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Submission to the Call for good practices for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights follow up report "Investment in the rights of the child" by "Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center

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PREFACE

The present report constitutes the submission of "Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center to the Call for good practices for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights follow up report "Investment in the rights of the child". Evidence has been collected from several countries, in collaboration with the Chairs, officers and psychologists of the Organisation, as well as academics.

"Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center is an International Independent Humanitarian Institution based in Nicosia, Cyprus; founded on the standards and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and European Union Law. The Organization focuses on humanitarian and development policy in relation to the advocacy and promotion of children's rights; through research, designing and implementing of grassroots programmes, and by offering advisory services to governments and international organizations.

"Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center also aims to improve the quality of life of socially disadvantaged children, such as asylum seekers, refugees and children in war-torn areas. Through education and social mobilization, "Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center works on raising awareness and promoting respect towards all cultures, religions and diversities within a society. The core objective consists in promoting and protecting the rights of children. We aim to realize our fundamental target through the implementation of a variety of projects on a national, European and global level.

Mr. Joseph Varughese,
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1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper constitutes the submission of the International Independent Humanitarian Institution "Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center to the Call for good practice for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights follow up report "Investment in the rights of the child". It includes a selection of practical examples, good practices and lessons learnt from different countries, underlining a range of selected programmes carried out in Denmark, Cyprus, Italy, and Romania; a number of conclusions, and recommendations in relation to the equitable and efficient public resource mobilization, budget allocation and spending to realize the rights of the child.

2. CYPRUS

In Cyprus, a number of projects and initiatives have been developed by the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights (hereafter the Commissioner), for the purpose of educating children about bullying, the economic crisis, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, and their human rights in general. For example, the "Summer Workshop for Children on the Education on Human Rights", "Give voice to your opinion" and the Teen-Advisors Group. The Commissioner is also involved in the European Network Consultants Junior Groups Program (European Network of Young Advisors-ENYA) for 2015, entitled «Let's talk young: The children speak about violence", which aims to give voice to children through the media, on something they have experienced such as abuse.

In relation to independent humanitarian action, "Hope for Children" UNCRC Policy Center has undertaken to design and implement a number of initiatives and campaigns for Cyprus. For example, it develops awareness-raising workshops/events for children, parents and teachers under the Council of Europe Campaign against Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children "One in Five". In collaboration with the University of Nicosia, it has additionally established the first Child Law Clinic in Cyprus, which mainly implements research activities relating to the rights of the child.

Moreover, our Institution, and the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO), have established and operate since 2012 two European Harmonized Numbers, the European Helpline For Children and Adolescents 116111¹ and the European Hotline for Missing Children 116000². Following authorisation by the Cyprus Police, our Institution and SPAVO have also undertaken the establishment and operation of the Child Abduction Alert in Cyprus³. This initiative, was coordinated by our Institution, and was funded by the Daphne Programme of the EC.

¹ www.call116111.com

² www.call116000.org

³ www.childalert.org.cy



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In addition, our Institution carries out the “Beat Bullying” programme⁴ against school bullying, under which children are selected and trained by practitioners to act as ambassadors. A Beat Bullying Mobile App has also been developed called HFCBeatBullying, which offers updates on the latest news about bullying around the world. It includes a ‘But what to do’ section with practical advice. Users are advised to use the European Helpline for Children and Adolescents 116 111, which is free and confidential in 23 European countries. The Commissioner similarly aims to combat bullying at school through diverse actions at different levels, like video production competitions between high schools and technical schools.

Additionally, “Hope for Children” UNCRC Policy Center has established "Home for Hope", a children’s Shelter which accommodates unaccompanied minors who are under the legal guardianship of the Director of the Social Welfare Services, and provides multi-disciplinary services. It was developed with the approval, funding, and in close collaboration with the Social Welfare Services.

3. DENMARK

The Danish legislative and judicial system is formed on the basis of the best interests of the child. The current legislation was enacted in 2007, and has been re-evaluated and amended in 2012 and 2014. In 2015, the Danish government has granted 48.8 million DKK (approximately 6.54 million EUR/7.33 USD) to be used in context of the preliminary contact between divorcing parents and the competent authority, Statsforvaltningen (the State Administration), in cases where decisions have to be made regarding custody residence and contact. The parents are offered immediate counselling and – if needed – courses and individual talks; all this in the hope that they come to a voluntary and peaceful solution upholding the best interests of the child, and avoiding strenuous administrative proceedings that can harm the child. A framework has also been set to ensure that the child’s perspective is adequately taken into consideration.

Proceedings are funded by the so-called “Satspulje”, which is a public pool of funds earmarked for disadvantaged groups. Taking money from vulnerable groups (the elderly, ill, and more importantly poor families) can be considered to be inconsistent with the views about budget enactment and execution, as presented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the report “Towards better investment in the rights of the child” (A/HRC/28/33). However, it can similarly be argued that the practice falls within the budgetary discretion of the State Parties, and therefore does not constitute an infringement on the rights of the child.

4. ITALY

In Italy, different practices are currently deployed from both public bodies and non-profit organisations. Given the economic difficulties associated with raising a child in this day and age, the Nuove Povertà (New Poverties) Fund, offers to families with severe economic discomfort economic support up to 3.000 EUR. This amount is substantially higher than the average funding provided, and can be used to repay eviction expenses or utility bills the family is struggling with; for the enrolment in a course; as security for a new house; rent, etc.

⁴ www.hfcbeatbullying.info



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Comune di Verona,⁵ takes both preventing actions to support parents, and ex post actions to support abused children removed from their parents temporarily or permanently. When possible, the Social Services work together with the parents so as to pinpoint and overcome their difficulties.

In relation to education, the Social Services opt and experiment with actions which partly "substitute" the parent, but do not undermine the relationship with the child. For example, the new national programme Programma di Interventi per la Prevenzione dell'Istituzionalizzazione takes into account both parents' and children's needs. Una Famiglia per Una Famiglia (One Family for One Family), facilitates the support of the educational needs of a family by another. Support is also provided to families with similar cultural origins during fostering procedures.

Istituto don Calabria – Casa San Benedetto⁶ welcomes children in need, and aims for their social inclusion with a complementary network of services. The Institute currently runs two communal residences for unaccompanied children in Verona, for whom it acts as a guardian. Up to 8 unaccompanied or asylum-seeking children between the ages of 13 and 18 can be hosted. Each residence aims to offer housing and develop a specific plan for the education, social integration, professional experience and training for each child. In 2014, the Institute has provided residence or foster family housing for 54 children.

The unaccompanied children are supported by experts of different disciplines. The Institute's activities are currently funded by two sources, one of which being the National Fund for foreign unaccompanied children. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies National Fund was established with decree no 95/2013, for local administrative entities involved with foreign unaccompanied children. In 2014, with the help of the Institute, individual fees and charges associated with a child hosted in a residence community in Verona were cut in half. However, the amount provided per child under the decree issued in August 7th 2014, is significantly lower than the calculated costs, even after being halved. Therefore, the funding provided to cover the Institute's expenses in regards the food, shelter, educational and health care needs of the minors calculated based on the period they will spend there, remains insufficient.

The Institute is also funded by the National Fund for asylum policies and services. In February 2014, the Municipality of Verona in partnership with Istituto Don Calabria and CIR Consiglio Italiano Rifugiati Onlus, has developed the project Verona Solidale Under, for the support and legal aid of 10 unaccompanied children. This project falls within the National System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and the National Fund for asylum police and services for a three-year period from 2014 to 2016. It also opens up the possibility for further funding and support for the integration of the minors from the National System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers.

⁵ www.comune.verona.it/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=1269

⁶ www.csben.it



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CESTIM – Centro Studi Immigrazione⁷, is a non-profit organisation established in Verona in 1990, for the promotion of migrants' civil rights, social solidarity, and equal school opportunities for children of migrant families. Cestim carries out a unique project in Italy using private funds, called Primo, imparare bene la lingua! (First, learn the language!), to help foreign students learn the Italian language and integrate within the school community.

In partnership with more than 70 schools in the cities of Verona and Vicenza, volunteers have helped create school support linguistic laboratories. Every year, more than 1.500 foreign students take advantage of the project for free. In the 2014/15 school year, 254 volunteers (mostly retired teachers) and around one-hundred young university graduates have been carrying out the project. From the 2013/14 school year, a Cestim linguistic supervisor works with 8 schools, to support its teaching activities to foreign students. However, so far the Italian school system does not have sufficient resources to guarantee equal opportunities to children of migrant families, leading to higher rates of school failure and withdrawal for foreigners. Thus, interventions are essential where immigration rates are particularly high.

Veronetta129⁸ is a cultural association which also aims to teach the Italian language to immigrants and promote inter-cultural dialogue. Funding is once more a major concern. This association counts on partnerships with bigger bodies, like the Regional School Office, the Italian Network of Culture of Turin, Radio Popolare di Verona, and the University of Verona (within the so called Kids University events). A specialized personnel is still wanting; to teach the Italian language to migrant children and improve communication within the family.

5. ROMANIA

A targeted approach in relation to the Roma community is presented in Romania. The project "Social interventions for de-segregation and social inclusion of vulnerable groups in Cluj Metropolitan Area, including the disadvantaged Roma⁹ is promoted by the Cluj Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association. It plans and implements coordinated interventions for the benefit of 300 Roma families of Pata Rât area, who live in extreme poverty at the outskirts of Cluj. The project has a clear emphasis on children's welfare and their rights, and demonstrates that investment in children has to be integrated in community development projects. The project staff collaborates with the department of Social Work, and several intern bachelor and master level students, joining a multitude of activities, and learning to work in a culturally sensitive way.

It qualifies as a good practice because of its' comprehensive character: it brings together Roma people, professionals, the school directorate, and the mayor's office (as main stakeholders) to define priorities and plan actions, so that children come first.

The project is financed by the Poverty Alleviation Program in Romania, EEA and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014, by 3 170 500 EUR. It is constantly evaluated by

⁷ www.cestim.it

⁸ www.veronetta129.it

⁹ www.patacluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Projects-in-Pata-Rat-2012-2014.pdf



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the stakeholders, meaning the children, young people, parents, staff, volunteers, and collaborators.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Children are entitled to be protected by the society and the State, especially against all forms of neglect, discrimination and oppression, and against the abusive exercise of authority in the family and other institutions. The present report elucidates a number of conclusions. Looking at Cyprus, Italy and Romania, it becomes clear that the involvement and active participation of independent humanitarian organisations has contributed significantly to the development of various specialised programmes. However, economic investment for the rights of the child remains one of the main drawbacks.

Often, projects are carried out in collaboration with different stakeholders and volunteers, but the personnel and funding available are not enough to cover the needs of the children or ensure the success or sustainability of the projects. The Danish example helps underline how wide the discretion of the states as to how they can allocate public funds is. Cost-benefit data can prove to decision-makers the benefits of investing in the rights of the child for the individual, families, and society in general, as well as the costs of failing to do so.