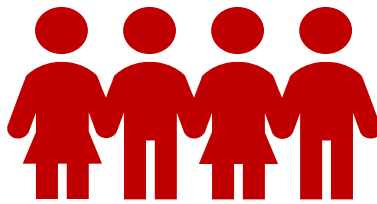




POLICY PAPER ON ENGAGING DIASPORA AND MIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



PROVENCE



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Rights, Equality and Citizenship
Programme of the European Union

Project 101008487

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May 2023



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INTRODUCTION

Millions of children are on the move both internally and internationally¹, with or without their parents. The reasons behind child migration vary: to escape war, natural disaster, violence, abuse, poverty, to reunite with family members abroad or to seek better opportunities and livelihood.

The migration journey of children may be a rather challenging and precarious experience for them, especially for those who are separated or unaccompanied. In fact, children on the move are considered among the most vulnerable populations on the globe (You, et al., 2020, p. 32). Too often, children and youth affected by migration face discrimination, violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Additionally, they have limited to no access to services of education, healthcare, child-friendly information, social protection and legal representation. At the same time, children on the move in most of the cases lack the means and resources to be informed about their rights.

There is thus a pressing need for the design of evidence-based policies, followed by specific actions to promote and deepen the awareness on the rights of the children and more specifically migrant children. Migrant communities are main actors to foster the development of their countries of origin. However, their role in the promotion of children's rights is underestimated.

The aim of this policy paper is to suggest concrete recommendations and present best practices on the promotion of the rights of the child by migrant communities. It is developed in the context of the co-funded project by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union: *"COMMIT-Engaging diaspora and migrant COMMunities in the protection of the rIghTs of the child"*, which aims at encouraging the engagement of migrant and diaspora communities in the promotion of the rights of the child. Its implementation has taken place in four European countries, who had throughout the ages but mostly currently, large

¹ Although, international organisations give more attention to children who move internationally, children who migrate within their own countries should also not be overlooked (Bottridge, 2013, p. 10).



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flows of migration: Italy, Greece, Cyprus and France. More precisely, the consortium is constituted by:

- CISS – Cooperazione Internazionale Sud Sud (Italy)
- KMOP – Social Action and Innovation Centre (Greece)
- Melissa – Network for migrant and refugee women (Greece)
- HFC – Hope for Children CRC Policy Center (Cyprus)
- Soliha Provence – Solidaires pour l’habitat (France)



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RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been stated that: *“the hard-to-reach nature of children on the move presents unique difficulties when planning programming to support and protect them”* (Reale, 2013, p. 67). Engaging migrant communities in the promotion of the rights of the child and specifically migrant children is an essential and a rather effective way in ensuring that children with migrant backgrounds are duly protected and their rights adequately respected. Important recommendations to facilitate this engagement have been concentrated and are presented hereunder:

❖ Building trust and cultivating relationships with migrant communities



Engaging migrant communities at the grassroots level can play a crucial role in the promotion of the rights of the child and thus also in children’s protection, as an empowered and well-informed community group can be very influential (Save the Children, 2008, p. 5).

Competent state agencies and civil society organisations shall thus pursue in cultivating honest and meaningful communication channels with migrant communities. Building trust takes time. It is thus important to be patient, respectful, open-minded and consistent. Community leaders may be the first and most crucial point of contact, as they have a deep understanding of their communities and can provide insights on how to



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engage with the community in a purposeful way, as well as support the endeavour of developing strategies to promote children's rights.

❖ Creation of safe spaces for migrant communities

Safe spaces for migrant communities can provide them a channel to share their experiences as well as a sense of community. There, they can also have the chance to benefit from a variety of services, such as: psychological support, play and learning, information desk, gender-based violence prevention and response, information on children's rights, referral to health care and more (UNICEF, 2020). It is important for safe places to be culturally appropriate and free from judgment and discrimination.



❖ Demystifying myths for children on the move

Children in migration do not differ from other children as far as their rights are concerned. Children around the world regardless of their migration status or that of their caregivers should be treated the same as all children (UNICEF, 2022; Council of Europe, 2016). Thus, all children, regardless of their or their caregivers' migration or residency status, are entitled to all rights articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).



As it has been stated: *"We should always devise a treatment for migrant children that we would consider appropriate for 'our' own children. As I have said, migrant children should always be treated as children first"* (Crépeau, 2013, p. 4).



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❖ Capacity-building for migrant communities on the rights of the child



States in collaboration with child-focused civil society organisations shall organise capacity-building activities, such as trainings, workshops and seminars for migrant communities on the rights of the child. Those activities shall be addressed to all the members of the community: parents, caregivers but also children. Children's awareness of their own rights is of paramount importance, as it empowers them to gain a better control over their own lives. Additionally, children who are aware of their rights and of child protection issues can play a role in identifying and assisting other children at risk, for example by providing support and advice to peers (Save the Children, 2008, p. 6). With their empowerment, they may develop their potential to advocate for their rights within their homes, schools and communities. Capacity-building activities shall be culturally sensitive, provided in the language of the community and include information on relevant laws, policies and services.

❖ Awareness-raising activities on the rights of the child



The organisation of awareness-raising activities, such as: info days and events on the rights of the child addressed to migrant communities can also play an important role in building knowledge and understanding.



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Those activities shall include information on laws, policies and the competent national authorities and civil society organisations.

❖ Providing access to information



Competent state agencies and civil society organisations shall provide migrant communities access to translated material and resources on the rights of the child, as well as the national services, organisations and multilingual helplines on child protection so as to empower them to advocate for the rights of children.

❖ Enhancing intercultural competence among service providers and state agencies

Communication is vital in engaging migrant communities in the promotion of the rights of the child. It is thus essential for service providers and state agencies to invest in training and resources to support staff members develop intercultural competence. Intercultural competence involves the understanding and valuing of cultural diversity and the ability to work effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.



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❖ Providing language and cultural support

The provision of language and cultural support to migrant communities can support them in overcoming language barriers and encourage their participation. This may be achieved through the provision of translated materials and culturally appropriate resources. Communication shall also be in a language understood by all, and where necessary, interpreters shall be made available.

❖ Co-creation of solutions on issues affecting children's rights. Involving migrant communities and especially children and youth in policy and decision-making processes



Co-creation of solutions involves working with migrant communities to identify issues affecting children's rights and jointly developing strategies to address them. This approach will empower migrant communities to take ownership of their own solutions and will enable them to better engage with the issues affecting them.

The involvement of migrant communities in policy and decision-making processes related to children's rights may be achieved through consultation, representation on committees or boards and/or involving them in the development and implementation of policies.

States shall specifically recognise the active role that children and young people can play in the identification and implementation of solutions related to children's rights and foster opportunities for their engagement



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and leadership building. Thus, they shall encourage their meaningful and inclusive participation in decision-making processes that impact their lives and the creation of youth-led initiatives promoting their rights. By empowering children and youth, they become advocates for their own rights, their voices are heard and their perspectives are taken into account. Last but not least, by this way a child-sensitive and child-centred approach to migration into national legislation, plans, programmes, policies and practices will also be guaranteed (Crépeau, 2013, p. 4).

❖ Fostering partnerships and collaborations

Collaboration and partnerships between migrant communities, state agencies, civil society organisations and other stakeholders can contribute to the creation of a supportive environment for the promotion of children's rights. It will also facilitate the sharing of knowledge, resources and expertise between them.



❖ Involving the wider community

Competent state agencies and civil society organisations shall also involve the wider community. Engaging the wider community can help create awareness and understanding of the issues affecting migrant children and promote a culture of respect for every child's rights.



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Overall, engaging migrant communities in promoting children’s rights requires an approach that is culturally-sensitive, participatory and collaborative. To achieve this, it is important that competent state agencies and civil society organisations take into account the recommendations suggested above. By doing so, it will be ensured that children in migrant communities are protected, supported and empowered to thrive and succeed in life.

BEST PRACTICES

❖ Educational material

On children's rights in general

- i. [Child Friendly Version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), produced by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
- ii. [Child Rights Education Toolkit: Rooting Child Rights in Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Schools](#), developed by UNICEF
- iii. The [“passport to your rights”](#), was created by the Council of Europe. It is addressed to children and aims at introducing them into the world of their rights in a playful manner. The passport explains their basic rights, as well as the relationship with the state and the role of international organisations. It is available in 22 languages.
- iv. [“I have rights, you have rights, he/she has rights...” brochure](#), created by the Council of Europe. This brochure presents children’s rights in a child-friendly language creating three, easy to understand clusters of rights. It outlines the relationship between the child and the state, along with the role of international organisations in protecting the rights of the child. Finally, it explains the options available to children if their rights are not respected. It is available in 29 languages.



- v. [Justice and Rights Manual for Children in a Child Friendly Language](#), developed by "Hope for Children" CRC Policy Centre in the context of the co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union, "*JudEx+: Towards a child-friendly justice in cases of sexual violence against children*". This manual presents children's rights in a child-friendly language and also explains them what happens when they are not respected.
- vi. ["Έχω δικαίωμα; Έχω δικαίωμα!" \(Do I have right? I have right!\)](#), children's book on the rights of the children written by the director of the Network for children's rights in Greece, Panos Christodoulou and published by the publishing house Mikri Selini.
- vii. ["Ταξιδεύοντας στον κόσμο, γνωρίζοντας τα δικαιώματά μου" \(Travelling around the world, knowing my rights\)](#). Educational material based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that is available in the Digital Repository of the Institute of Educational Policy of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs so as to be used in the Skills' Laboratories in schools.
- viii. ["Your Passport to your Rights" – "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center](#). The child ambassadors of "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center prepared this educational tool in which they compiled the rights of the child based on the UN Convention, written in child-friendly language. This booklet has been distributed in primary and secondary schools all over Cyprus.

On specific issues

Children and migration

- ix. Leaflet ["Your rights in the age assessment procedure – Information for children in migration"](#)



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- x. Animation [“Age assessment of children in migration”](#)
Both the animation and leaflet seek to inform children about the age assessment procedures in an adapted way, so that they understand that the age assessment should be conducted in a manner that respects their human rights and dignity, with their informed consent, and that takes into account any particular vulnerabilities, their gender and cultural background.

Sexual violence

- xi. “Kiko and the Hand”
The Council of Europe has developed awareness-raising material on “The Underwear Rule” which is intended to help parents and carers talk to children in a positive and child-friendly manner about their right to define their personal boundaries. Awareness-raising materials are presented in the form of:
- a [children’s book](#)
 - a [TV spot](#)
 - [posters and prints](#)
 - [colouring booklet for children](#)
- xii. “Tell someone you trust”. Make use of your Lanzarote Convention Rights.
It is an initiative of the Council of Europe that informs children aged 9 to 13 about sexual violence committed in the circle of trust and how to speak out against it. Its material consists of a [brochure](#) and a [TV spot](#).
- xiii. “So, this is sexual abuse?”
A child-friendly [booklet](#) and a [TV spot](#) for teenagers (aged 12 and up) to explore some of the ways in which sexual abuse and exploitation of children can occur today. Their aim is to provide useful advice and information to children and adults in order to access support.
- xiv. “Kiko and the Manymes”
It is a [storybook](#) and a [TV spot](#) developed by the Council of Europe that help children, including very young ones, from



being exposed to screens in particular phone with video and photo cameras or a webcam.

Corporal punishment

- xv. [Illustrated brochure on positive parenting](#), developed by the Council of Europe
- xvi. [Abolishing corporal punishment of children – Key points: a fold-out brochure with cartoon stickers](#), developed by the Council of Europe
- xvii. “Raise your hand against smacking”
It is a Council of Europe campaign against corporal punishment of children. Corporal punishment is the most widespread form of violence against children and is a violation of their human rights and it can cause serious physical and mental harm. It consists of a [TV spot](#) and a [poster](#).

Children in care

- xviii. “Children and young people in care. Discover your rights!”
It is a Council of Europe initiative that intends to help young people in care to gain a better understanding of their rights and whether these rights are being respected. It consists of a [booklet](#), a [leaflet](#) and a [poster](#).

Bullying

- xix. Beat Bullying video: [“Have you already been in such situation?”](#)

On human rights in general

- xx. [Compass. Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People](#)
- xxi. [Composito. Manual on Human Rights Education for Children](#)
- xxii. Brochure for children on [Democracy and Human Rights](#)



❖ Games

- xxiii. ["Happy on a Mission"](#) is an online game for 6 to 9 years old children to help them gain skills on how to act and communicate in situations when child violence occurs. It was developed in the context of the co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, *"Co-Happiness. Happy and Safe in Community"*, implemented in Greece by KMOP-Social Action and Innovation Centre.
- xxiv. ["Step-by-step rights"](#) is a game addressed to children 10 to 16 years old. Through storytelling and role play, it aims at allowing participants to talk about children's rights and situations where these rights are not respected. It was created in the context of the Children Diaspora Lab of this project and it was implemented in Palermo by CISS.

❖ European projects

- xxv. [FA.B. - Family based care for children in migration](#)
In the context of this project which aims at supporting the improvement and expansion of alternative family-based care system for unaccompanied children, educational material for unaccompanied children informing them about their rights was developed.
- xxvi. [YCREATE - Voices for respect, celebrating difference and tackling hate](#)
In the framework of this project, which works on creative interventions dealing with hate speech, discrimination, misinformation and disinformation, educational activities for young people have been developed.
- xxvii. NET 4 CHILDHOOD - NETwork 4 responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences
It aims at preventing and tackling child abuse through the development of a holistic intervention model which prevents



and responds to adverse childhood experiences, such as neglect, physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

xxviii. CL.A.P. - ChiLdren's rights Awareness and Participation addressing emerging needs after Covid-19 pandemic

It aims at promoting the right of children to participate in decision-making processes particularly during emergency situations, so that they contribute to the development of child-friendly and gender-sensitive responses by local public authorities.

xxix. [REFUGE-ED - Effective practices in education, mental health and psychosocial support for the integration of refugee children](#)

This project aims at identifying, implementing and evaluating existing evidence-based practices in education, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) that have been shown to promote educational success, well-being and sense of belonging. The target group are children (0 to 18 years old) from recent migration cohorts, including refugees and asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors.



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