FAO: Mr Derek Baker

Permanent Secretary

Department of Education

Rathgael House

43 Balloo Rd

Bangor

BT19 7PR

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3 December 2018

Dear Derek

***Child and adolescent mental health in Europe***, 2018 comparative report ***Child Mental Health***, 2018 policy statement.

Last September, the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) held its 22nd Annual Conference “*Children’s Rights and wellbeing, promoting mental health*” in Paris hosted by the office of the Children’s Defender, France. This year’s Conference focused on mental health of children and young people, which you also will be aware is a priority of my office.

The annual event brought together Commissioners and Ombudspersons for Children from across Europe but also representatives of European and international organisations, the non-governmental sector, experts and young representatives. The objective was to draw a picture of the situation of children’s mental health in Europe, to provide a forum for the exchange of information and experience and to elaborate a set of measures aiming to ensure the right of children to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health.

In this context, we are pleased to share with you the [*ENOC 2018 report on child and adolescent mental health in Europe*,](https://www.niccy.org/media/3192/enoc-2018-report-on-child-mental-health-eng-fv.pdf) the findings of which are based on the feedback received from contributing ENOC members along with the [*ENOC position statement on Child Mental Health* adopted](https://www.niccy.org/media/3191/enoc-2018-statement-child-mental-health-fv.pdf) by the ENOC 22nd General Assembly in Paris. The report provides a European overview of public policies promoting mental health and draws a list of the main difficulties experienced in different European countries. It offers a set of provisions enhancing the rights and participation of children in in-patient care. Lastly, it focuses on issues related to exclusion and stigmatization of children facing mental disorders.

I am also pleased to inform you that NICCY made a considerable contribution to the development of the Statement and the supporting report through sharing our [Scoping papers on “Child and Adolescent Mental Health”, April 2017](https://www.niccy.org/media/2810/niccy-scoping-paper-mental-health-review-apr-2017.pdf) and the early findings of our [“Still Waiting” report](https://www.niccy.org/about-us/our-current-work/mental-health-review-still-waiting/still-waiting-a-rights-based-review-of-mental-health-services-and-support-for-children-and-young-people-in-northern-ireland/) which as you know was published at the end of September.

Besides, the policy statement on the same issue draws a number of recommendations aiming to improve respect of the fundamental rights of children affected by mental health issues.

Among others, those are related to:

* **The introduction and implementation of national children’s strategies,** based on the Rights of the Child as defined by the UNCRC and on consultation with children on the development of the strategy and throughout its implementation;
* **The implementation of human rights-based mental health legislation, regulations and standards,** with a particular emphasis on the definition of children’s consent to medical treatment and clearly acknowledging children’s evolving capacities;
* **Combating stigma through awareness and prevention,** bydesigning and implementing public awareness-raising and prevention campaigns focused on wellbeing and on enhancing evidence-based knowledge of all forms of mental health difficulties;
* **Promote child-centred, mentally healthy and inclusive schools,** bystrengthening anti-bullying policies and practices;
* **Develop specialist, comprehensive community based mental health care for children,** by putting in place nationwide, high quality, evidence-based, multi-disciplinary, community mental health care services, which span the continuum of care;
* **Ensure the provision of children’s rights based in-patient services,** by ensuring that it is mandatory to seek the fully informed consent of the child to receive in-patient treatment and by discontinuing the practice of admitting children to adult services;
* **Introduce European indicators to enhance a better understanding of Child mental health.**

It is important to stress that this statement was elaborated not only on the basis of the findings of the comparative report, but also on the informed views of a [panel of young people](http://enoc.eu/?page_id=2066) from ten ENOC countries/regions (including Northern Ireland) whose [recommendations are also enclosed to this letter.](https://www.niccy.org/media/3193/enya-2018-recommendations-on-mh.pdf)

Young people from NICCY’s Youth Panel played a very active role both in the young people’s meeting in June and the ENOC conference in September providing feedback on the views of a wide range of young people in Northern Ireland.

We hope this important piece of work delivered by ENOC and addressing a largely underestimated issue that is the one of child mental health in Europe will receive all the necessary attention.

Yours sincerely,

Koulla Yiasouma

**NI Commissioner for Children and Young People**