

Protecting children's rights to build a Social Europe

**Eurochild's contribution on the
Action Plan to implement
the European Pillar of Social Rights**

POSITION PAPER



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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Since its launch in 2017, Eurochild has welcomed the Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar) by acknowledging the positive impacts that **sound social policies** and **social protection systems** can have on our society. The 20 principles enshrined in the Social Pillar can indeed contribute to greater upward economic and social convergence and enhance the resilience of our society. Furthermore, Eurochild acknowledges that many of these principles are relevant to the **rights and well-being of children**, including those addressing minimum income, access to essential services, work-life balance, education, housing and assistance for the homeless. The Social Pillar has also promoted high-level debates on social and employment policies in the Union and reflections on how investing in children can contribute to a more inclusive and prosperous European Union (EU).

Eurochild appreciates the European Commission's decision to launch a broad discussion with EU countries, regions and civil society organisations on the future implementation of the Social Pillar. Indeed, despite the pivotal positive momentum created by the establishment of the Social Pillar, it is now necessary to set up an **ambitious Action Plan** and ensure that the implementation of the Social Pillar will be the engine of our social resilience. Eurochild is calling for a **comprehensive implementation plan** of the Social Pillar that **puts children and their rights at its forefront**. Protecting children's rights is a fundamental prerequisite to have a social, resilient and equal society.

This document aims at responding to this pivotal opportunity by setting out Eurochild's position and a number of recommendations. The paper is divided into three parts:

1. The first summarises Eurochild's **key recommendations** on the implementation of the Social Pillar
2. The second focuses on **Principle 11** by highlighting the necessity of **investing in children** to tackle child poverty and build a stronger social Europe
3. The third analyses different principles and underlines the necessity to adopt a **comprehensive child-rights based approach**

1. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Social Pillar is not only about raising awareness about the importance of social investment, nor it is an isolated shop-window for social issues. The Social Pillar must have a robust implementation plan that ensures its 20 principles are followed through with determination. To ensure a stronger social Europe, Eurochild emphasises the following key points.

➤ The Action Plan should exploit its political weight, structures and procedures to support the prioritisation of tackling child poverty and the implementation of the European Child Guarantee

- The Action Plan must ensure Member States tackle child poverty through **multiannual national and subnational strategies** that include **targets, indicators, earmarked budget allocations** and a **monitoring mechanism**. These strategies should also ensure children are able to participate in all actions and decisions that concern them.
- European **funds**, in particular the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), should provide financial support to implement the Social Pillar.

➤ The European Union should solidify its commitment to a Social Europe by designing and implementing a comprehensive Europe 2030 strategy

- The Strategy should include an ambitious target to **end extreme poverty by 2030** and to **reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 50%**.
- The European targets should be translated into **national level targets**. These targets should be based on the EU **AROPE** indicators; set beyond GDP rate; and look at the well-being of children and families at a national, regional and local level.
- The strategy should be based on the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

➤ All proposals under the Action Plan – legislative and non-legislative – take into account the best interests of children and promote their well-being through a comprehensive approach

- The Action Plan should be based on concrete **synergies among policy areas** to embed integrated working and acknowledge the transversal impact of policies on children and young people. The best interests of the child and the promotion of their well-being should be the cornerstone of these synergies.

- The Action Plan should thus **avoid a silo-approach** by involving stakeholders in designing and monitoring the work dedicated to realising the commitments in the field of inclusion, education, deinstitutionalisation, early childhood development and child poverty.
- The Action Plan should pay particular attention to **investing in early childhood development**; it is the most critical stage, influencing greatly the extent to which a child meets his or her cognitive, social, physical and emotional potential.
- The Action Plan should ensure the development of **national deinstitutionalisation strategies** as part of the enabling condition 4.3 of the Common Provisions Regulation 2021-27 that requires a national strategic policy framework for social inclusion and poverty reduction to be in place and include measures for the shift from institutional to community-based care.

➤ The Action Plan is accompanied by an ambitious monitoring framework

- The reporting mechanisms of the future **multiannual national strategies** to tackle child poverty and **Child Guarantee action plans** should be used to monitor the implementation the Social Pillar and included in the European Semester process.
- The Commission should set up a **renewed Social Scoreboard** characterised by more child specific indicators and apply it rigorously in the European Semester process to increase Member States commitment and action on social inclusion.
- The Action Plan should feed into the **European Semester process** and influence its structure and functioning. The European Semester, in turn, must ensure the full compliance of the use of EU funding with the principles of the Social Pillar.
- The European Commission should **engage with civil society organisations, children and families** while monitoring Member States implementation of the Action Plan

2. INVESTING IN CHILDREN IS INVESTING IN A SOCIAL, RESILIENT AND EQUAL EUROPE

According to Eurostat, even before the pandemic, **nearly one in four children lived in poverty or social exclusion across the European Union**.¹ Albeit the EU is one of the most prosperous regions in the world, many families are struggling to make ends meet. Poverty experienced in childhood has lifelong consequences, leading to poorer social, educational and employment outcomes, perpetuating a cycle of poverty across the generations.

The **COVID-19 outbreak** is now having far-reaching effects on Europe's economic and social fabric and, as reported by the 2020 Eurochild Report,² on children's well-being. The crisis is exacerbating existing inequalities, and putting huge pressure on available health and social welfare services. Child poverty levels are thus likely to escalate as the full economic impact of the pandemic becomes apparent, making it even more urgent to act. It exposes the lack of national policies to tackle poverty, particularly child poverty, and highlights the need for a multi-dimensional approach.

The **fight against poverty and deprivation cannot be dropped from the political agenda**; on the contrary, investments in our future education, child protection, health and nutrition, will help Europe reduce the damage and avoid future crises.³ Poverty affects **every aspect of a child's life**; their health, well-being, relationships and education. Adults who have grown up in poverty are more likely to be out of work or in precarious jobs, and to have poorer mental health; too often poverty is **passed on from one generation to the next**.⁴

Yet, **few Member States have actually delivered policy reforms and increased public investments aimed at reducing child poverty**. The EU has repeatedly failed to call governments to account on how they are implementing Country Specific Recommendations. Indeed, albeit the EU has witnessed important progress towards its long-term fiscal targets for 2020, the Court of Auditor has underlined that it is clearly lagging behind on a number of fields, among which poverty alleviation.⁵

As such, the inclusion of the children's right to protection from poverty in the Social Pillar's principles plays a crucial role in tackling this urgent issue. **Principle 11** states that: *"Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged*

¹ [Eurostat](#)

² Eurochild, [Growing up in lockdown: Europe's children in the age of COVID-19](#)

³ EU Alliance for Investing in Children, [Joint statement on protecting children and their families during and after the COVID19 crisis](#)

⁴ According to the [OECD](#), it takes at least 5 generations for children of poor families to reach the average income in their country.

⁵ EU Court of Auditors, [The European Semester–Country Specific Recommendations address important issues but need better implementation](#)

backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.”⁶ We must now ensure its implementation.

The Action Plan include targeted measures for vulnerable children

Principle 11 specifically mentions the necessity to protect **vulnerable children**. The Action Plan measures to tackle child poverty should be relevant for all children from 0 to 18 years, but should also foresee **targeted measures** to help those growing up in vulnerable situations in all countries of the EU.

EU Member States should then identify the policies and actions to support children’s access to universal, efficient, comprehensive, and high-quality services that apply to all children (e.g. access to free education, ECEC, healthcare) and, at the same time, elaborate on strengthening outreach to those most in need. Ensuring that all children have equal access to good quality services is key to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage.

The Action Plan should take account of the European Child Guarantee and connect to its national anti-poverty strategies and action plans.

Eurochild welcomes the **Child Guarantee**, a crucial initiative which adopts a multisector and comprehensive approach to tackling child poverty, representing a pivotal milestone in the fight against child poverty. More specifically, Eurochild has called on the EU institutions to adopt a **Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee** based on the comprehensive **3 pillars approach** of the **2013 European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children** (2013 Recommendation). This means that the Council Recommendation should be based on the access to adequate resources and benefits; access to affordable, quality and inclusive services; children’s right to participate in cultural and recreational activities and in decisions affecting their lives. This approach is consistent with the principles included in the Social Pillar. Indeed, in its 2017 working document, the European Commission stated that, in setting a right for children to be protected from poverty, the Social Pillar indicates that “every child shall have access to comprehensive and integrated measures as set out in the 2013 European Commission Recommendation on investing in children.”⁷

To ensure the Child Guarantee concretely contribute to tackling child poverty, the Action Plan should efficiently monitor its **implementation**. The Action Plan should thus ensure EU Member States develop **country-specific implementation plans** that set out their

⁶ [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

⁷ European Commission, [Commission Staff Working Document](#)

priorities, targets and concrete actions which will help to tackle child poverty. EU Member States should articulate how their plans reflect EU policy guidance and make full use of EU funding opportunities from the future 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework. These plans should feed into the **national strategic policy framework on poverty reduction and social inclusion**, which is monitored through the **European Semester process** as well as implementation of the **SDGs**.⁸

Furthermore, Eurochild supports the European Commission [Child Guarantee Roadmap](#) proposal to ask Member States to establish **multiannual national strategies** for tackling child poverty and social exclusion. The Action Plan should ensure these strategies bring greater transparency and accountability to Member States commitments and budget allocations. These strategies should be built around the three pillars of the 2013 Investing in Children Recommendation and comply with the principles of the Social Pillar.

The Action Plan should ensure that adequate funds are allocated to tackle child poverty

Eurochild has been ceaselessly supporting the European Parliament and the European Commission proposal for EU Member States to allocate at least 5% of their European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) resources to tackle child poverty.⁹ Regrettably, the European Council has not yet taken a position on this paramount issue, and the negotiations among co-legislators are still ongoing. Eurochild is thus urging the Council to ensure **that 5% of the ESF+ resources are allocated in every EU Member State for actions that support structural reforms to tackle child poverty**.

Nonetheless, the ESF+ should not be considered as the only EU financial resource that should be used to tackle child poverty. The Action Plan should echo what proposed in the European Commission's [Child Guarantee Roadmap](#) and ask Member states to use other EU financial resources to tackle child poverty and deliver the future Child Guarantee Council Recommendation. These financial resources include the European Regional Development Fund, the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, InvestEU, Erasmus Plus, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the Recovery and Resilience Facility and funding available in the field of healthcare.

The Action Plan should also ensure that the European Commission monitors the use of EU funding by requiring EU Member States to report on implementation of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

⁸ [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee for the wellbeing of all children across the EU](#)

⁹ [Texts adopted - European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\) ***I - Thursday, 4 April 2019 \(europa.eu\)](#), [EUR-Lex - 52020PC0451 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

The Action Plan should set up new key indicators to assess child poverty

Monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee at European level will be essential. The **AROPE** is a valid indicator that can be used to set national poverty reduction targets. However, to reflect the multidimensionality of child poverty, AROPE should be complemented by **other key indicators**. These indicators 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 also be foreseen.

The Action Plan should set up new targets

Eurochild and the EU Alliance for Investing in Children have been urging the European Commission to adopt a EU target in line with targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 1¹⁰. The Action Plan should ensure the adoption of a new target aiming to **eliminate extreme child poverty** and to **halve child poverty by 2030** as defined by the AROPE indicator. Given the fact that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, consideration should also be given to **agreeing further targets** related to health, education and unemployment, early childhood development and deinstitutionalisation.

The EU target should be then **translated into national targets** based on the EU AROPE indicators; be set beyond GDP rate; and should look at the wellbeing of children and families at a national, regional and local level.

The multiannual strategies, the Child Guarantee action plans as well as the implementation of the Social Pillar should be monitored against these targets.

The Action Plan should ensure a rigorous review of the SDGs and indicators

The **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) offer a comprehensive policy framework to which European countries are also bound and that should guide the Action Plan. The SDGs can help drive delivery on children's rights within EU Member States across a range of policy areas, including child poverty. However, ownership of the SDG framework from the EU has so far been limited. There needs to be a **rigorous review of the SDGs and indicators to ensure**

¹⁰ EU Alliance for Investing in Children, [Call for Action for a comprehensive, sustainable Europe 2030 strategy with a strong social dimension](#)

their relevance for an EU context. These goals and indicators should be integrated into the EU governance and accountability mechanisms that also support the implementation of the Social Pillar.

The Action Plan should promote investments in early childhood development

The first years of a child's life are vital for a child's development and well-being. Tackling disadvantage in early years is often the most effective way to ensure full inclusion in society at later stages in life. The Action Plan should thus pay particular attention to **investing in early childhood development**; it is the most critical stage, influencing greatly the extent to which a child meets his or her cognitive, social, physical and emotional potential.

For a truly comprehensive approach, investments in **Early Childhood Education and Care** needs to be complemented by **services** that support families with young children, in particular those facing adversity and those with children under three years. These include maternal health services such as family planning, pre- and post-natal services, training for parents and health professionals in the area of preventive care, healthy nutrition, and opportunities for children's early learning.

The Action Plan should therefore ensure that:

- Universal health, social and education services integrate **non-discrimination measures** and **targeted programmes** to ensure to reach communities that are exposed to exclusion and discrimination
- All parents and children have **equal access to services** which can stimulate the child's development and parents' empowerment
- Proper, well-equipped **nurseries and kindergartens** are available and accessible in smaller localities, rural and remote areas
- Access to **healthcare**, affordable medicines, vaccination and preventive services are guaranteed to every child regardless of social status, ethnicity, gender
- Public authorities are encouraged to **better assess the needs of families** and issue adapted measures for better meeting the needs of parents and children.

The Action Plan should promote investments in early childhood education and care

The Action Plan should emphasise children's right to **affordable, good quality early education and care** (ECEC). Eurochild regrets that provision of early childhood education and care is often tied to the labour market situation of the parents. If ECEC is to contribute to

tackling disadvantage early in life, it needs to be available to all children, independently of the parents' labour market situation.

In many Member States, much of the childcare currently provided is on a part-time basis which does not allow for full-time working hours for parents. A lack of flexibility of childcare is a major barrier to full-time employment across Europe and particularly for women, which is not addressed in the Social Pillar. In addition, childcare entitlement in many countries begins after 3 years of age, and data suggests that demand in childcare for children under 3 continues to be largely unmet. To enhance the implementation of the Social Pillar, efforts need to be stepped up to promote access to childcare from birth to 3 years. The Action Pillar should thus promote high-quality ECEC services and highly qualified workforce.

The Action Plan should ensure adequate living standards through social benefits

The Action Plan should **ensure adequate living standards** through **social benefits**, complementing cash income support with in-kind benefits in key services. If conditional cash transfers are used, they should be linked to other social inclusion policies, with additional funds or other resources provided to local authorities, child welfare services, schools, or professionals working with families and children affected by the change in policy.

Eligibility to family benefits should not be based on the need of the labour market or education system but rather on the **needs of the child**. Children's rights and best interests should be kept the primary focus. It is important to incentivise parents to return to work, investing in skills development and training rather than adopting a punitive approach which can drive families and children further to the margins of society. All financial incentives must avoid any form of stigmatisation, segregation or discrimination.

Families should be helped and empowered to make changes themselves, with additional and appropriately tailored support, information and/or knowledge, with the overarching aim of improving their well-being.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the most vulnerable children, including refugee and asylum-seeking children and children in institutional care and children who are less likely to appear in broad official statistics. It requires strengthening both universal benefits and services as well as targeted services.

2. A CHILD-RIGHTS BASED IMPLEMENTATION

Eurochild appreciates that child poverty is recognised as one of the 20 principles of the Social Pillar and, consequently, as a priority for the EU. Nonetheless, it must be underlined that **all areas and principles of the Social Pillar have a deep impact on children well-being**. As underlined by Commissioner Schmit¹¹, investing in Europe starts by investing in children. Only taking into consideration children's rights in all EU policies it will be possible to fully achieve social cohesion and inclusion, alongside economic growth and prosperity. Consequently, the Action Plan should be underpinned by a **comprehensive child-rights approach**.¹²

In recent years, Eurochild has advocated for increased investment and reforms in policy and practice in several areas, such as education, early childhood education, health promotion, community development, family strengthening, social protection and welfare support. The future Action Plan should thus **promote public investment** in these areas; this would lead to better outcomes for children, significant savings for the state, and more effective working through collaboration across sectors.

The Action Plan should support parents and carers

Child poverty often depends on parents/carers' socioeconomic and residence status; it can occur due to parent's unemployment but also if parents/carers are trapped in low paid jobs/in-work poverty/low minimum income or lack access to basic services.¹³

In light of this, we welcome a multisector approach of the Social Pillar. For example, its explicit reference to the quality of **healthcare** under the third chapter on **Social Protection and Inclusion**.

Principle 16 is particularly helpful in underlining the importance of prevention. Investments in health promotion are essential to improve children's well-being and prevent poverty and social exclusion.

Principle 14 focuses on the right to **adequate minimum income** benefits as a means to ensure everyone's right to live their lives in dignity and have effective access to goods and

¹¹ UNICEF Office of Research Innocenti, Conference: Worlds of Influence - Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries, 3 September 2020

¹² As an overall remark, it is important to underline the interconnectedness of social and human rights; the Action Plan should indeed support and comply with the EU mechanisms of protection of human rights.

¹³ EU Alliance for Investing in Children, [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee for the wellbeing of all children across the EU](#)

services. Initiatives emerging from this principle will have an **impact on families' living standards**.

Furthermore, the Social Pillar includes the **right to housing** in **Principle 19** as a key measure to foster social inclusion. Eurochild particularly welcomes the reference to the right to good quality social **housing for the most vulnerable**, which has the potential to shed more light on the precarious living standards in Europe and improve the situation of children and their families. These references represent a crucial step towards giving better consideration to the needs of children and young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU.

The Action Plan should support investments in the health care system

Health care services that are **inclusive, equitable, available, and affordable** need to be ensured for every child and family. Every child must be guaranteed access to healthcare, affordable medicines, vaccination and preventive services regardless of social status, ethnicity, gender. Services must be inclusive of families facing adversity, including Roma, migrants (including undocumented) and families with children with disabilities. Particular attention must be paid to families' living environments to reduce health disparities from an early age.

The Action Plan should ensure citizens and CSOs engagement

The Action Plan should put a stronger emphasis on **citizen and civil society engagement and empowerment**. Eurochild invites the European Commission to continue strengthening the role of civil dialogue and participatory democracy in policy processes and governance, and fostering a meaningful engagement of the civil society, including children and young people themselves.

Successful implementation of the **Social Pillar** relies on **strong civil society engagement** and **ownership**. The European Commission should continue to invest in **strengthening civil society's capacity** to independently monitor progress within Member States and to ensure a voice for people who might not otherwise be heard. All relevant stakeholders (service providers, social partners, civil society, etc.) should be involved in holding governments to account and supporting policy development and implementation. This is particularly important for the **European Semester** given it is the main instrument to monitor implementation of the Social Pillar. Like many civil society networks, Eurochild has encouraged its members to engage systematically with the Semester process and report back on their engagement.¹⁴ While the quality of civil dialogue varies significantly across countries

¹⁴ Eurochild, [New Opportunities for investing in children – 2019 Eurochild report on the European Semester](#)

(depending on the capacity and expertise of both government and civil society), it has improved steadily since the adoption of the Semester process in 2010. The capacity of the Social Pillar to strengthen the social dimension of the European Semester depends on the extent to which it creates ownership from the different actors involved. Civil society organisations working with and for children, as well as children themselves need to be able to shape the outcomes of the initiatives stemming from the Social Pillar.

The Action Plan should ensure children participation

Engaging with children on what is important for them, what they would like to see changed, is in itself a means to increasing their autonomy, self-awareness, sense of agency and self-confidence - which are key to breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

Considering that the European Pillar of Social Rights Staff Working Document calls EU Member States to put in place “*national strategies on child participation to promote awareness on how to involve children in all actions and decisions that concern them*”¹⁵, the Action Plan should ensure meaningful processes of **child participation**,¹⁶ in order to involve children in all actions and decisions that concern them.

Setting up **structural mechanisms** which allow children, including those with vulnerable backgrounds, to participate in public decision making is key to ensure policies are addressing their needs, as children are experts on their own situations. **National child participation strategies** can help change the way professionals and decision-makers engage with children and prepared with such a child rights approach in mind.

To avoid the development of multiple strategies on the same issue, the European Commission should include **child participation as a horizontal principle** in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and to call on EU Member States to develop structures that will support the meaningful involvement of all children - including those who are harder to reach and children in vulnerable situations¹⁷ - and their parents in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee action plans and the multi-annual national strategies.

Eurochild stands ready to support Member States committed to implementing child participation in their decision-making processes and is encouraged by several countries’ willingness to use the Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool¹⁸.

¹⁵ European Commission, [Commission Staff Working Document](#)

¹⁶ As requested by the European Commission [Staff Working Document](#)

¹⁷ Such as children with disabilities, children at risk of poverty, children in institutions, children in migration and children belonging to ethnic minorities, such as the Roma.

¹⁸ Council of Europe, [Child Participation Assessment Tool](#)

The Action Plan should strengthen and expand investments in deinstitutionalisation reforms.

Children growing up in out-of-home care are particularly vulnerable and have notoriously poor outcomes in adulthood. In 2009 Eurochild estimated that approximately one million children¹⁹ were living in alternative care, many of them confined to harmful institutions. More recent figures suggest that around **345,000 children are still living in institutions** in the EU today²⁰. This includes children with disabilities, children without parental care, children in the child protection system, migrant, unaccompanied and separated children. Albeit progress has been made over the past 10 years, much still remains to be done.

Countries tend to deprioritise investment in children and vulnerable families and the development of high quality alternative care during economic decline. A large number of migrant, unaccompanied and separated children are still being detained or institutionalized in entry, transit and destination countries across Europe. Furthermore, the current crisis caused by global COVID-19 pandemic has put extra strain on vulnerable families and number of children in out-of-home care might grow by up to 30%²¹.

Eurochild believes the **Action Plan must strengthen and expand investments in deinstitutionalisation reforms**. It should ensure Member States develop **long-term strategies** to support the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care through wide range of services, including measures to prevent institutionalisation and family separation²². The Action Plan must support investment in services and infrastructure that support children's right to grow up in a family and prevent institutionalisation (social welfare centres, rehabilitation services, mobile services accessible social housing, housing adaptations, accessible schools, etc.). EU funding should never go towards creating or sustaining institutions.

As concerns Principle 1 - High quality education for all – the Action Plan should ensure **access to education for all children, including children in alternative care**, children with disabilities, children from marginalised Roma communities, and children in migration. To give all children the best chance of escaping poverty, quality inclusive education is key. Children in vulnerable situations need to the technology and support to participate in online education. Attention must be paid to the accessibility and inclusivity of physical settings and digital tools, as well as to building the capacity of educational professionals to support children with special education needs.

¹⁹ Eurochild, [Children in alternative care: National Surveys](#)

²⁰ Speech by Commissioner Dalli, "[Towards Inclusion 2020: What is the vision of the future of deinstitutionalisation and role of EU?](#)"

²¹ Eurochild, [Growing up in lockdown: Europe's children in the age of COVID-19](#)

²² DI strategy as part of the enabling condition 4.3 of the CPR 2021-27.

With regards to principles 19 and 20, the Action Plan should **provide housing to families at risk of extreme poverty and homelessness**. Priority should be given to funding Housing First Initiatives to prevent homelessness of at-risk families. These housing options should be in the community and allocated in line with the wishes and need of the families concerned. They should take into consideration the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities. Emphasis should go on supporting families to find a place to live and to remain together in order to avoid placing children in institutional care.

The Action Plan should include an efficient monitoring system

The Commission should set up a **renewed Social Scoreboard** characterised by more child specific indicators and apply it rigorously in the European Semester process to increase Member States' commitment and action on social inclusion.

Furthermore, the Action Plan should feed into the European Semester process and influence its structure and functioning. The Semester cycle must keep increasing its focus on employment, social issues, and education. The Commission should strengthen the **social dimension of the European Semester** by using the annual review process to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Recommendation on Investing in Children at Member State level

The Commission should ensure **clear implementation for each principle** of the Social Pillar, with appropriate tools and processes to realise and monitor the commitments, and engage with stakeholders, including civil society children and families while doing so.

The Action Plan should include the monitoring and delivery of **benchmarks** and **minimum standards** concerning the implementation of all the principles covered by Social Pillar. This means at least one benchmark per principle with adequate matching indicators. More specifically, the European Commission should include:

- A benchmark on childcare
- A benchmark on children at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- Indicators on early childhood development
- Indicators on children in alternative care with specification of institutional, residential and foster care

This monitoring system should be connected to the **European Semester process**: this would not only strengthen the social dimension of the Semester process, but also help the European Union to build a more resilient and strong society.

The Action Plan should represent the social dimension of a Europe 2030 strategy

Eurochild firmly believes that the adoption of a **Europe 2030 Strategy** will help the EU and its Member States to **tackle poverty** and **promote the Social Pillar's principles** more efficiently and holistically.

The European Parliament²³ and the Council of the EU²⁴ have both called for a long-term EU Strategy. The European Commission, however, has not presented any adequate successor to the Europe 2020 strategy yet. The European Green Deal, although crucial to fight climate change and ensure a better future for all EU citizens, is not integral enough to be seen as the overall post-2020 EU strategy. The EU should thus launch a proposal for a Europe 2030 strategy that **balances the social, economic and environmental dimensions and that takes into account the most pressing social needs**. The Social Pillar and its Action Plan will thus be the social backbone of this holistic framework.

The Strategy should include an ambitious target to end extreme poverty by 2030 and to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 50%. The European targets should be translated into national level targets. The national targets should be based on the EU AROPE indicators; be set beyond GDP rate; and should look at the wellbeing of people not only at national level but also at regional and local levels.

The Europe 2030 Strategy will also ensure **synergies** between the Action Plan and other **strategies** adopted by the European Commission, such as Comprehensive Child Rights Strategy and the Disability Strategy, which are underpinned by the European Pillar of Social Rights.²⁵

The Council could then ensure the coherence of European social and economic policy in the **European Semester** by integrating the social indicators of the Europe 2030 Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights in the European Semester monitoring cycle.

Furthermore, the EU institutions should ensure the meaningful **engagement of civil society, social partners, children and families** in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Europe 2030 Strategy. Particular attention should be paid to the inclusion of children and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion and civil society organisations representing them.

²³ European Parliament, [Resolution of 14 March 2019 on the Annual strategic report on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#)

²⁴ Council of the European Union, [Outcome of the proceedings](#)

²⁵ For further information please see: [Call for Action for a comprehensive, sustainable Europe 2030 strategy with a strong social dimension](#)



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