

# Working Paper on a 'Child Guarantee'



## About Eurochild



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 working papers are exploratory texts that allow for discussions on emerging policy areas and their implications on children's rights.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2014-2020. For further information please consult <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>. The views expressed by Eurochild do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.



## What is the Child Guarantee?

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On 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015, a cross-party majority of MEPs approved a [resolution](#) to combat child poverty through the introduction of a Child Guarantee. The resolution was led by the Socialists and Democrats group in the European Parliament, and states:

*“The European Parliament...calls on the Commission and the Member States, in view of the weakening of public services, to introduce a child guarantee so that every child in poverty can have access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition, as part of a European integrated plan to combat child poverty including both the Child Guarantee and programmes offering support and opportunities for the parents to come out of social exclusion situations and to integrate the labour market...”*

The details of how a Child Guarantee might be designed and implemented in practice are currently being discussed at EU level.

**This paper seeks to explore the concept of such a European initiative, highlight the current policy context and outline Eurochild’s position and key messages to influence further development.**

## Policy context at an EU level – an opportunity?

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- The European Commission [Recommendation on Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage](#) (2013) provides clear guidelines to Member States on how to tackle child poverty, through integrated strategies based on three key pillars.<sup>1</sup> It recommends the use of structural and investment funds to implement the Recommendation, and paves the way for monitoring progress through the EU’s over-arching economic governance framework – the European semester. In 2015, 428 MEPs signed a [Written Declaration on Investing in Children](#) which calls on the European Commission and the European Council to apply measures that help Member States<sup>2</sup> implement the Recommendation on Investing in Children.
- A [‘Youth Guarantee’](#) was adopted by the European Commission in April 2013 to ensure young people’s successful transition into work. The European Council created a [Youth Employment Initiative](#) which increases the EU financial resources available to support the implementation of national Youth Guarantee schemes. Under the Youth Guarantee, Member States are required to put in place measures to ensure that young people up to the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving school or becoming

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<sup>1</sup> The three pillars are access to adequate resources, access to affordable quality services and children’s right to participate. See [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Read the Written Declaration on Investing in Children [here](#).

unemployed. Despite criticism over the level of implementation across the EU member states, the initiative is acknowledged as bringing the challenge of youth unemployment to the forefront of political debate.

- The **Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF) 2014-2020 lays down the maximum annual amounts which the EU may spend in different political fields. Emphasis is placed in the MFF on the importance of deinstitutionalization and on using European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to promote social inclusions and tackle poverty. The mid-term review of the MFF is scheduled for the end of 2016<sup>3</sup> to assess the spending priorities of the EU. This provides an opportunity for the European Council to commit to an increased overall budget envelope targeted at supporting the rights and wellbeing of children and young people and to improve and clarify the accompanying instruments that support implementation.

## **The size of the challenge – child poverty across the EU**

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Eurochild warmly welcomes the focus at a European level on tackling child poverty, recognising that urgent action is required to address the rising numbers of child poverty across the EU. Of the 100 million people under the age of 18 in the European Union, over 26 million are at risk of poverty or social exclusion – this is more than one child in every four. The percentage of children living at risk of poverty or social exclusion varies significantly between Member States: Norway (11.9%), Iceland (13.7%) and Denmark (14.5%) have the lowest levels of persons under 18 at risk, whereas Hungary (41.8%), Bulgaria (45.2%) and Romania (50.5%) have the highest.<sup>4</sup>

A Child Guarantee initiative could help to increase political visibility and build the momentum needed at local, regional and national level to protect and promote the rights of children.<sup>5</sup> Addressing child poverty is both a moral and economic imperative. Europe's future prosperity depends on every child being able to realise his/her full potential.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Find out more [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> [Eurostat data here](#).

<sup>5</sup> The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) requires all Member States to guarantee all children the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27) and to the highest attainable standard of health (Article 24).

<sup>6</sup> [Childonomics](#) is a Eurochild research project aimed at developing a tool to determine the long-term social and economic return of investing in children.

Eurochild recommends that a European Child Guarantee initiative should take into consideration the following key concerns:

### 1) Child poverty and social exclusion is best addressed through integrated strategies and action plans developed at national and sub-national level

The EC Recommendation on Investing in Children provides widely endorsed policy guidance on the most effective approach to address child poverty and social exclusion. However to have an impact on the lives of children, its principles need to be reflected in strategies and action plans developed, implemented and monitored at national and/or at sub-national level. The active involvement of different stakeholders - policy makers, practitioners, academics and children and families experiencing poverty themselves – will be key to success.

A child guarantee at EU level must mobilise national efforts, for example by making access to the guarantee fund conditional on the existence of a local, regional or national action plan.

### 2) An EU-level sub-target on child poverty would support political commitment

Eurochild recommends that a **target to reduce child poverty is added to the Europe 2020 Strategy commitments**, supported by a specific child poverty indicator as part of the European Semester Annual Growth Survey. This would help to ensure that the European Semester, the annual mechanism in place to monitor the Europe 2020 targets at the national level, better delivers for children.<sup>7</sup> The **Sustainable Development Goals** include a specific target to reduce child poverty and could help to support a more ambitious agenda at EU level.<sup>8</sup>

A separate EU fund will only be a drop in the ocean compared to the size of the challenge of sustainably reversing the rise in child poverty across Europe. It would need careful design to avoid a silo approach. Rather it needs to complement and stimulate best use of existing, more substantial resources at EU and at national level.

For example, there remains significant potential to better harness the European Structural and Investment Funds on investing in children. Recent national seminars have helped raise awareness among managing authorities and local stakeholders of the availability of funds to support investing in children, but there is little follow-up and monitoring of their impact.

Likewise links need to be made to other EU-level programmes, such as the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and even the broader Investment Plan championed by Juncker and Vice-President Katainen. Eurochild's

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<sup>7</sup> Find out more [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> **Goal 1:** End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Target: By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

working paper on 'A child-centred investment strategy,' provides a framework for exploring these EU-level programmes in a way which positively facilitates the prioritization of funds for children.

Most importantly, such an initiative needs to support prioritization of children in national budget planning, reversing austerity-driven public spending cuts in early childhood services, prevention and early intervention, welfare support, and education<sup>9</sup>.

### 3) A child guarantee could be strategically used to support child budgeting

Bearing in mind the above 3 considerations, Eurochild believes that such a child guaranteed fund would have greatest impact if it were used to help the EU, member states and sub-national governments better plan and budget for investment in children. So called child budgeting is advocated by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the recently adopted General Comment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on better public spending<sup>10</sup> gives further policy guidance on how governments can better plan, implement and monitor public expenditures on children. Wales is the only territory in the European Union where a government has attempted a child-focused budget analysis.<sup>11</sup> In Northern Ireland, the Office of the Children's Commissioner commissioned a review of public expenditure on children by the Dartington Social Research Centre in 2014. The report entitled *Fund Mapping: the investment of public resources in the well-being of children and young people*,<sup>12</sup> published in October 2015, provided a snapshot of expenditure on children. In Belgium, the Ministry of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels has recently carried out a study to identify and analyse international experiences of child budgeting. With reference to the lessons learned from these experiences, guidelines have been drawn up for the implementation of similar mechanisms in Federation Wallonia-Brussels.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 12, Children of the Recession](#)

<sup>10</sup> Access the final draft of the 2016 General Comment 19 on Public Spending [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> National Assembly for Wales (2009) [Children's Budgeting in Wales](#), Children and Young People Committee, Wales: National Assembly for Wales.

National Assembly for Wales (2009) [Financial Provision for Children within the Assembly Government Budget: A summary](#), Wales: National Assembly for Wales.

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Welsh Government (2015) [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2016-17 Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

<sup>12</sup> Dartington Social Research Unit (2015) *Fund Mapping: the investment of public resources in the well-being of children and young people*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner. Available at: <http://www.niccy.org/media/1669/niccy-budget-report-final-oct-15.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> 'Exploratory Analysis of child budgeting', Federation Wallonia-Brussels in cooperation with Eurochild and Anne Crowley, May 2016.

One of the key demands of the children's rights manifesto to which 100 elected MEPs signed up to during the 2014 European Parliament elections was to "secure adequate funding for children in EU instruments and monitor the impact of EU aid on children's lives"<sup>14</sup>.

Eurochild will strongly support the initiative of the Socialists and Democrats group to establish a child guarantee initiative, if it is designed in such a way to catalyze best use of public resources at different levels. Eurochild believes that using such a fund to improve children's budgeting at regional, national and EU level will increase transparency, improve policy making and generate greater political buy-in from cross-party political groups.

Eurochild looks forward to further discussions with EU policy makers and politicians and engaging our broad membership<sup>15</sup> in further developing our recommendations regarding such an initiative.

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<sup>14</sup> [Child Rights Manifesto](#)

<sup>15</sup> Eurochild has 178 members, of which 133 are full members, 42 associate members and 3 honorary members in 33 countries. 19 national networks of children's rights organisations have been appointed as National Partner Networks.