of the child,[57] for better implementation of the existing standards and tools in Council of Europe member States, as well as in terms of innovation and capacity-building in selected areas. A key priority also relates to the **follow-up phase of child participatory processes**, which must ensure that relevant child consultation processes are meaningful. It is imperative to act upon challenges expressed by children when they are consulted, as children often feel that even when consulted, their input does not always make a difference.[58]

44. The Council of Europe will continue providing guidance on how to embed child participation in practice in a systemic manner and in all contexts relevant for children, by supporting member States upon their request in implementing the Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.[59] The Organisation will also continue producing child-friendly versions of its standards and reference texts.

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53. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard.
54. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2019). Giving a voice to every child: promoting child participation as a foundation for democratic societies (Doc. 14806).
55. Ibid.
56. According to the Report "Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future", and regardless of background, the vast majority of child respondents (70 per cent in the EU) would like to participate more if they were given the opportunity to.
57. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child includes the objective of improving "Participation in political and democratic life: An EU that empowers children to be active citizens and members of democratic societies".
58. See the Report "Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future".
59. CM/Rec(2012)2.

Key UNCRC Articles	The right of the child to…
13	Express themselves and seek information
14	Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
15	Freedom of association
17	Access to appropriate information
31	Participation

Key ECHR Articles	The right of the child to…
10	Freedom of expression
11	Freedom of assembly and association
14	Prohibition of discrimination
2 of Protocol 1	Education

UN SDGs Goals	Targets that the Strategy will contribute to meet regarding child participation
5. Gender equality	5.5 Ensure [girl's and] women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
10. Reduced inequalities	10.2 Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
11. Sustainable cities and communities	11.3 Enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions	16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

The challenges faced…

- Child participation is often **overlooked and fragmented** at national level, and there is a need for a more coordinated and stable approach provided through permanent mechanisms that offer easy access to children and allow them to participate in decision making more systematically.
- Children lack information on participation mechanisms and child-friendly information in order to meaningfully participate.
- Children are not sufficiently involved in **judicial systems and relevant decision-making** processes.
- Children also lack access to child-friendly **complaint mechanisms**.
- The access to and opportunities for taking part in participation activities are not equally available to all children. Notably **children in vulnerable situations** as well as younger children are not sufficiently involved in participatory processes.
- An **adult-led approach to participation** has a limited capacity to meaningfully tackle the child-adult power differentials.
- **Children's limited democratic citizenship** is a key obstacle to the enjoyment of their other rights.
- Insiders' perspectives, including the knowledge of children, are needed to tackle issues such as **violence and bullying in schools** or access to a **healthy environment,** and to strengthen child-sensitive and meaningful service provision for children.
- Children **as defenders of human rights** face challenges in standing up for their own rights and in being taken seriously. In some contexts, they are even threatened, pressured or prevented from taking action.

… and the ways identified by the Council of Europe to ensure the rights of the child in their relation to technologies:

IMPLEMENTING its standards, by continuously:	**INNOVATING**, by:
5.1.1 Involving children and giving due weight to their views in the development, implementation and evaluation of the **Council of Europe standards, policies and activities,** as well as providing feedback to them on how their opinions are taken into account. 5.1.2 Empowering and promoting **safe and ethical child participation**, by implementing child safeguarding policies, data protection and ethical data collection principles, and guaranteeing children's access to information in child participation processes. 5.1.3 Promoting child participation in and through **schools and non-formal learning** and in decisions concerning their **health,** as well as the evaluation of service provision for children and families. 5.1.4 Fostering the development of **national strategies or action plans** on child participation. 5.1.5 Undertaking further assessments of child participation mechanisms and practice through the **Child Participation Assessment Tool** (CPAT) and improving relevant tools in order to allow for regular progress reviews at country level.	5.2.1 Promoting **children's democratic engagement** and ensuring their participation in political life in accordance with their age and maturity, including by encouraging member States to consider the possibility of **lowering the voting age.**[60] 5.2.2 Empowering children to access information and to participate in decisions related to the environment, at different levels of decision making, leading to the **co-designing of environmental policies**. 5.2.3 Promoting practice-oriented working methods and tools for officials, professionals and volunteers working with and for children, which are evidence-based and provide guidance on how to hear children, communicate with them and provide child-friendly information. 5.2.4 Develop **training modules and provide systematic training on child participation**, including through relevant methods and tools and by involving children as trainers. 5.2.5 Establishing sustainable channels for communicating directly with children and developing **child-led activities** at the Council of Europe level, including through identifying and collaborating with existing child-led initiatives and networks. 5.2.6 Protecting and empowering children acting as **defenders of human rights and of the environment.** 5.2.7 Enhancing the possibilities and capacities for **reaching out** to children **through digital technologies**. 5.2.8 **Mainstreaming child participation** into the work of other Council of Europe bodies, including by offering capacity-building activities and providing training for staff members. 5.2.9 Ensuring that participatory processes include **children in vulnerable situations**. 5.2.10 Strengthening **accountability** for the right of the child to be heard and the actual impact that children will have on law and policy making as well as on service provision and decision making in administrative and judicial proceedings.

60. Currently only Austria, Greece, Malta and Scotland have a minimum voting age lower than 18 years old. The mid-term evaluation of the previous Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021) showed that children are interested in and able to engage in political participation through lowering the voting age (Report on the Conference on Redefining power: Strengthening the rights of the child, November 2019).

HIGHLIGHT: What children suggest	
Challenges to be addressed urgently	– Identify themes that children themselves find important for having their views heard and taken into consideration. – Give easy access to children and professionals to digital platforms and questionnaires that gather children's points of view and help officials, professionals and volunteers in different fields better understand their views. – Allow children placed in alternative care to express their views, helping them to overcome their fear of sanctions by care-takers.
Possible action to be taken	– Establish a "European day of child´s voice/Child voice day" raising awareness of the importance of the child's voice to be heard and taken into consideration. – Create a platform for communication between children in Europe or online forums through which they will be able to exchange on opportunities for participation, ideas, difficulties, problems and suggestions related to their quality of life, development and well-being. – Train and support services providers (doctors, school psychologists, etc.) to communicate with children, to inform and hear them and to take into consideration their views, increasing their autonomy to avoid sharing them this information with others without the children's consent.
How children can be involved	– In consultations regarding specific themes of concern to them. – Via youth councils, European platforms and/or safe online fora, digital platforms and social media (e.g. TikTok or Instagram), on issues of concern to children.

IN FOCUS. When working on child participation, the Council of Europe will implement the following approaches:
Gender-sensitive approach: by ensuring girls' full and effective involvement in child participation processes. **Anti-discrimination approach**: by including children in vulnerable situations in participatory processes, such as children on the move, children belonging to national minorities, including Roma and Traveller children, children in care or children with disabilities.

Key Council of Europe bodies concerned (non-exhaustive; alphabetical order)	Other Council of Europe units concerned
– Commissioner for Human Rights – Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) – Committee of Legal Advisers on Public International Law (CAHDI) – Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee (T-ES)) – Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO) – European Committee for Education (CDEDU) – European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ) – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) – Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) – Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI)	

2.6. Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations

"I want to have the right to still be a child."

"Adults give promises they don't keep."

"In my country, I have never heard of the word right."

45. The rights of the child are at **greater risk during crisis and emergency situations**, and hence should be particularly respected and protected. These situations include armed conflicts and terrorism, migration and forced displacement, health and economic crises, natural disasters, including climate change, and any other unforeseen events that may hamper children's enjoyment of all their human rights. The Strategy is intended to keep a certain level of flexibility towards any unforeseen events so that new and emerging challenges can also be addressed.

46. **Europe is not a safe haven in terms of crisis or emergencies**. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed almost every child in Europe in a public health crisis, and many of them in an economic one. Children living in conflict areas are also a reality in Council of Europe member States. There are also children living in conflict zones given their parents' involvement with terrorist organisations, who may seek to return to their European countries of origin. In addition, an increased number of people, including children, are forced to flee their countries and continue to arrive in Europe in search of safety and protection. The European region is also living an unprecedented scale of labour migration, which is leaving many children without the care of one or both parents in their countries of residence. The environmental crisis our world is facing also puts children at particular risk of harm, given both the short- and long-term consequences, climate change and environmental degradation will have on migration movements as well as on children's enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Key UNCRC Articles	The right of the child to…
19	Protection from violence
20	Protection and assistance when deprived of their family environment
22	Receive protection or humanitarian assistance when seeking refugee status
24	The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health
29	Education directed to the development of respect for the natural environment
38	Be protected in armed conflicts, by respecting the rules of international humanitarian law; and not participate in hostilities or armed forces if they are younger than fifteen years
39	Recover and reintegrate when they are victims of armed conflicts

Key ECHR Articles	The right of the child to…
2	Life
5	Liberty and security
8	Respect for private and family life
13	An effective remedy
14	Prohibition of discrimination

UN SDGs Goals	Targets that the Strategy will contribute to meet regarding child participation
1. End poverty	1.5 Build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters
3. Healthy lives and well-being	3.d Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks
4. Quality education	4.7 Ensure that learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence
10. Reduce inequality	10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies
11. Sustainable cities and communities	11.5 Reduce the number of deaths and people affected and decrease the economic losses caused by disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations
13. Combat climate change	13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

The challenges faced…

- Crisis and emergency situations compound the disparities that many children already experience in their access to economic, social and cultural rights. These situations make children **more likely to fall into poverty and end up living and/or working on the streets**, as well as more vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation and violence. Children living in poverty are also **more likely to be separated from their parents or caregivers**, for example as crisis situations lead to economic hardship resulting in increased migration flows.
- Children in crisis and emergency situations also suffer from **reduced access to education and health services** and are more likely to see their social rights infringed.
- In some cases, these children are **more vulnerable to deprivation of liberty**, as for instance children on the move being held in administrative detention centres.
- **Extremist groups** thrive in crisis and emergency situations, which may lead to the potential radicalisation of children for the purpose of terrorism.
- Climate change and natural disasters are hampering the ability of the **child to enjoy a healthy environment** and **environmental degradation** is linked to severe health outcomes for children. Children are also highly exposed to toxicity.

… and the ways identified by the Council of Europe to ensure the rights of the child are protected in crisis and emergencies:

IMPLEMENTING its standards, by continuously:	**INNOVATING**, by:
6.1.1 Developing and promoting standards on human rights for **children in migration** (by implementing the actions included in the Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe (2021-2025), as for instance, undertaking a follow-up to the Recommendation on Effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration[61] or promoting family and community-based care for unaccompanied children). 6.1.2 Acting as a platform to **exchange good practices** among member States on their responses to international crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. 6.1..3 Upholding the right to an **education with respect for nature** and which raises awareness of natural hazards and environmental risks.	6.2.1 Supporting member States in building **strong child protection systems** able to adjust to a crisis. 6.2.2 Providing guidance to **protect children in a public health crisis**, including by supporting children's resilience, ensuring that the right to education and to participation are not overlooked, and by promoting digital citizenship for children to strengthen their ability to respond to crisis. 6.2.3 Mapping the existence of possible new vulnerable situations arising from crisis or emergency situations and developing innovative measures targeting their protection. 6.2.4 Developing capacities and tools to support member States in protecting children in **armed conflicts** and in **reintegrating and rehabilitating children** returning from conflict zones. 6.2.5 Analysing and advising on **legal issues relevant to children in such situations**, such as with respect to guardianship, housing, land and property rights, registration, national identification and citizenship, statelessness and other public law issues, in particular for orphaned, child refugees and internally displaced children, as well as in cases of serious violations of human rights. 6.2.6 Recognising the human rights obligations as they relate to the enjoyment of a **safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.** 6.2.7 Facilitating children's **access to justice against environmental harm**.

61. CM/Rec (2019)11.

HIGHLIGHT: What children suggest	
Challenges to be addressed urgently	– Protect children especially in crisis and emergency situations (e.g. (civil) war). – Be aware that, in situations of war and armed conflict, survival is the first priority and children are facing many obstacles in developing their evolving capacities, resources and potentials. – Make proceedings for migrant and refugee children, more effective and timely, in particular for unaccompanied children. – Step up access to timely and less complicated family reunification procedures. – Give the opportunity to all children, even in situations of crisis and emergency, to attend school or enrol in other types of education.
Possible action to be taken	– Accommodate migrant and refugee children in child-friendly accommodation centres or shelters. – Make policies and procedures for the reception of migrant and refugee children more child-friendly and child rights-based. – Ensure continuity in the free access to the health care system for children in situations of crisis and emergency and provide timely access to treatment, ensuring children's right to be heard and given informed consent in an age-appropriate manner.
How children can be involved	Children should have opportunities to influence the attitudes and mindsets of older generations, including with regards to gender equality.

IN FOCUS. When working on children in crisis and emergencies, the Council of Europe will implement the following approaches:
Gender-sensitive approach: by looking at the issue of gender-based violence during emergency situations and the impact of COVID-19 related measures on the equality between boys and girls. **Anti-discrimination approach**: by taking a closer look at the protection of different groups of children in vulnerable situations during crisis (children affected by migration, internally displaced children, Roma and Traveller children, children in conflict areas, children with disabilities, LGBTI children or children living in poverty). **Child participation approach**: by promoting the involvement of children in decision-making process related to solving crisis and emergencies, such as environmental policies or measures to handle pandemics.

Key Council of Europe bodies concerned (non-exhaustive; alphabetical order)	Other Council of Europe units concerned
– Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) – Commissioner for Human Rights – Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT) – European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) – Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) – European Committee for Education (CDEDU) – European Committee on Social Rights (ECSR) – European Court of Human Rights – European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) / Advisory Council on Youth – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) – Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI)	– Division of Independent Human Rights Bodies – EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement

3. DELIVERING THE STRATEGY. HOW TO GET THERE?

47. Strategies are reference frameworks and tools that are meant to lead to concrete improvements. In the area of the rights of the child, a Strategy like the present one, should find its final expression in improved levels of protection of the rights and well-being of all children living in Europe. This Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027): "Children's Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation" is intended to achieve visible results and progress for the children of Europe: to create a true impact on children's lives.

48. In order to achieve this goal, the Strategy needs to be transparent about the way in which progress is to be reached under its six thematic priority areas. The right "catalysts" must be identified to help all stakeholders make progress collectively and individually. Such "driving factors" of the present Strategy can be found at different levels, and certainly include: integrated approaches and cross-sectoral action (both at the European and at national levels); coherent and innovative working methods; strong partnerships (both within the Organisation and with external partners); sufficient resources; an accompanying communication strategy; increased awareness of current risks and anticipation of trends and upcoming developments; political willingness and commitment by key stakeholders and leadership.

49. The Council of Europe as a whole and in particular the CDENF represent an exceptional framework for the intergovernmental multi-stakeholder collaboration needed to deliver an ambitious Strategy. To achieve such result, all stakeholders must remain committed to the objectives agreed upon and play their part. Only then will it be possible to unleash both the individual and collective potential to put "Children's Rights in Action".

3.1. Institutional settings

50. The CDENF is the main coordination body designing, implementing and overseeing progress made under the Strategy, in collaboration with other Council of Europe bodies and international partner organisations. Under its expected four-year terms of reference, it will continue to gather twice a year in plenary sessions, with the possibility of organising additional thematic meetings in different formats, and of creating relevant subordinate expert and working groups as appropriate, as already practiced under its previous mandate. Other Council of Europe intergovernmental and monitoring bodies will also take ownership for selected actions specific to their terms of reference.

51. This intergovernmental co-operation structure will reflect the most urgent priorities identified, whilst remaining flexible to react and adjust to emerging or yet unexpected challenges at a later stage. The CDENF will continue to involve multiple internal and external partners, i.e. representatives of other Council of Europe bodies and international organisations, civil society organisations and non-member States, both through its formal meetings, and in implementation activities and promotional events, so as to fill traditional and upcoming partnerships with life and generate an impact on the rights of the child.

3.2. Working methods

52. The implementation of a multi-level and multi-stakeholder Strategy requires clear and transparent working methods to produce accountable action, that can easily be understood and followed by those concerned and allows for interaction with a view to creating synergies or developing partnerships whenever there is an opportunity.

53. These are the key elements of the Strategy's working methods:

54. The **timeframe** of the Strategy follows different logics at CDENF level and in relation with the Committee of Ministers.

- The Strategy covers a six-year period (2022-2027); a mid-term evaluation by the CDENF is foreseen after three years.
- An implementation report of the CDENF Terms of Reference will be prepared by the Secretariat, based on an Action Plan, and submitted to the Committee of Ministers every two years (as required by the intergovernmental framework foreseen by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers for all its Steering Committees and Monitoring Bodies for the period 2022-2025).

55. This leads to an "alternation" of reporting obligations linked to the Strategy which straightens out the process and facilitates follow-up by all stakeholders involved.

56. Following and overseeing the implementation of the Strategy will be facilitated by separate biennial **Action Plans** to be prepared in parallel to the Strategy and to be finalised in spring 2022 once the Strategy will have been adopted by the Committee of Ministers. However, the detailed logical framework linked to the Strategy's key objectives will bridge the gap towards this Action Plan and illustrate how the Strategy's goals and objectives are meant to set "Children's Rights in Action: from implementation to innovation". The Action Plan will then be a clear reference agreed upon by all internal and external partners, setting out joint and individual activities to be developed under the Strategy, the expected outcomes, the timelines involved, and the indicators suggested to measure success. Taking the form of such a detailed implementation framework, the upcoming Action Plan will help the Council of Europe and its partners to move "From Words to Action", transposing all objectives of the Strategy into actual improvements to the lives of European children.

57. **Further resources and methods** used for the effective implementation of the Strategy will (continue to) be:

- The solicitation of external expertise raised through the academic and consultancy network of the Children's Rights Division or other operational entities;
- The organisation of capacity-building events and the production of relevant tools, handbooks and guidance documents, to support national stakeholders in implementing the Strategy's objectives (either within the realm of the Steering Committee or in close co-operation with the co-operation unit of the Children's Rights Division);
- Different ways of improving the evidence base referred to, before developing new standards and guidance, to make sure that these respond to children's actual needs, by ensuring data collection via the CDENF (e.g. through surveys), the monitoring work of other Committees (e.g. the ECSR), via desk research (by the Secretariat and mandated consultants) or via the publications of partner organisations (e.g. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Commission, European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and others);
- Awareness-raising methods of different scope, format and length, involving, for example, thematic campaigns, one-off events, new publications or social media campaigns; and
- Platforms for exploring new challenges and trends or emerging issues, in order to identify new areas requiring legislative or policy responses and subsequent action at European or national levels.

3.3. Partnerships

58. When implementing the Strategy, the Children's Rights Division will work jointly with internal partners (Council of Europe sectors concerned as mentioned under each priority area) but also with external stakeholders, including international organisations, international or European civil society organisations, non-member States of the Council of Europe as well as the business sector or industry wherever opportunities and synergies are possible and desirable.[62]

59. Amongst the key partners in implementing the Strategy will be other European and international organisations, starting with the European Union, represented by the European Commission and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). Collaboration will refer to synergies identified in the framework of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and rely on EU funding provided for co-operation projects led by the Council of Europe.

62. The specific roles and responsibilities of these partners will be defined by the Action Plan.

International partners for implementing the present Strategy include the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and in particular the CRC, UNICEF, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (UN SRSG VAC), the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS).

60. Civil society organisations will also continue to be key partners, including: the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), Eurochild, Defence for Children International (DCI) and its different branches, the End Violence Initiative, the Inter-agency Panel on Juvenile justice (IPJJ), End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT international), Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, Missing Children Europe, the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), the International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates, the International Social Service (ISS), Child Rights International Network (CRIN), the Child-Friendly Justice European Network (CFJ-EN) and World Vision International, and others.

61. Children will continue being a key partner in the implementation of the Strategy, as they will continue to be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of the Council of Europe standards, policies and activities related to their rights and well-being. Any relationships with children established during the preparation of the present Strategy and in its implementation, have been and will be accompanied and governed by the Council of Europe child safeguarding policy, which also requires relevant commitments from any partner organisation reaching out to children under the umbrella of Council of Europe activities.

62. Finally, and also with a view to innovating in the area of multi-stakeholder collaboration in favour of the rights of the child, the Council of Europe will seek to develop a structured approach to private sector engagement, so as to promote child-centred approaches through all spheres of society.

3.4. Resources

63. Key resources linked to the Strategy implementation, will include those assigned to the Children's Rights Division, either through its ordinary budget or through extrabudgetary resources. Other operational entities of the Council of Europe, responsible for other intergovernmental or monitoring bodies will contribute with their ordinary budget for joint activities identified in the action plan. The Parliamentary Assembly [and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities] will support the effective and sustainable implementation of the Strategy in the Council of Europe member States by feeding it into legislative, budgetary and oversight activities of national parliaments and local and regional authorities. The Strategy will be delivered in the usual intergovernmental co-operation framework as implemented through internal management tools, such as the biannual Programme & Budget exercise and the Terms of Reference for each Committee, assigned budget and staff.

64. As already done under previous Strategies, Council of Europe staff expertise will be completed as appropriate by consultants or partner organisations. Resources, knowledge and data available in member States will be regularly reviewed and sought through expert hearings, exchanges of views and surveys initiated by the Secretariat, so as to best reflect the experiences and requirements of national governments and their respective partners. Certain national activities aimed at the development, dissemination and promotion of standards will again be eligible to receive support from the Council of Europe through relevant grant agreements.

3.5. Communication and visibility

65. A communication strategy will be developed to promote the Strategy and the progress achieved, mainly through the website http://www.coe.int/children. Communication about any new developments and events will also be provided through relevant social media channels, including the Facebook page and Twitter account (@coe_children) in particular. Further social media will also be developed.

66. The website will at the same time serve for "internal" communication purposes towards member States involved in delivering the Strategy (via the dedicated Committee webpages), as well as for "external" visibility for the outcomes of Strategy implementation, including legislative changes and new policy programmes at the national level and new Council of Europe instruments and tools facilitating the attainment of high human rights standards. The website will also promote material for a wider public, such as brochures for children and young people, guidance for parents or handbooks and checklists for professionals working for and with children.

4. KEEPING TRACK OF THE STRATEGY'S IMPLEMENTATION

Monitoring and evaluation

67. This Strategy is laid out for a 6-year period which allows for sufficient room to deploy substantive activities, to monitor the implementation of the numerous objectives listed and assess their impact on children's lives and in the institutional contexts they are evolving in. However, such a long period is also likely to see societal changes and developments that may require strategic adjustments, which means that the Strategy needs to remain open to host emerging challenges and adapt the focus on the ones that had been agreed to from the very start.

68. **The evaluations of actions within the Strategy involves different dimensions, according to their context, tools used, and stakeholders involved:**

69. Progress within the Council of Europe and with involvement of different bodies and sectors collaborating under the Strategy will be measured every two years on the basis of the Action Plan developed separately and presented in a distinct document. The outcomes of this internal evaluation will allow for adjustments to the Strategy and developing new activities as appropriate, in light of the resources available. This evaluation exercise is first a **technical evaluation** undertaken between different Secretariat units of the Council of Europe. The entity facilitating exchanges about progress made will be the Inter-Secretariat Task Force on the Rights of the Child that has ensured this follow-up for many years now. Based on the Action Plan, and progress measured through the logical framework planning matrices, an implementation report will be prepared for the Committee of Ministers, equally in a biannual rhythm, thus leading to a more **organisational evaluation**, undertaken under the oversight of the CDENF.

70. A more in-depth and **political evaluation** of progress achieved under the Strategy will be undertaken under the leadership of the CDENF with support of other stakeholders and find its expression at a mid-term review conference after the first three years. Subject to resources available, children will be consulted throughout the various evaluation processes, according to relevant methodologies and child safeguarding policies in place at the Council of Europe.

Logical framework planning matrix

71. Next to the Action Plans that will be regularly updated with different partners involved in delivering the Strategy, the Logical framework and its planning matrices will be amongst the main working tools for keeping track of the Strategy, at technical, organisational and political level. On this basis, internal follow-up of the Strategy implementation will be ensured by the Children's Rights Division. Dedicated forms will be developed, to be filled and regularly submitted by member States to report on any progress made from their side, under different priority areas and types of action, and according to specific indicators.

Risks and mitigation

72. Every Strategy, programme and project faces risks in its delivery, which are more or less likely to occur (level of "exposure"), may have a differing impact on the delivery and will require specific and adapted mitigation measures. The present Strategy is estimated to involve the following risks and possible responses hereto:

Risk	Exposure	Impact	Mitigation measures
Changing context with newly emerging challenges requiring immediate responses	High	High	Reviewing priorities and adapting the Strategy in the most transparent manner
Lack of political willingness to support the implementation (European and national levels)	Medium	Medium	Stepping up promotion and political negotiation
Changes in resources assigned to services involved in the delivery, causing delays	Medium	Medium	Reviewing priorities and adapting the Strategy in the most transparent manner
Lack of voluntary contributions or co-operation projects concluded	Medium	Medium	Re-adjusting the ambitions of the Strategy and relevant frameworks

OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS:

- Reference texts (including Council of Europe Conventions and Recommendations)
- Action Plan
- Logical framework planning matrix
- Forms for national follow-up and reporting
- Communication Strategy

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union.
All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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