

Welcome address

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At last! We are together and I can't describe how grateful we are for this opportunity to see you in-person here in Athens and online.

We already mentioned how challenging this year has been in our spring meetings, in our notes, and in our articles and interventions. We felt disconnected from ourselves, and children felt disconnected from their peers and from a sense of safety and normality in their everyday lives – making us all realize the importance of relationships and connections with other people. Moreover, during this period, the shortcomings and inconsistencies in our child protection systems at national and European levels became even more evident under the pressure of the state of emergency.

But the crisis is not over yet and no one can guarantee that new pandemics won't occur in the future. Our discussions today and tomorrow, our deep dive into the impact of the crisis on children's rights, using the UNCRC and its fundamental principles as a guide, is valuable not just in terms of a detached calm evaluation but also in terms of assessing our next steps and planning our strategy for the future.

Today, we will have the opportunity to explore the different aspects of the pandemic's impact from various angles, the Ombudspersons' and Commissioners' experience, the manifold mental health issues, the attempt for CRIA within the framework of our cooperation with UNICEF ECARO, the CDENF approach on the matter and our workshops on education, protection from violence, participation, adequate standard of living and health. Tomorrow, we will have the privilege to listen to our young advisors and learn more about the new EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child from representatives of the European institutions and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Our young advisors who have done an amazing work this year will also join us in our workshops today and they will be our rapporteurs for the plenary session.

It feels like we are culturally and globally at a crossroad of transitions. The pandemic crisis and its ongoing effect, the climate change (which is our next year's topic) and overarching economic factors create an unprecedented need for careful and thorough impact assessments, for robust strategies with concrete indicators, and for our active presence in the field.

This brings us to ENOC. Our Network holds the responsibility of defending and promoting children's rights while simultaneously contributing to the evolution of their interpretation, to a deeper understanding of what children need and how do they feel



and to the construction of a new social representation of the child as rights holder that actively participates in decision-making.

Therefore, it is important to openly share each of your experiences and ideas in this conference, to speak your truth and to ask all the questions that come in mind, and I wish you all a wonderful experience in the Conference and in Athens.

Finally, I would like to thank our distinguished guests and speakers, the Bureau, and our Chair Bruce Adamson for the amazing support, to thank Polina and Coralie because, let's be honest, without them ENOC does not exist, my team for bearing with me and especially Ms Anna Routsis and our working groups and experts for their brilliant work on the statements and report.