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*Brussels,
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Dear Ms Papadopoulou, Dear Ms Kirdi, Dear Ms Panagou,

Thank you for your letter addressed to President von der Leyen, to which I am pleased to respond. Please accept my apologies for my delayed response. Firstly, please allow me to congratulate you on behalf of the European Commission as this initiative very much echoes the Commission's priorities on children's rights. I would also like to thank the children for their very accurate and insightful questions. In her speech before the European Parliament on her Political Guidelines for her second term as President of the European Commission, President von der Leyen stressed that one of the most fundamental choices we face is what kind of society we want for our children and grandchildren.

We are progressing on the achievements of the 2021 EU Strategy on the rights of the child, which will be the first comprehensive strategy to protect and promote children's rights across all relevant EU policies. On child participation, we have set up a new EU Children's Participation Platform that will function as a hub to connect child participation mechanisms across the EU and to give a voice to children on EU policy-making. Fostering children's participation is also an EU objective at global level, with the Youth Action Plan aiming to make children agent of change.

Unfortunately, as you point out, particularly in crisis situations, children's rights may be violated. Children need special protection due to the vulnerable situation they are in. Children are notably disproportionately affected by armed conflicts and are the primary victims. In nearly all the world's conflict zones, from the Sahel, Central and Eastern Africa to the Middle East, Ukraine, Syria, Gaza or Afghanistan, children represent as much as half of the affected population. Let me summarise the answers to children's questions and explain how the European Union (EU) is working on making sure that all children can enjoy their rights and their childhood. /..

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Regarding your question on child soldiers, the EU and the United Nations are working together to support efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflict. In some regions such as Uganda, the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Sudan and Syria, the EU provides assistance to children in need, by reintegrating children associated with armed forces and groups into families or alternative care and by bringing them back to school.

As education is central to preventing the use of children in conflict and to reintegration efforts, children associated with armed forces and groups are being prioritised for support to access education. To this end, the EU has increased humanitarian funding for education during emergencies over the last years and currently 10% of EU humanitarian budget is dedicated to education. In 2023, nearly 2 million girls and boys across the world were able to experience an education thanks to EU support.

Furthermore, in June 2024, the EU significantly updated its Children and Armed Conflict framework by adopting revised guidelines for EU actors in this area. In doing so, the EU has taken a strong stance to protect children caught in the crossfire of conflict and war across the world with particular emphasis on the six grave violations against children in times of war.

The protection of children in armed conflicts is also part of the Commission Recommendation on integrated child protection systems. The Commission indeed calls on EU Member States to mitigate the immediate and long-term impact of armed conflict on children, to prioritise the protection of children in conflict zones, and prevent and respond to the six grave violations against them. It also emphasises promoting compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law by all parties involved in a conflict and assisting the rehabilitation and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups and facilitate their return and reintegration into society.

In terms of whether child refugees enjoy equal rights, and who safeguards said rights, as recalled in the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, children's rights are human rights. Every child in Europe, and across the world, should enjoy the same rights and be able to live free of discrimination, recrimination, or intimidation of any kind. Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states that children have the right to such protection and care as it is necessary for their well-being. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child asks States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure that child refugees receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of their rights. The Recommendation on integrated child protection systems also insists on preventing any discrimination, including discrimination based on origin, and encourages Member States to build national integrated child protection systems that are ready to face the diversity of situation of migrant children. The best interests of the children remain central across the EU Asylum acquis, where they must be a primary consideration.

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The Pact on Migration and Asylum introduces additional safeguards and obligations on child protection. As stated in its Common Implementation Plan, the implementation of these rights, safeguards and guarantees serve to protect human dignity and ensure a genuine and effective right to asylum, including for the most vulnerable people and children.

To answer your question regarding if it is fair that classmates who have come from abroad can't understand what the teacher says during lessons and what should be done about this, in the Recommendation on integrated child protection systems, the Commission invites Member States to foster a safe and inclusive environment in education and in training, while fighting discrimination and responding to specific vulnerabilities. Regarding migrant children and children with a migrant background the recommendation insists on increasing their participation in education, while ensuring that schools are equipped to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children.

Children with characteristics related to causes of discrimination are more likely to face bullying. This is why in the Recommendation on integrated child protection systems, we encourage Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure that children are always treated without any discrimination and in a manner that protects their dignity. We also stress the need to provide targeted support to children at risk of discrimination.

In the Political Guidelines, President von der Leyen emphasised that one of our greatest challenges in this decade is protecting the mental health of our children and young people – especially online. Notably, she expressed the intention to combat the growing trend of abusive behaviour online with an action plan against cyberbullying.

While many ask why the European Union doesn't create a fund with the purpose of providing aid to children in regions and countries that are facing various issues, it should be noted that the EU is a major donor for humanitarian aid benefiting children in countries outside the EU. Ensuring their protection is a priority and the EU funds specific projects to protect children in humanitarian crises, including situations of conflict.

The EU provides ample funding opportunities to contribute to the protection of children from all forms of violence. To facilitate navigating different programmes, the Commission has put in place a single gateway for Union funds that enables users to find relevant funding opportunities. A number of other Union funding programmes can cover other specific concerns relating to child protection and children's well-being. For example, child poverty and social exclusion fall under the European Social Fund Plus, asylum, integration or return support targeting non-EU children fall under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, and access to non-segregated services in education, housing, healthcare, social care, and childcare under the European Regional Development Fund.

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Finally, regarding your query about whether it is possible to impose sanctions on EU Member States that do not implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, under the Treaties on which the European Union is based, the EU can only intervene with the Member States in the area of fundamental rights if an issue of EU law is involved.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an instrument from the United Nations, which is a different organisation to the European Union. It is important to emphasise that all 27 EU Member States are part of this Convention, yet the EU is not responsible for its execution. The respect of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is monitored by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Children whose rights have been violated have the right to complain to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child if their country has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. The Committee may ask the State to take measures to protect the child or the group of children or prevent any reprisals.

However, the EU can sometimes impose sanctions linked to human rights outside of the EU. Indeed, in 2020, the EU decided to establish a global human rights sanctions regime, which allows the EU to target individuals, entities and bodies associated with serious human rights violations and abuses. Sanctions currently apply to 67 natural and legal persons and 20 entities. The EU can also sometimes implement economic sanctions, economic restrictions, or diplomatic measures. For example, since July 2022, the EU has imposed sanctions against 16 individuals responsible for the deportation and forced transfer of Ukrainian children.

I hope that you and the children who prepared these questions will find the replies satisfactory. Please send them my warmest greetings and appreciation. You may also check if your organisation could possibly join the EU Children's Participation Platform to further elevate their voices.

Thank you for your efforts in promoting and protecting the rights of the child and echoing such important messages from children.

Yours sincerely,



Dubravka Šuica