

Concept Note

High-level meeting on Anti-Rights Movements in Europe and its Impact on Children's Rights

**European Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica,
Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Dunja Mijatović and
Eurochild President Marie-Louise Coleiro-Preca**

**Hosted by Eurochild on 8 February 2022 – 10h30 – 11h30
at the European Commission, Berlaymont building, Brussels**

Background

Anti-rights groups are non-state groups that position themselves as part of civil society but attack fundamental and universal human rights. They typically campaign against the rights of excluded groups – women, children and young people, LGBTQI people, religious minorities, ethnic and racial minorities, migrants and refugees. Consequently, civil society that defends the rights of those groups is under attack as well. As a result, anti-rights groups are impacting directly on people's lives and on civic space.

Often the well-being of children and child-protection rhetoric is used to mobilise opposition to human rights. Other times, children are directly targeted because of their actions and communications. A number of Eurochild members have reported being subject to pressure from anti-rights movement. Representatives of Eurochild Children's Council and other children have also described instances of being subject to negative reactions (or feedback) where they were active and voicing their opinions. While Eurochild members from Central and Eastern Europe seem to be particularly affected, members from other countries have noticed that in national parliaments and public discourse, the rhetoric of 'traditional family values' have started to gain traction. This results in children not being seen as legitimate rights holders and their rights being instrumentally opposed to parents' rights.

Anti-rights groups grow in success through shaping public narratives, disinformation and manipulation, and are encouraging animosity and division. They are most effective when



political leaders, parties and states pick up and echo their narratives, and when anti-rights groups are able to connect with and amplify regressive discourse that comes from the top.

As a network defending and promoting children's rights, we are deeply concerned by these developments and keen to identify ways to take action against such movements and support civil society and children in doing so, especially in contexts where the impact on children's rights is significant.

Objective of the meeting

The objective of the meeting is to get a better understanding on how anti-rights groups are affecting children rights and civil society across Europe. Vice President Šuica has consistently stressed the importance of children's rights and the right for children to participate. Moreover, the European Commission has adopted an ambitious EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Human Rights Commissioner Mijatović has been at the forefront of speaking up for human rights, as evidenced in various country and thematic reports on the implementation of human rights safeguards in Council of Europe member states, including as regards children's rights. Eurochild is a network of almost 200 members working with and for children in Europe. We are striving for a society where all children and young people grow up happy, healthy, confident and respected as individuals in their own right.



Agenda

- 10:30 Welcome by **Eurochild President Marie-Louise Coleiro-Preca**
- 10:32 Vice-President **Dubravka Šuica** sharing her view on anti-rights movements and actions that have been taken by the Commission in that regard.
- 10:40 Human Rights Commissioner **Dunja Mijatović** sharing an update on the state of children's rights' implementation in Europe based on her country and thematic work.
- Setting the scene from a CSO and child's perspective - moderated by Mieke Schuurman, Senior Policy Advisor Eurochild**
- 10:47 **Milena** - young person supported by **National Network for Children, Bulgaria** and Member of the **Eurochild Children's Council**
- 10:52 **Marie-Louise Coleiro-Preca, President Eurochild** - setting the scene from the perspective of Eurochild and its member organisations
- 10:57 **Maria Herczog – Co-Chair of the National Coalition Hungary** and
Bianka – young person supported by **Hintalovon Foundation, Hungary**
- 11:07 **George Bogdanov – Executive Director of National Network for Children, Bulgaria**
- 11:12 **Dialogue**
- 11:25 **Closure** with a statement from Vice-President **Dubravka Šuica** and Human Rights Commissioner **Dunja Mijatović**

