

Declaration of Rotterdam

On the role of local and regional authorities
in the establishment of child friendly communities



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ON THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHILD FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

On the occasion of the fourth 'Child in the City Conference' of the European Network Child Friendly Cities, 2008

We, being mayors, representatives of Europe's local and regional governments, and representatives of intergovernmental organizations and NGOs, as members of the European Network Child Friendly Cities and meeting together in the framework of the fourth 'Child in the City' conference, held in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, on 3-5 November 2008;

Responding to the call made in the

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for further (local) implementation of the rights of children, promoting and protecting the child's rights in legislation and regulatory frameworks and creating child friendly communities (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989);
- UN Habitat II Conference (1996) where the concept of 'child friendly cities' was launched for the first time and the UN Special Session on Children (May 2002) where it was reiterated as a way to ensure that children are a key focus of local government agendas,
- Communications of the European Commission: 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child' (COM(2006)367) and 'A Special Place for Children in EU External Action' (COM(2008)55), in which the European Commission announces the wish to establish child friendly communities in the European Union;
- Opinion of the Committee of the Regions, 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child', adopted by the 68th Plenary Meeting on 13 and 14 February 2007 (CONST-IV-009);
- European Parliament Resolution of 16 January 2008: Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the Child [2007/2093 (INI)];
- Resolution 258 of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe of the Council of Europe, for local and regional authorities to offer social and structural conditions necessary for children's well-being and development, adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008;

Reaffirming the Child in the City Manifest of London of 22 October 2004 and the Child in the City Manifest of Stuttgart of 18 October 2006 of the European Network Child Friendly Cities;

Emphasising the extremely important role of local and regional authorities, given their responsibilities for all policy areas affecting the direct living conditions of children and their potential for creating child friendly communities in a concrete way;

Recognizing the urgent need for cities to be attractive for children, young adults and their parents or carers, to face problems like demographic changes, increased urbanization rate, environmental degradation, limited inter-generational exchanges and threats to the long-term vitality of communities, since young families play an important role in a community's social cohesion and economic activity;

Stressing that local and regional governments are the most immediate and main providers of public services to all citizens, including children, and therefore play an essential role in realizing child friendly communities;

Realising that the children of Europe, including migrants, are greatly diversified. For example, the living conditions of children may be influenced by their geographical location, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, disability or family structure. Therefore policies, especially those made at regional and local level, should take into account the diversity of children and address their varying needs and demands;

Considering that all levels of governance (regional and local governments included) have a responsibility to provide a democratic and inclusive society, promoting equal opportunities and full participation for children on issues which affect their lives and their living conditions;

Emphasising the need for supportive European policies and coordination, involving all levels of government, in order to promote child friendly communities;


Indicating that for the purposes of this Declaration and concurrence with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier;

Declare as follows:

1. A child friendly community is a system of good governance committed to fulfilling children's rights. A community friendly to children is friendly to all, because the wellbeing of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy, safe, democratic and sustainable society and of good governance.
2. Child friendliness of cities, towns and villages is a continuous and dynamic process with continuously evolving new aspects and should be an ever continuing ambition.
3. Child friendliness of communities and cities provides access to basic services and opportunities for development and participation to all children including the most disadvantaged children.
4. Changes in the demographic situation of communities, economic and social developments as well as technical innovations stimulate local authorities to improve the living conditions of children and young adults in their municipalities.
5. Child friendliness of cities, towns and villages is related to governance and mainstreaming, public space, protection and safety, education and economic participation and the European level.

Governance and mainstreaming

6. Child friendliness, needs an integrated policy approach in order to be effective and efficient. The present child and youth policy is often strongly fragmented, being part of various policy areas like public health, education, social policy, justice, integration, mobility and spatial planning. By mainstreaming and integrating child friendliness in all of these areas, a more efficient child and youth policy can be pursued
7. The local and regional authorities are being called up to develop a systematic child-oriented policy with clear objectives, concrete action plans and self assessment via specific tools. This systematic child-oriented policy should be supported and promoted by all relevant administrations and actors.
8. The further implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires cooperation between different levels of government and collaboration with NGOs, communities and all other actors involved. A more 'horizontal approach' will ensure more coordinated and effective policies.

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9. Child friendliness does not imply that children require their own city, but recognizes that children play a key role in society. Introducing mechanisms for children's participation in the decision making processes that relate to their lives at the level of local and regional authorities will enhance children's role as active citizens in their own society.
 10. An inter-generational approach to child friendliness is important. Children need to grow up with people of all ages as they can contribute to children's development and participation by sharing their knowledge and experience. In return elderly persons can benefit from a social support network. Local and regional authorities should therefore promote inter-generational projects such as communal living.
 11. As citizens, children have democratic rights to participate in governmental processes, regardless their age. On those issues that affect the living conditions of children, children should be consulted as actors, not as factors. Local and regional authorities should offer chances to children to develop autonomy and confidence required to flourish and give them the opportunity to play their role in society. Therefore, local and regional authorities should provide access to information and communication as a first step to enhance participation of children and young adults. Due to the diversity of children and their varying needs and demands, there is no uniform approach possible and a tailor-made approach is required.

Public space

12. Local and regional authorities have a major role in creating the necessary conditions to facilitate and encourage children's activities and mobility. We stress the importance of a child-oriented urban planning and design, regarding the built environment, street furniture, play areas, green spaces, sports fields and general public areas. Well-lit and safe public spaces available for children, including safe routes to travel through the community, should be included in urban planning.
13. Local and regional authorities are responsible for providing a safe and healthy environment to prevent chronic illnesses such as neurodermatitis, allergies and respiratory diseases, since children's environmental rights are enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Protection and Safety

14. Children living in urban areas often experience a lack of safety in their living environments. We therefore underline the importance of creating and providing safe public areas. For example, the environment of a school should be safe, as well as playgrounds and meeting places.
15. Local and regional authorities should undertake and support actions against child abuse and domestic violence, with special attention to prevention and victim aid. A safe environment will benefit not only children, but the whole society.
16. Children have the right to be protected, but they also have a duty to respect the rights of others and to abide by the laws and rules laid down by society. In case of youth criminality, local and regional authorities should ensure social and occupational reintegration of minor offenders and offer re-educational measures commensurate with their age.

Education and economic participation

17. Education is crucial for young people's development as well as their access to the labour market and successful integration and participation in society. For example, education including preparedness for employability is an important measure to break the inter-generational transmission of poverty and to offer equal opportunities to all. However, many youngsters leave education systems without the necessary certificates or the information and skills needed by the labour market. Local and regional

authorities should play an important role in preventing dropouts and promoting school and economic participation.

18. To stimulate and enable the economic participation of (single) parents, local and regional authorities need to ensure the quality of their childcare facilities. This contributes to a decrease in poverty among women and subsequently among children and benefits to parents regarding their workloads.

European level

19. We welcome the initiatives of the European Union (EU) to incorporate children's rights within its policies and stress the need to cooperate with all actors involved, including the European Network Child Friendly Cities. Local and regional authorities should be regarded as essential partners at the European level and should also be consulted on further developments of establishing child friendly societies.

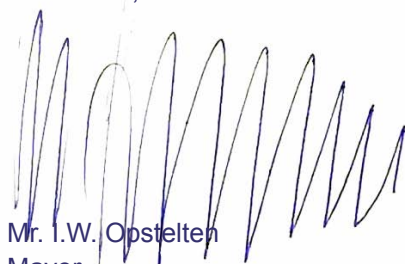
20. The EU can play a supporting and facilitating role in the cooperation of local and regional authorities to achieve collective objectives, such as enhancing the exchange of experiences and best practices between communities and cities with increased efforts to become child friendly.

Conclusions

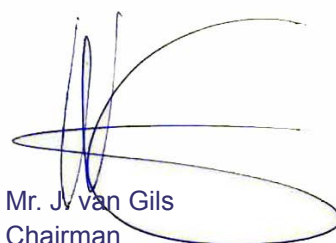
21. We invite the Committee of the Regions, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), and the other representative organisations for local and regional authorities, to combine their efforts in creating child friendly communities and in working actively in support of this goal, together with the European Network Child Friendly Cities and all other actors involved.

22. We confirm that the local and regional level plays a key role in establishing child friendly communities and therefore we call for an intensive and fruitful cooperation between the different levels of government, as well as for a better involvement of regional and local authorities in future EU initiatives, such as the European Forum for the Rights of the Child.

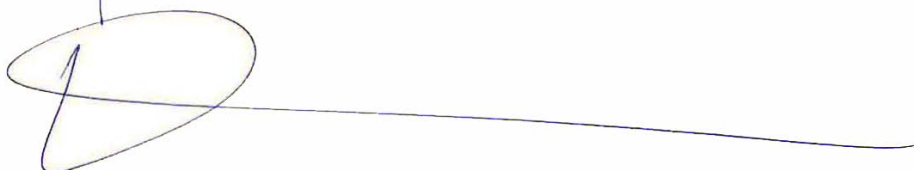
Rotterdam, 5 November 2008.



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The European Network Child Friendly Cities

Established in 2001, the European Network Child Friendly Cities (ENCFC) endeavours to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at local level.

The network is dedicated to creating a child friendly environment. Its general aim is to improve the lives, opportunities and environment of children by bringing together human capital, accumulated knowledge and experience of child related NGOs and networks, civil society and local authorities in Europe. ENCFC aims at raising social and political awareness of the importance of child development for the general socio-economic welfare. It aims at involving children and youth in the decision making process on policies of their concern by local and regional authorities. Involving children and youth is a requirement to maintain solidarity, democratic values and fundamental rights. ENCFC is concerned with incorporating child friendly policies in European issues such as: demographic change, sustainability, urban development, education, labour, integration, mobility and environment.

ENCFC stimulates the establishment of 'child friendly communities' through networking and organising the exchange of information and best practices (such as the biannual international 'Child in the City' conferences, exchange visits, toolkits, local platforms), as well as lobbying European organisations, such as the EU and the Council of Europe, on child-related issues. The network is a dynamic collaboration between authorities from various governmental levels and NGO's. ENCFC is currently active within the following European countries: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey, where a growing number of municipalities are making the political decision to become 'child friendly'.

www.childfriendlycities.eu



Gemeente Rotterdam



Association of
Netherlands Municipalities

