

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



15th PLENARY SESSION
Strasbourg, 27–29 May 2008

Child in the city

Recommendation 241 (2008)¹

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd sitting (see document CG(15)9REC, draft recommendation presented by S. Kalev (Estonia, L, NR), rapporteur).



1. Children's place in society, their protection, development and role as citizens are major preoccupations for elected representatives throughout Europe. Concerns about their health and safety could lead to a progressive withdrawal of children from urban public spaces thereby depriving them from fully experiencing their town or city and becoming fully-fledged citizens.
2. There is a close connection between sustainable development and building child-friendly towns and cities adapted to children's, young people's and families' differing needs. Places where the environment is protected, where economic and social disparities are addressed and where cultural diversity is welcomed are places which create the conditions necessary to prepare the world where children live and will be living.
3. Paradoxically, although the vast majority of Europeans now live in urban areas, town and city centres are seen as unattractive places to bring up families. This has led to those families with the means to do so moving out of city centres thereby increasing urban sprawl and automobile-dependency.
4. This trend is reinforced by current demographic changes which contribute to the ageing of the urban population and an increase in the number of childless households and single people. This situation limits inter-generational exchanges and poses a threat to the long-term vitality of urban centres since young families play an important role in a town or city's social cohesion and economic activity.
5. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe notes that the territorial level is responsible for many of the policies which have a major impact on children's lives. There is a need to provide local authorities with the means to foster an urban environment where the decision to have a child is made easier and which offers the population the necessary conditions to raise a family. Towns and cities need to become places where children can flourish.
6. Reconciling working and family life is of benefit to all generations. Caring responsibilities - whether for children, parents, relatives or the sick – call for a flexible working environment which allow people to combine their personal and work responsibilities. The paradigm shift necessary for this requires strong political leadership and reinforced partnerships with relevant stakeholders.
7. Local authorities have a major role to play in creating the necessary conditions regarding the natural and built environment to facilitate the mobility and activities of children. Inhabitants' isolation should be reduced and opportunities developed to enhance social interactions between the generations, cultures and different social groups. Children should be able to explore their locality playfully, safely and autonomously.
8. A desire to be guaranteed total protection currently pervades our attitudes to children. Whilst safety issues are crucial for parents and elected representatives alike, the risk-safety balance has shifted towards safety promotion in recent years. Policy-makers, the economic sector and parents have adopted an over-cautious approach. Media coverage of particular events probably reinforces these feelings of insecurity.
9. The Congress believes that all levels of governance have a responsibility to ensure a democratic and inclusive society where children enjoy their fair place in family, community and social life, as recommended by the UN Convention on the Rights on the Child (1989). Strong political will is required to ensure that children are treated as fully-fledged citizens and included in the decision-making processes on issues which affect their lives and their locality.

10. The Congress welcomes the Council of Europe programme 'Building a Europe for and with children' and is pleased to contribute to this programme with relevant innovative experiences taking place at local and regional levels. It notes with satisfaction that this programme ensures the European follow-up to the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children (2006), calling on governments to "encourage and assist local and municipal governments to reduce risk factors in the physical environment. Well-lit and safe public places available for children, including safe routes for children and adolescents to travel through their communities, should be included in urban planning."

11. *In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to invite its member States to:*

a. ensure that the rights of children are promoted and protected in legislation and in regulatory frameworks and that child-impact assessments are undertaken to evaluate policies on children's protection and well-being and in this respect, support the development of appropriate advice, advocacy services and complaints procedures;

b. develop policies, between all levels of governance, to implement integrated mobility solutions which encourage public transportation and 'soft' mobility and which improve the protection and security of all users, particularly the most vulnerable such as children ;

c. adapt spatial planning and urban development legislation to respond to the needs and interests of children and to encourage them to explore the built environment and understand how their town or city functions and:

i. set minimum standards regarding the amount of land that should be reserved for open space and play space so that play and sports areas are systematically included in urban development projects,

ii. develop norms regarding public furniture and public spaces which take into account children and parents as they move around the town or city and which reduce the specific constraints and obstacles they face,

iii. ensure that the risk-safety balance is taken into account with regard to safety norms for street and play furniture and avoid installation and renewal conditions which are too restrictive for local authorities following undue pressure from manufacturers of street and play furniture;

d. elaborate a national housing and accommodation policy which includes the right to housing as a fundamental principle and which the availability of high-quality, affordable housing in urban centres for young and reconstituted families;

e favour strategies to reconcile work and family life in employment legislation and elaborate policies based on partnerships between all levels of governance and all stakeholders in the fields of economy, health, education, transport and housing;

f. reinforce citizenship education in school programmes and encourage children's participation in democratic life at school and in consultation processes on urban planning and the environment.