

NETHERLANDS EU PRESIDENCY



PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FROM A CHILD RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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About Eurochild



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Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

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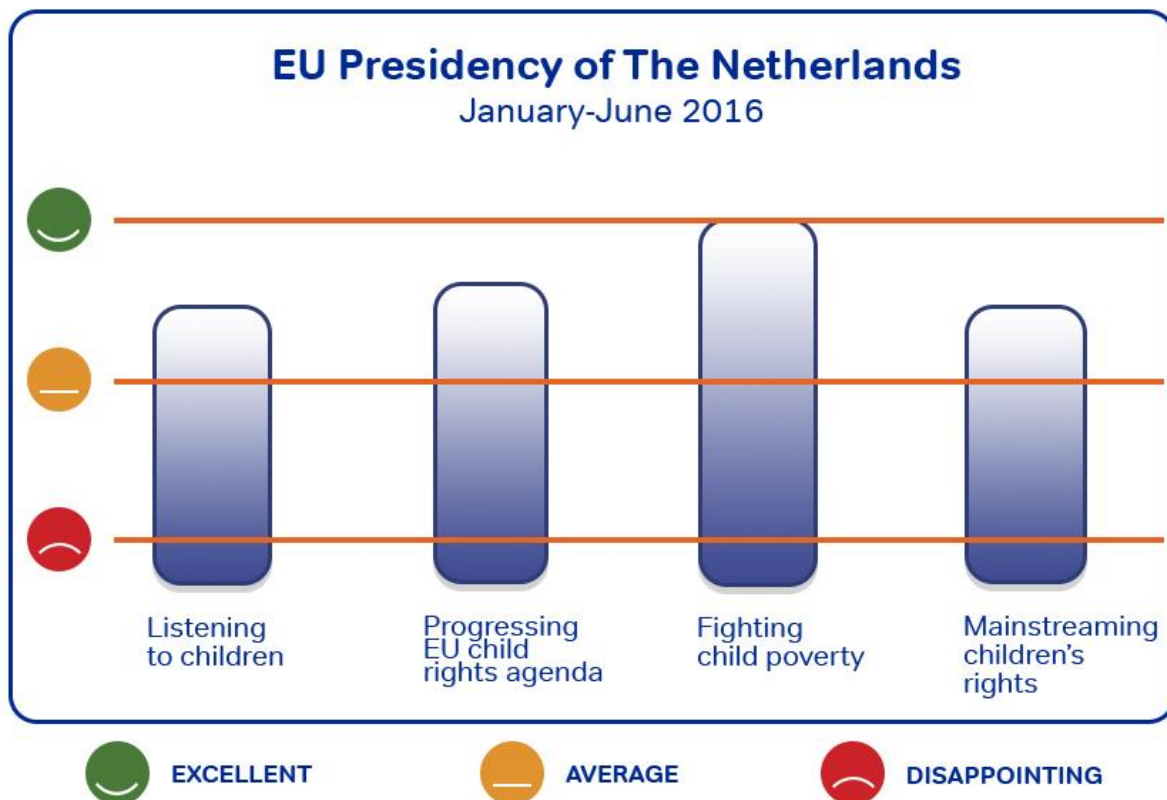


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SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

The Netherlands Presidency undertook a work programme that reflected a commitment to the social dimension of the EU. The main priority areas that positively advanced the rights of the child were within the remits of migration, education, employment and poverty. The Presidency gave special attention to the issue of integrating migrants into the existing fabric of the EU and held a number of events on the challenges posed by the migrant crisis. Poverty was also high on the agenda which resulted in the adoption of the Council Conclusions on 'Combating poverty and social exclusion: an integrated approach'. The Presidency also focused on education as a tool for addressing the skills gap to foster job growth and embarked upon their very own educational journey as teachers. The 'EU back to school' programme enabled members of the Presidency and EU institutions to engage in interactive lectures with young people on current EU issues and the workings of the institutions.

During their 6 month tenure of the EU Presidency, Member States have an important responsibility to ensure that the rights and well-being of children remain high on the EU political agenda. Children represent 20% of our present, and 100% of the future. Strong, genuine commitment to children's rights and well-being is an investment in the future; it is also an obligation to which all Member States have signed up under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This is the ninth in a series of assessments of EU Presidencies. It assesses performance on four criteria: listening to children, vision and leadership for strong children's rights strategy, action and cooperation at EU level to fight child poverty, and children's interests in the Presidency programme. This scorecard evaluates the extent to which a Member State promotes children's rights during their tenure of the 6-month EU Presidency. It does not reflect how well the country fares in its overall treatment of and investment in children and young people.



Find this and all other EU Presidency Scorecards [here](#).

Did they listen to children?

During the Netherlands Presidency, children between the ages of 10 to 12 years old had the opportunity to be a journalist for a day, taking over the [EU2016NL](#) Instagram account. Children attended a handful of conferences, one being the Capital Conference, where mayors from 28 EU Member States were present and participating. The children were able to ask questions and talk to high-level speakers about different social and economic issues. The children gathered information which they then used to create messages and posts that were shared on the Dutch Presidency's Instagram account.

In April 2016, over 200 children and young people along with policy makers across Europe met in Amsterdam for four days to participate in the [EU Youth Conference](#) held by the Netherlands Presidency. The conference was entitled 'Ready for life, ready for society' and the overarching theme was 'enabling all young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe'. Together, the youth delegation and policy makers discussed ways in which young people could harness their full potential within the context of a digital and multicultural age. All young participants were asked to interview three young people in their home country in order to uncover the biggest challenges facing young people today. A particular focus of the conference was also on marginalized groups of young people, especially those with mental health issues or a migrant background. The final day of the conference concluded with a debate on the issue of radicalization and potential solutions that could prevent youth from becoming radicalized. A number of 'guiding questions' were produced which young participants will then use to consult with peers in their home countries. The results will be made public later this year during the Slovak EU Presidency. The Youth Conference is the first in a cycle of three planned during the Trio Presidency of the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta and forms part of the [structured dialogue process](#).

The Netherlands Presidency also played host to a series of interactive guest lectures entitled '[EU back to school](#)' by officials from EU institutions and ministries to young people in secondary school and university. The lessons give young people the opportunity to discuss European issues and voice their opinions and experiences. It is also an educational experience as young people become aware of current issues within the EU.

Did they progress the EU child rights agenda?

The Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations hosted a seminar for representatives of Member States on applying the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) to national policy making and legislative processes. Member States could speak about challenges they faced when applying the Charter at a national level and were able to exchange and identify best practice. The Charter clearly enshrines the rights of the child (Article 24), providing for specific rights that are relevant to children and which are directly binding on all EU institutions. Therefore this seminar on applying the Charter can also be seen as progressing and improving the application and implementation of children's rights across EU institutions.

The issue of migration was high on the list of the Netherlands Presidency which hosted over four seminars and conferences on EU fundamental values and the integration of refugees. Discussions ranged from issues such as addressing migrant smuggling to looking more specifically at ensuring that national migration policy complies with EU principles and values. Within these debates, there

was a focus on child-related issues including those of family reunification and the nature of reception centres for unaccompanied minors.

On May 25th, International Missing Children's Day, the Dutch Minister of Justice and Security announced a European police network for missing children experts. [AMBER Alert Europe](#) set up the network which will allow experts of 'missing persons experts' to more speedily facilitate cross-border cooperation. This initiative of the Dutch Presidency gained the support of 465 Members of the European Parliament from 28 Member States and 9 political groups, all of whom signed [AMBER Alert Europe's Written Declaration](#). The Written Declaration seeks to improve European cooperation on saving the lives of missing children and is the most successful declaration since 2011.

Did they strengthen EU cooperation to fight against child poverty?

Fighting against poverty and social exclusion has been one of the key priorities of the Netherlands Presidency. At the [Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth 2016](#), Jetta Klijnsma, Secretary of State for Employment and Social Affairs of the Netherlands reiterated the Presidency's commitment to the fight against poverty. She emphasized the importance of consulting with real life experts including children on tackling poverty and firmly stated that 'inclusive growth starts with children'.

There have been a number of events on combating poverty through the use of social protection systems and engagement with local citizens. The [24th annual European Social Services Conference \(ESSC\)](#), held in conjunction with the Presidency, looked at how governments can work together with local communities to develop more sustainable societies in the face of poverty. The conference also highlighted ways that local public authorities can more effectively respond to social and economic challenges.

The most substantial step taken in the fight against poverty, was the adoption of the [Council Conclusions on 'Combating poverty and social exclusion: an integrated approach'](#). The conclusions were adopted by all 28 EU Member States at the [EPSCO council](#) and calls on Member States and the Commission to implement an integrated approach to fighting poverty and social exclusion.

This is a welcome step in addressing child poverty and promoting children's well-being. This integrated approach to fighting poverty is outlined in the [Recommendation on Investing in Children](#). At the 'Making child poverty policies real' conference in Dublin, Jetta Klijnsma reaffirmed the Dutch Presidency's commitment to the Recommendation. The conference which was held by Eurochild's member organisation Children's Rights Alliance Ireland with the support of the Eurochild secretariat, explored the ways in which policy commitments can be translated into reality at a national level.

By adopting these conclusions, Member States have committed to placing the fight against poverty and social exclusion high on their political agenda. This newfound commitment also supports the implementation and achievement of the [EU 2020 strategy](#) and its goal to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty by 20 million.

Eurochild commends the Presidency for its collection of good practices on integrated approaches to tackling poverty across Europe that has been published as an addendum to the Council Conclusions. The addendum is particularly useful within the children's rights field as it outlines innovative approaches for fighting child poverty and social exclusion. Whilst welcoming the Council Conclusions and associated addendum, Eurochild calls on the Dutch Presidency to advance a national action plan

for targeting child poverty with accompanying performance indicators. Although the 'Kindpakket' is a positive mechanism for supporting families, complementary social protection tools, which directly address the root causes of poverty, must be put in place. Additionally, the Dutch government should continue to fulfil its commitments under the UNCRC by withdrawing its reservation to article 26, thus fully respecting the child's right to benefit from social security. We look forward to the Trio Presidency implementing these Council Conclusions and best practices to fight poverty and hope that clear concrete actions to support Member States will be taken forward.

Did they mainstream children's rights throughout their programme?

In the context of high rates of youth unemployment and large influxes of refugees and migrants, education is seen as an important part of the solution to current challenges facing Europe. Under the auspices of the Netherlands Presidency, a conference was held on vocational education and skills. This event looked at providing skills that would enable future candidates to successfully obtain an entry-level position in the labour market. The ideas taken from the conference were integrated into the broader framework of the ['New Skills Agenda'](#) for Europe adopted by the Commission on 10 June 2016. The New Skills Agenda aims to ensure that people develop a broad set of skills from early on in life in order to make the most of Europe's human capital.

Education is also seen as a tool for further strengthening socio-economic development and inclusiveness throughout the EU and this was incorporated into a [resolution](#) adopted by the Council on 24th February 2016. The resolution calls for more targeted investment in education in order to close existing skills gaps and restore jobs. Education was also linked to promoting citizenship and encouraging social inclusion. A subsequent workshop was held that focused specifically on the challenge of providing education for asylum seekers.

The Dutch Presidency did not only influence education policy at EU-level but officials embraced their role as direct educators. One of the priorities of the Presidency was 'a Union that connects with society'. Officials of the Presidency visited secondary schools and higher education institutions to talk to students about the importance of the European Union and the role of the Presidency of the Council. The series kicked-off with Lodewijk Asscher, Minister of Social Affairs and Employment giving a [press conference](#) to more than 100 editors of school newspapers.