



***The Future Generation of EU Neighbours:  
Children and Adolescents at the Heart of the ENP***

Contribution to the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy

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*Investing in children and adolescents in the ENP is in the EU's own interest*

Children and adolescents make up for over 50% of the population in the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. They are the future generation of EU neighbours who will shape the region's long-term prosperity, stability and democracy. The review of the ENP is an opportunity to adapt the EU's engagement with the countries of the region to support investments in children and adolescents as the most effective way to develop a democratic, prosperous and stable neighbourhood.

Promoting the rights of children in the EU's neighbourhood is part of the EU's legal obligations, as Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union states that 'in its relations with the wider world' the Union must contribute to the protection of fundamental rights, in particular the rights of the child.

The EU promotes child rights as part of its core values in both internal and external action based on the principles enshrined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup>. This commitment was recently reaffirmed on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, promoting the rights and investing in the well-being of children and adolescents in ENP countries is also in the interest of the EU, as investment in the future generations of European neighbours will have important long-term consequences for the way the EU and its actions are viewed by the populations in partner countries. As a consequence this investment will directly benefit the EU's own prosperity, stability and security.

*A vision for children and adolescents in the EU's neighborhood*

Supporting neighbouring countries to build societies where all children and adolescents have equal opportunities to grow up well-nourished and protected from violence; to have access to basic services and social protection; to learn and grow; to find work and contribute to society and to enjoy mobility and, above all, peace is key to respond to the challenges faced today by the EU and its Member States and to build long-term prosperity and stability at its borders.

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<sup>1</sup> The promotion and protection of the rights of the child is one of the objectives of the EU on which the Treaty on European Union (notably Article 3(3)) puts further emphasis. The rights of the child are also enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, where Article 24 of the Charter recognises that children are independent and autonomous holders of rights.

<sup>2</sup> European Parliament's [Resolution on 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) of 27 November 2014; EU Council [Conclusions on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child](#) of 18 November 2014; European Commission's [Joint Statement on the occasion of the Universal Children's Day and the 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) of 20 November 2014.

To realise this vision, the new ENP provides an opportunity to:

- harness the EU's economic, political and cultural weight to help build a neighbourhood where the rights of children and adolescents are respected and their views are heard and taken into account in decisions affecting them;
- address social exclusion and close equity gaps by promoting the rights of the most vulnerable children and adolescents who are affected by multiple deprivations and gender inequalities that are leading to inter-generational cycles of poverty;
- invest in strengthening national and subnational systems that reach all children and adolescents across the region by promoting child-centred laws, policies and budgets combined with a strong focus on their implementation through accountability and monitoring systems;
- promote broad partnerships between governments, civil society organisations including grass roots, regional and international organisations, media and the business sector that can bring lasting and sustainable change for children and adolescents in the region.

*Importance of  
partnerships for an  
effective ENP*

No single organization or institutions acting alone can make a lasting difference for the children and adolescents in neighbouring countries, which is why all actors – especially those locally-based – should play a role in the new ENP.

The complementarity in the respective roles of the EU, governments, regional and international organisations, media, civil society, including grassroots organisations, and other actors will be important to foster evidence-based policy dialogue and implement reforms in a variety of sectors (education, health, justice, social protection, strengthening child protection systems).

*Differentiation...*

Maintaining a single policy framework for the ENP is important in order to take into account existing cross-cutting issues and to ensure that the human rights based approach remains a fundamental building block for the relations between the EU and its partner countries.

In a context characterized by diverging expectations and increased complexity, differentiation will allow for more flexibility to respond to the needs of partner countries, thus facilitating local ownership.

EU actions under the ENP should be tailored closely to the specific country context and national development plans with a focus on human rights, equity, system strengthening, gender equality, means of implementation and accountability frameworks.

Further differentiation should be explored by making a more structured use of the “more for more” approach that could foresee gradual increases in the type of cooperation frameworks (going from ‘basic minimum’ – respect for democracy, human rights and rule of law and common interests around security and mobility - to full association status), corresponding to political and financial incentives.

The “more for more” approach led to important commitments by partner countries. However, an enhanced differentiation should look into the implementation of these commitments: when “more for more” is applied, more should be done also to track progress against commitments.

The new principle of differentiation could also be an opportunity to re-engage with some of the countries that – so far – are not actively participating in the ENP.

*...taking into account cross-cutting trends and the centrality of the human rights based approach*

A human rights based approach should remain one of the building blocks in the EU’s relations with ENP countries. Promotion of human rights, in particular children’s rights, requires the establishment of an adequate legal framework and the implementation of actions in a variety of sectors, affecting virtually every policy.

This is particularly true when it comes to dealing with cross-cutting issues affecting all ENP countries, requiring a systematic EU response, such as growing inequalities and social exclusion, lack of access to justice by the most vulnerable children, out-of school children, youth unemployment and lack of participation to the democratic process and gender inequalities.

A core set of human rights commitments - notably children’s rights - should be included as an overarching guiding principle of the EU’s partnership with neighbouring countries.

*Geographical Scope*

Recent events show that the geographical scope of the ENP does not consistently take into account the complex web of interactions, challenges and pressures to which partner countries are often subjected.

The ENP should take into consideration the growing interdependence between ENP and their respective neighbours, by promoting increased political dialogue and cooperation with “neighbours of the neighbours”.

Increasing interactions with the “neighbours of the neighbours” could also provide an opportunity to leverage the specific roles of some partner countries vis-a-vis their neighbours outside the ENP region.

Technical or thematic cooperation mechanisms open to “neighbours of neighbours” could be set up to respond to specific challenges, such as increasing cooperation between national child protection and educational institutions in the framework of migration policies.

*Focus/Priority sectors*

The ENP review provides an opportunity to refocus the partnership to respond to the diverse challenges in the neighbourhoods and address key concerns for children and adolescents that are essential to develop a democratic, stable and prosperous neighbourhood.

*Governance, Rule of Law, Human Rights and Democracy*

Governance, rule of law, human rights and democracy need to continue to be at the heart of the renewed ENP. While progress has been made in reforming laws and policies in the region, their implementation is hampered by weak governance, lack of accountability and monitoring systems, insufficient human and financial resources and lack of coordination between different sectors (at national and sub-national level). This situation is compounded by a relatively weak civil society in countries that are facing a host of challenges, including an increasingly restricted space for their work.

- The ENP should capitalize on globally recognized treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and ILO child labour related conventions, and work with a wide variety of partners to track progress via the existing reporting mechanisms at the UN level.
- Promoting the establishment of independent human rights institutions and building their capacity is crucial to strengthening the monitoring and reporting mechanisms on children’s rights and to develop a culture of accountability within governments. Attention also needs to be given to raise awareness about the rights of children and adolescents and to contribute to changing social norms.
- With EU support, there has been a significant improvement in justice for children in the region especially in the area of juvenile justice. In

many Eastern partnership countries the number of children in detention has decreased and children have been diverted away from the justice system. These positive experiences should be used as 'best practices', brought to scale and expanded to all ENP countries.

- However, more remains to be done, with regards to the creation of child-friendly justice systems and to ensure that all children (including victims and witnesses and also children in civil and administrative proceedings) can access justice systems to seek redress for violations of their rights. As they constitute a large population in ENP countries, the EU needs to prioritise children's and adolescent's access to justice by integrating it in support to justice sector reforms and by promoting measures to empower children and adolescents to claim their rights. As part of its commitment to children's rights, dialogue with ENP countries provides an opportunity to make sure the rights of children are protected also in the framework of national anti-terrorism laws.
- Violence against children, in all of its forms, remains a key concern in all partner countries. The EU should support governments to build and strengthen integrated child protection systems that can identify and respond to violence against children and strengthen prevention and support for families. More attention needs to be given to changing social norms that are often the root causes for violence, for example placement in residential care, domestic violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting.
- Providing every child with an identity, by achieving universal birth registration in neighbouring countries, is another priority for partner countries and it is crucial to improve the quality of data and strengthen legal certainty on civil matters.

### [Inclusive, Sustainable Economic Growth](#)

Inclusive and sustainable economic growth is a precondition for employment generation and the basis for cohesive, equitable and stable societies that provide access to education, health and social services, housing, safe drinking water and sanitation. In ENP countries, too many vulnerable children and their families do not receive sufficient social assistance or services and are therefore trapped in poverty and deprivation.

- The new ENP can foster increased national commitment to build an inclusive social protection system with monetary benefits and strengthening the access and the quality of basic services for all, especially the most marginalized children, including those living in

institutions. This could also include national commitment to increase domestic resources to build social protection systems.

- The new ENP should strengthen human capacities and the mobilisation of domestic resources for increasing access to quality health, early childhood and youth-centred services.
- Support to social protection reform could be also included within broader public administration reform, with the aim of increasing both the effectiveness of programmes in reaching their marginalized populations and also the efficiency of expenditures.

### Mobility, Education, Youth and Research

In a neighbourhood characterized by increasing instability, conflicts, unequal distribution of income, gender inequality and migration flows, investment in the efficiency and equality of education from early years, along with the empowerment and employment of young people will be crucial to achieve the goals of the ENP.

- The ENP should promote increased domestic expenditure and commitment for the development of Early Childhood Education and Care<sup>3</sup> to insure inclusion of children from lower income groups and to promote employment of young people and women.
- Out-of-school children and adolescents remain a major concern for the stability and development prospects of most neighbours. Governments are increasingly aware of the need to build robust systems to reduce early school leavers and would welcome the transfer of good practices from Member States on remedial and vocational education and training<sup>4</sup>.
- A strong focus should be increasing expenditure in the education sector, especially on teacher salaries and investment in system strengthening to ensure quality education with higher learning achievements.
- The EU and its partners can jointly support the development and implementation of national school safety programmes to protect children from the impact of potential disasters, violence and conflicts.
- Partner countries are concerned and willing to cooperate with the EU and other partners in order to build comprehensive multi-sectorial youth policies which reach disenfranchised youth, offer them opportunities to contribute to society and to find employment.

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<sup>3</sup> Commission Recommendation on Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage, C(2013) 778 final, 20 February, 2013

<sup>4</sup> The EU 2020 Strategy set a headline target to bring down the share of early school leavers to below 10% by 2020.

## Migration

All indicators show that the number of migrant children will continue to increase. ENP countries are increasingly affected by this phenomenon as places of origin, transit and in certain cases, destination. It is therefore imperative to support the ENP partner countries to address this situation comprehensively and effectively while at the same time protecting the rights of children affected by migration.

- Addressing the root causes of migration will require additional and targeted investment in key areas such as health, education, child protection and social protection in the country of origin and transit, as well as in supporting additional capacities in non-EU countries of destination.
- Partner countries require substantive EU support to implement relevant provision of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees and address the basic humanitarian needs of migrants, such as access to housing, health, protection and education, and to find longer-term solutions for refugees and migrants.
- The best interest of the child should be a primary consideration in all decision-making processes regarding migrant children and their families (including return and repatriation processes).
- Collaboration with the countries of origin of migrants, mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa but also from some countries in Central and Eastern Europe is crucial and should be further developed and expanded to prevent illegal migration at the origin.

## Stability, Peace and Conflict Resolution

Children and adolescents in the ENP are disproportionately affected by crises, instability and natural disasters and at the same time are a crucial factor contributing to long-term peace and conflict resolution. Under the new ENP, the EU should support resilience building and disaster risk reduction as a core element of building secure societies and sustainable economies in the neighbouring regions.

- The ENP can help to support and renew the Government commitment to the development of national policies and capacities in humanitarian action, resilience and disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, the ENP can ensure that climate change adaptation is addressed as a cross-sectorial challenge and that programmes to protect children from the impact of potential natural disasters are strengthened.

- Building the resilience of children and adolescents in the ENP will be of crucial importance to address instability and emerging challenges. Within the context of Syrian crisis, the No Lost Generation (NLG) Initiative is providing an example for supporting resilience-building in the twin pillars of education and protection, with youth as a cross-cutting theme. The NLG approach has relevance across the region, and there is tremendous potential to apply it more widely including in non-crisis countries where education and protection challenges remain significant.
- Initiatives to foster early recovery and long-term resilience and peace-building will be crucial to respond to the crises in Syria and Ukraine. The ENP should also increase dialogue and cooperation to protect the realization of child rights in non-government controlled areas and frozen conflicts.
- A growing number of children and adolescents in partner countries are disillusioned and disenfranchised and are at risk of being drawn into extreme violence, radicalisation and possible recruitment by armed groups. The new ENP could support efforts to build a major preventive programme to tackle this issue by promoting social inclusion, employment and empowerment in order to reintegrate children and adolescents into their societies.

*Making existing tools  
“fit for purpose”*

The EU has a wide range of policy and programmatic tools at its disposal with which it promotes dialogue and cooperation with its partners in the ENP and beyond. However, in the past these tools have often been used in isolation of one another and with insufficient “teeth” to achieve the desired results. The tools in the EU’s toolbox therefore need to be sharpened and used in a more strategic and integrated way to increase the effectiveness of EU actions and maximise the value for money invested by EU taxpayers. To be able to measure the results of the EU’s policy and programmatic tools, they need to be evidence-based and closely linked with effective data collection, monitoring and evaluation processes.

- **Association Agreements & Partnership and Cooperation Agreements:** To increase consistency in the renewed ENP, a chapter on children’s rights should be a standard component of every AA/PCA (see AA EU-Moldova). ENP Action plans should be more closely aligned to National Development Plans of ENP countries’ and should use the new set of Sustainable Development Goals as minimum common denominator to measure partner countries commitments. Child rights should be duly reflected in the Association Agendas/Action Plans and be made a

mandatory item in meetings of Association/Cooperation Councils, Association/Cooperation Committees and relevant subcommittees.

- **Human Rights Dialogues, Policy Dialogues:** The practise of including child rights as a separate item on the agenda of Human Rights Dialogues has been very effective and should be replicated for all countries. Child rights should also be promoted through policy dialogues in other relevant sectors, in particular justice/rule of law and employment/social protection.
- **EU Trade Negotiations & General Scheme of Preference:** EU trade negotiations should be used to address important concerns over violations of child rights and to encourage any necessary reforms. The GSP+ mechanism could be leveraged with countries such as Armenia and Georgia to introduce specific benchmarks and indicators on child rights and to reward progress.
- **Annual Neighbourhood Package/Progress Reports:** The Annual Neighbourhood Package/Progress Reports are among the most effective tools to galvanize support towards reforms in ENP countries. The Package/Progress Reports should be maintained to provide a strategic assessment of the pace of reforms and also key recommendations to governments. The reports should be linked with effective benchmarking and monitoring tools using available data. To strengthen co-ownership and increase commitment from local actors to the reform process, the reports should be disseminated locally.
- **European Neighbourhood Instruments:** The implementation of the European Neighbourhood Instrument should be made more flexible to allow EU Delegations to cover a broader range of sectors and to respond to changing environments.
- **Resilience building measures:** The ENP provides an opportunity to bridge existing gaps between humanitarian interventions and longer term development policies. Increased attention needs to be given to building resilient societies by using all available EU tools to break down the barriers between the existing instruments, to increase flexibility and respond more effectively to partner countries' needs.
- **Force Majeure:** A fast track mechanisms should be added to the ENP toolbox to respond to *force majeure* incidents, including natural disasters, economic crises, instability and conflicts that require an adjustment of priorities to the rapidly evolving situation in a given country. In this context, the EU's analytical capacity should be strengthened - stronger partnerships between EU and local universities, think tanks and more effective coordination and exchange

with international organisations, including the United Nations should developed even before a crisis or conflict arises.

- **Bilateral aid:** A greater mix of available humanitarian and development modalities could allow for increased participation in the ENP by EU Member States through their bilateral aid and other mechanisms.

### Ownership

Developing ownership for the reform process in partner countries will be fundamental to create a long term perspective to the ENP. A number of actors contribute to building support and local ownership towards societal change and UNICEF believes the ENP provides an opportunity to engage with all actors involved: national governments, local administration, civil society, media, business community and public at large. Engaging local civil society organisations and adolescents will be of crucial importance to stimulate ownership and incremental demand for reforms.

- The EU should reinforce regional networks (and umbrella NGOs) on specific issues and build local civil society capacities.
- Building on the experience of decentralized governance and cooperation in some EU member states, the ENP should assist partner countries in implementing more effective and responsive decentralized administrative systems. Cooperation between sub-national authorities should be further encouraged.
- ENP should also encourage and provide incentive for horizontal partnerships across the region on child related issues. This would facilitate more intra-regional best practice sharing.

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Submitted by: UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)

Type of responded: United Nations Program

Location of Headquarters: New York, USA

Contact details: UNICEF Public Partnerships Division

Brussels Office

Rue d'Arlon, 80

1040 Brussels (Belgium)

Tel. 0032 2 213 0075

Email: [ndellarciprete@unicef.org](mailto:ndellarciprete@unicef.org); [mbauer@unicef.org](mailto:mbauer@unicef.org)