



## THE SEPARATED CHILDREN IN EUROPE PROGRAMME

STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 - 2015



March 2014

## 1. Introduction

This document sets out the strategic plan which will guide the work of the Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP) for a 2 year period including 2014 and 2015. It draws on previous strategy documents and the definitions within that strategy remain relevant to our work today and inform this current document.

As from 1 January 2013 Defence for Children has taken over the coordination of the SCEP Network from Save the Children Denmark. Save the Children Denmark has successfully coordinated the Network as from 1997. The key elements for the handover of the coordination were laid down in a framework agreement in December 2012 enabling a clear and effective transfer of the coordinating role from Save the Children Denmark to Defence for Children-The Netherlands (DCI-NL). The handover took place in a way that will allow SCEP to continue to deliver on its vision to further the rights of separated children and that SCEP will maintain its position as a credible, well governed and effective programme. DCI-NL has been involved with SCEP and the NGO Network for many years. When co-ordinating and leading European projects in relation to separated children DCI-NL has always sought the involvement of SCEP partners because they have proven to guarantee high quality work and have always been trustworthy partners. DCI-NL was closely involved with the last revision of the Statement of Good Practice and has been the lead of the thematic group on guardianship. The goal for the continuation of SCEP after the handover of the coordination is to guarantee a key European platform for the protection and promotion of the rights of separated children. It was decided by the Steering Committee of SCEP to develop a strategic plan for two years (2014-2015) instead of five years because a lot of activities of SCEP will depend on funding. The SCEP coordinator and SCEP partners have applied for various projects but at this date (March 2014) we are waiting for the outcomes of the applications. Therefore it appears to be most realistic and pragmatic to work on a Strategic Plan covering the next two years. During these years SCEP will work on a Strategic Plan post 2015.

SCEP purposely has a broad definition of the term 'separated child' thus putting children in a wide range of circumstances within our remit and it is useful to repeat our definition here;

**'Separated children are under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or their previous legal/customary primary caregiver. Some children are totally alone while others, who are also the concern of the Separated Children in Europe Programme, may be living with extended family members. All such children are separated children and entitled to international protection under a broad range of international and regional instruments. Separated children may be seeking asylum because of fear of persecution or the lack of protection due to human rights violations, armed conflict or disturbances in their own country. They may be the victims of trafficking for**

**sexual or other exploitation, or they may have travelled to Europe to escape conditions of serious deprivation'<sup>1</sup>**

## **2. Our Vision**

A commitment to the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is fundamental to the work of SCEP. The CRC has been ratified by all countries in the Council of Europe and European Union. We believe that all the articles within the CRC (and other international human rights instruments) are applicable to all separated children and must be the framework for all decisions affecting them. The Committee on the Rights of the Child's *General Comment no 6 on the Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children outside their Country of Origin* provides guidance on the protection, care and proper treatment of separated children and this should always be followed when decisions are being made concerning separated children. We would emphasise that all decisions relating to separated children must be sustainable and made in the best interests of the child. The meaning of these terms should be explored and expanded to ensure it is relevant in a range of contexts.

The vision that we developed during the preparation of our previous strategy document with which to drive forward our work is still relevant, and for the benefit of clarity that too is repeated here.

**The rights of all separated children entering or travelling across Europe will be realised; in particular, they will be protected, their well-being and development will be promoted, they will have opportunities to develop their full potential and they will participate in a meaningful way in the development of policies and practices that impact upon their lives.**

We believe that every separated child in Europe should;

- Feel safe, secure and loved, be listened to and have a responsible guardian to turn to.
- Receive accurate advice, appropriate guidance and support throughout their time in the receiving country.
- Be seen as a child first and foremost rather than simply a migrant or criminal subject to immigration control.
- Be seen as a unique individual.
- Be listened to and be involved in the design of procedures and services addressing their needs.
- Have their experiences acknowledged and validated.
- Have opportunities to achieve their full potential.
- Have their full range of needs, i.e. welfare, social, emotional and developmental addressed in relation to each other and not in isolation.

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<sup>1</sup> Separated Children in Europe Programme, Statement of good practice 4rd Edition 2009. Available at: [www.scepnetwork.org](http://www.scepnetwork.org).

### **3. Realising the Vision**

Our network partners<sup>2</sup>, steering committee members and coordinator will advance our vision by;

- The sharing of good practice within our network of NGO partners.
- The provision of reliable, current, relevant and accurate information.
- The development of clear, evidence based policy positions.
- Supporting the network partners to deliver direct services.
- The commissioning, support and development of appropriate and timely research and the dissemination of relevant findings.
- Timely, effective campaigning and targeted advocacy.
- Promoting the principle that separated children can participate in the development of a wide range of appropriate services, and where possible offering support and practical assistance to participatory initiatives involving separated children.

We recognise that if the programme is to develop and implement a strategy that is capable of delivering our vision we need to ensure that the network is robust and appropriately positioned to take full advantage of the collective experience, skills, motivation and overall capacity of our network partners. We want to ensure that we have a structure capable of delivering our goals and so we must strengthen the impact of the network and its outputs. We will;

#### **3.1 Strengthen our structure, our governance and our membership**

We want to ensure that we have the right partners within the network so that we can implement this strategy. Further we want to target our resources more effectively, improve our communication and be better placed to make sure our lobbying and advocacy makes an impact. We also want our steering committee to be fully in tune with the issues and challenges facing our partners in their work with separated children. We will;

- Continue with a two tiered system of membership thus accommodating the differing levels of engagement that partners can commit to the programme
- Develop and implement a variable membership fee scheme for partners
- Require that new partners sign a memorandum of understanding formalising their relationship with the programme. In 2014 we will not pro-actively seek new partners but if an NGO applies to become a member the Steering Committee will assess the request.
- The steering committee of four SCEP members, the coordinator and SCEP advisor monitors the structure, governance and work of SCEP and meets regularly via Skype.

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<sup>2</sup> SCEP's Network of NGO partners 'the network' consists of 33 NGO's from 28 European countries. The contact information of the various network partners is available on SCEP's website: [www.scepnetwork.org](http://www.scepnetwork.org).

### **3.2 Develop our network of NGO partners**

A great strength of SCEP is the network of 33 NGO partners working in 28 European countries. Indeed having network partners in so many diverse countries enables us to speak with almost unparalleled authority on the issues that currently affect separated children in Europe. However we want to make our network more effective by targeting the particular skills of our partners where they are most relevant. We also want to increase the effectiveness of the partnership between network partners and DCI-NL and we want to improve our mechanisms that enable network partners to input effectively into the lobbying, advocacy and policy development work. DCI-NL will contact the Network about relevant meetings and the partners can represent the SCEP Network during those meetings. We want the network to be a pool of expertise and experience within which partners can identify resource people and identify best and worst practice. We also want the network to speak 'with one voice' and to develop unified positions, standards and guidelines. We will;

- Support the thematic working groups that reflect the change objectives identified in this strategic plan and create new thematic groups if needed.
- Ensure partners are informed in advance of significant dates and events in the EU calendar.
- Depending on funding continue to hold 1 or 2 network meetings per year.
- Ensure the participation of the SCEP Network during relevant meetings. Network partners will be asked to represent the SCEP Network at meetings of stakeholders when the coordinator or the members of the Steering Committee are not able to attend a meeting or if the meeting is specifically linked to the expertise of a network partner. The SCEP representative will communicate the outcomes of the meeting to the SCEP Network members.
- Ensure visibility of the SCEP network by maintaining the SCEP website; [scepnetwork.org](http://scepnetwork.org) and continue publication of 2 newsletters every year. The SCEP website and newsletter have been renewed in 2013.

### **3.3 Review and develop our strategic alliances**

We believe that the most effective way to realise our vision and deliver on our strategic objectives is to work closely with other networks that have similar or complimentary mandates. We want these alliances to reflect our intention to work across the many identified 'categories' of separated children. Our alliances will inform our policy development, strengthen our advocacy capacity, maintain our profile and enhance our relevance across a range of issues that impact upon separated children. We will;

- Continue to develop general alliances with agencies who will endorse our work, promote our products and support our advocacy positions.
- Encourage our thematic groups and Network members to develop partnerships with smaller, regional or national agencies with a focus on a particular relevant issue.

### **3.4 Develop our financial sustainability**

If we are to deliver on our ambitious objectives we must identify and secure the necessary resources. Network partners are a primary resource in themselves, but we also need to secure the necessary financial income to fund our work. This will enable us to identify and set our own agenda, and create a stable independent base from which we can promote our work. We will;

- Receive in kind support from Defence for Children The Netherlands.
- The funding file with aims for the future and achievements will be maintained and can be used by all Network partners to seek for funding related to SCEP's work.
- Expect partners to meet their own costs associated with attendance at network meetings and other activities as appropriate.
- A variable membership fee.
- Search for an appropriate strategic partner with the ability to make a financial contribution to our on-going work.
- Seek out and actively pursue grant awards made available by the central EU funding bodies.

## **4. Our Goals and Change Objectives**

If we are to realise our vision then our work must bring about real and lasting change to the lives of the separated children on whose behalf we work. There are many issues that relate to the denial of the rights of separated children within Europe at the current time and the network partners are crucially aware of these issues. However there is recognition within the network of the need to prioritise our work. With this in mind the network partners have identified the following priority areas relating to legislation and practice that they feel need to change and on which our strategy should focus;

The main goals for 2014 and 2015 are linked to the thematic groups which have been most active in the last couple of years. These goals are;

- All separated children must be offered the appointment of a guardian whose duties and status will fully comply with the programme's Statement of Good Practice (SGP).
- Age assessment processes will comply with both the spirit and the practice outlined in the programme's SGP.

Furthermore SCEP will promote that;

- States will draw up, implement and adequately resource strategies aimed at the prevention of trafficking of children and the provision of adequate care and protection for child victims of trafficking. All separated children who are trafficked must be seen as children and as victims rather than criminals; their welfare must be safeguarded and promoted.

- The return and reintegration of separated children will only take place where this can be demonstrated to be in the child's best interest, having taken into account the views of the child as outlined in the CRC.
- The detention of separated children will cease.

## **4.1 Our Change Objectives**

The main change objectives for 2014 and 2015 are linked to the thematic groups which have been most active in the last couple of years. These objectives are linked to guardianship and age assessment. A new change objective is the implementation of a best interest of the child determination procedure for separated children in Europe.

### **4.1.1 Guardianship**

#### Long term objective, overall goal

Every separated child has a qualified and impartial guardian who ensures the best interest of the child.

#### Short term objectives

1. Guardianship is the right of the child.
2. The EU Commission has adopted standards on guardianship in line with the Statement of Good Practice and Core Standards for guardians of separated children in Europe ([www.corestandardsforguardians.com](http://www.corestandardsforguardians.com)).

#### SCEP will;

1. Seek collaboration with organizations and initiatives related to guardianship in Europe.
2. Attend meetings related to guardianship and inform participants about the Statement of Good Practice.
3. Will support the implementation of the Core Standards for guardians of separated children on a European level.

### **4.1.2 Age assessment**

#### Long term objective, overall goal

Separated children whose age is disputed enjoy all their rights (especially to protection) provided by national and international legal frameworks as a result of age assessment methods and procedures being in line with the Statement of Good Practice and SCEP's position paper on Age Assessment.

#### Short term objective

The majority of age assessment methods and procedures in the SCEP countries are consistent with the Statement of Good Practice.

SCEP will;

1. Closely monitor the age assessment procedures in Europe and will provide input to network members on a national level.
2. Will stay informed and attend meetings organized by the European Asylum Support Office related to Age Assessment.
3. Communicate and advocate for the use of SCEP's position paper on Age Assessment.

#### **4.1.3 Best Interest of the Child Determination procedure**

Long term objective, overall goal

A Best Interest of the Child determination procedure is developed and applied for separated children in Europe. This determination is based on *General Comment No. 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as primary consideration* and is in line with the Statement of Good Practice.

SCEP will;

1. Actively search for promising practices related to Best Interest of the Child Determination procedures (for instance the BID Panel in the USA and the work of UNHCR and UNICEF).
2. Will stay informed and attend meetings related to Best Interest of the Child determination procedures.
3. Will support or potentially endorse promising methodologies to determine the best interest of the child on national and European level.

**Furthermore the SCEP Network aims to stay informed and will advocate for change related to the following topics;**

#### **4.1.4 Trafficking**

Long term objectives, overall goals:

Every Child is guaranteed prevention and protection from trafficking

1. protection systems exist
2. professionals are capable through training

SCEP will;

Stay updated on trafficking issues and act as a watchdog in relation to

1. legislative systems and related documents
2. best practices on capacity building

#### **4.1.5 Return and reintegration**

##### Long term objectives, overall goals

1. Return is only one of the potential durable solutions. It is an individual durable solution that can be the outcome of an independent Best Interest of the Child Determination (BID) process.
2. Evidence of how a decision has considered a child's view is shown in decisions about the child's future.
3. States involved in returns of children follow best practice in family tracing and assessments.

##### Short term objectives

1. The ageing out group is understood to be vulnerable and provided with protection
2. Legal representation should always be available to the child for free.

#### **4.1.6 Detention**

##### Long term objective, overall goal:

1. Detention of separated children will cease.

#### **4.2 Our aims and approach**

We aim to realise our change objectives by striving to;

##### **4.2.1 Raise awareness of relevant issues and their impact upon separated children. We will,**

- *Develop and maintain the SCEP website and newsletter*
- *Maintain, review, revise, promote and disseminate the SGP*

##### **4.2.2 Inform and influence relevant policy makers, at both national and European level, on the impact of their policies and practices upon separated children. We will,**

- *Prepare and disseminate policy and position papers*
- *Analyse the impact of EU Directives and Regulations*
- *Share good practice through network meetings, the Network website and emails.*

##### **4.2.3 Enhance the skills and knowledge base of relevant practitioners and inform the development and delivery of direct services in regard to both the protection and well being needs of separated children.**

##### **4.2.4 Listen to, empower, and involve separated children in the development of our work.**

*We will,*

- *Support participation projects at national level*
- *The coordinator of SCEP will seek input from separated children for the work of SCEP via projects of partners (for instance consultation via Skype with the youth group of the Irish Refugee Council).*