

# **The European Child Guarantee**

**Eurochild input to the Roadmap published by  
the European Commission**

**POSITION PAPER**



**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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## **Eurochild welcomes the initiative to create a European Child Guarantee**

On 19 August 2020 the European Commission presented a Roadmap<sup>1</sup> on the European Child Guarantee, opening up for inputs from the public for a period of seven weeks.

Eurochild, having followed the initiative since its inception at the European Parliament, including as part of the consortium carrying out phase I of the feasibility study on the child guarantee, is pleased the European Commission outlined this important initiative.

The latest statistics indicate that 23.4 % of children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2018. The economic recession following the pandemic will dramatically increase poverty levels, including child poverty levels across Europe. The value and urgency of the initiative is therefore very apparent.

**As partner of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children, Eurochild supports the joint submission to this consultation.<sup>2</sup>**

### **Eurochild in particular welcomes that in the Roadmap the European Commission...:**

- Acknowledges and prioritises the consequences the **ensuing economic crisis** will likely have on children in need, and will aim to ensure that the Child Guarantee helps mitigate its negative effects. All efforts going forward need to take account of the realities of children across Europe, recognising that support needs would have shifted or increased in the past months.
- Considers that the 2013 European Commission Recommendation on **Investing in Children** provided a helpful framework for steering policies for preventing and tackling child poverty. Presented as part of the Social Investment Package and a milestone in the EU's achievements to end child poverty, the Investing in Children framework is as relevant as ever for taking a child centred approach in poverty reduction.
- Supports a stronger policy instrument that takes the shape of a **Council Recommendation**, as that will help hold Member States accountable to its realisation. The 2013 Investing in Children Recommendation lacked support and implementation at national level. The Council Recommendation also allows Eurochild's national member organisations to support EU Member States in the implementation of the Child Guarantee.
- Takes action to **encourage, support and complement Member States' activities**, while respecting their overall responsibility for policy reforms. There is immense value in the political ownership surrounding the initiative bringing with it the potential to trigger waves of structural reforms across sectors and across the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> public consultation on the Roadmap on a Council Recommendation for a Child Guarantee  
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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/contribution-of-the-eu-alliance-for-investing-in-children-to-the-european-commission-public-consultation-on-the-child-guarantee/>

- Links the policy development on the European Child Guarantee to the ongoing finalisation of **the 2021-2027 EU budget**, and the new opportunities it gives to Member States to invest necessary financial instruments in the fight against child poverty. It is an opportunity to align the policy framework the Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee will provide with matching priorities in the various financial instruments of the next Multiannual Financial Framework.
- Recognises the **difference in needs as well as the commonality of challenges** of different Member States. This acknowledgement is not just crucial for national level ownership, but also to ensure all possible dimensions are taken into account in the national strategies on child poverty.
- Foresees implementation through a well-established mechanism. We particularly welcome the proposal to have both national strategies for tackling child poverty and social exclusion as well as “Child Guarantee National Action Plans” to hold Member States accountable to commitments and actions, budget allocations and impact.

**Notwithstanding the important progress, Eurochild encourages the European Commission to:**

1. **Capitalise on the high level political commitment from the EU to call for long-term structural reforms for better outcomes for children in EU Member States**

The Child Guarantee is an opportunity to recommend that every Member State sets a **concrete target** for reducing child poverty, as measured by the AROPE indicator within the framework of its multi-annual national strategy (at least until 2030).

To frame that it will be essential that the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation calls on Member States to adopt multi-annual national strategies, covering at least the period until 2030, where that **entails all public policies intended to prevent and tackle child poverty and social exclusion.**

The European Child Guarantee Council Recommendation should reinforce the message to all Member States, as is done in the 2013 Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children, to “organise and implement policies to address child poverty and social exclusion, promoting children’s well-being, through multi-dimensional strategies...”<sup>3</sup>

The Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee should offer the guiding logic for such national strategies to cover:

- Access to adequate resources
- Access to affordable quality services + culture and leisure activities
- Participation in decision making

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<sup>3</sup> COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION of 20 February 2013 *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (2013/112/EU)

- And be guided by the *investing in children* horizontal principles<sup>4</sup>

It is important to refer to the **whole policy spectrum in the national strategies** and not solely to access to services. It is equally important that the national strategies address prevention as well as policy interventions – thereby also describing the universal policies they have in place for all children.

National strategies on reducing child poverty and social exclusion should include the important component of the families' **access to adequate financial resources**, the role of the welfare state, the labour market and the economy. Children's access to high quality and affordable services needs to go hand in hand with reforms aimed at tackling inequality and income poverty.

Similarly, the **meaningful engagement of children in decision-making** should be an integral part of national strategies. In 2017 the European Commission advised Member States to pay particular attention to child participation when detailing the contents of Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>5</sup> stating that "*national strategies on child participation could be put in place to promote awareness on how to involve children in all actions and decisions that concern them*".

Furthermore, by carrying the *investing in children* approach, the national strategies will by nature not only focus on children most in need, but also on prevention and early intervention.

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<sup>3</sup> The horizontal principles

1. Tackle child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies that go beyond ensuring children's material security and promote equal opportunities so that all children can realise their full potential;
2. Address child poverty and social exclusion from a children's rights approach, in particular by referring to the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the European Union, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, making sure that these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled;
3. Always take the child's best interests as a primary consideration and recognise children as independent rights-holders, whilst fully acknowledging the importance of supporting families as primary carers;
4. maintain an appropriate balance between universal policies, aimed at promoting the well-being of all children, and targeted approaches, aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged
5. Ensure a focus on children who face an increased risk due to multiple disadvantage such as Roma children, some migrant or ethnic minority children, children with special needs or disabilities, children in alternative care and street children, children of imprisoned parents, as well as children within households at particular risk of poverty, such as single parent or large families;
6. Sustain investment in children and families, allowing for policy continuity and long-term planning; assess how policy reforms affect the most disadvantaged and take steps to mitigate any adverse effects.

<sup>5</sup> Staff Working Document accompanying Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights, SWD(2017) 201 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017SC0201&from=en>

This will help to monitor the extent of universal support and the choices of targeted policies across Europe.

Within the section on children's access to affordable quality services it is also important to take an integrated approach. Eurochild encourages the European Commission to broaden the existing scope of *early childhood education and care* to look at *early childhood development*, thereby taking a more child-centred approach. By emphasising the importance of early years from the perspective of a child's development the role of family in caregiving, social inclusion and support services and needs of children aged 0 to school age are framed in a broad scope than the education system. With regard to the ECEC services being part of ECD we encourage that the Child Guarantee promotes the national application of the European Quality Framework<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, children at risk of entering or in the care system need special attention, given that growing up in poverty is often a contributing factor for family separation. Family strengthening, the support of children in alternative care, and the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care should form part of the national strategies. To break a cycle of disadvantage support for young people ageing out of care should be also included. Strengthening of child protection systems contributes to keeping families together, the, and social protection of young people.

The **national Action Plans on the Child Guarantee** would be the place to focus in particularly on children in vulnerable situations. Member States will need to identify children particularly at risk and in extreme poverty, the gaps in existing measures, and planned actions Member States will commit to under the Child Guarantee to support their access to services in particular, including the budgetary sources of investments.

## **2. Put in place a robust monitoring system**

Monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee at European level is essential. Eurochild recommends that the AROPE indicator be complemented by other key 'indicators' that ensure a comprehensive understanding of child poverty and social exclusion. This should include a focus on early childhood development and the transition from institutional care to family- and community-based care. Coordination with the European and national statistical offices will be key to ensure comparable data collection across the EU. Disaggregation by age of relevant indicators should be foreseen.

## **3. Ensure that EU funds are mobilised to prevent and tackle child poverty**

The specific reference to the European Commission's amendment of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) proposal is welcome, asking for EU Member States to earmark 5% of their

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<sup>6</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (2019/C 189/02)

ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty, especially as it links to the service areas of the Child Guarantee. To ensure its strategic use and monitoring aligned with the priorities set in each country, EU Member States should be requested to wait with using the 5% ESF+ resources<sup>7</sup> for tackling child poverty until the multiannual strategies and Child Guarantee Action Plans have been developed and agreed. This will be in line with thematic enabling condition 4.3. of the Common Provision Regulation requiring national strategic policy frameworks for poverty reduction and social inclusion, including child poverty. As national Operational Programmes (OP) for the structural funds will be in effect as of January 2021, they are under development while the EU budget negotiations are taking place. In the coincidental phase, the European Commission could consider issuing an internal operational guidance note to support with operational planning discussions for the 5% earmarking.

#### **4. Promote the engagement of civil society**

Eurochild's membership spreads across all EU member states, and beyond the borders of the EU. We can not only contribute with expertise but capacity to realise the Child Guarantee across Europe. We urge the Commission to invite Member States to meaningfully engage civil society working with and for children in the design, implementation and monitoring of the Child Guarantee Action Plans and national strategies on child poverty and social exclusion.

At a European level, opportunities for regular stocktaking on progress, with the involvement of civil society organisations and national and EU policy-makers should be provided.

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<sup>7</sup> Or equivalent agreed in the trilogies on ESF+ regulation