

# **Eurochild calls for an integrated and child-centred approach to delivering the European Care Strategy for all children**

**Eurochild's response to  
the European Care Strategy**



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

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## 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.



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## Eurochild welcomes the European Care Strategy

Adopted on 7 September 2022, **the European Care Strategy** introduces a breakthrough policy that has the ambition to address the needs of children and their families as well all generations needing care. Carers important contributions to our society and their needs are also recognised. The implementation of European Care Strategy Communication envisages two proposals for **Council Recommendations: i) revising the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care; and ii) access to affordable, high-quality long-term care.** Both are scheduled to be adopted by December 2022.

Eurochild welcomes the proposal for **Council Recommendation on the revision of ‘the Barcelona targets’ on early childhood education and care, with** an aspiration to improve the quality of **early childhood education and care (ECEC)**. Investing early in **nurturing care for all children is essential** for their healthy development and the wellbeing and prosperity of communities and society.

### We welcome:

- increase in the number of **children under 3** participating in ECEC (target increased from 33% to **50%**). This is something we have been calling for, given the critical importance of the first 1,000 days of a child’s life for their healthy development and wellbeing.
- increase of number of children between **the age of 3** and the **starting age of compulsory primary education** participate in early childhood education and care (i.e. the Barcelona targets, raising from 90% to **96%**). This important measure will target disadvantaged children such as children from ethnic minorities, refugee/migrant children, children in poverty and with special needs to allow their proper pre-school preparation.
- **universal access to high-quality ECEC**, with targeted measures to increase access for **children facing poverty and exclusion**, and those with **disabilities** and special educational needs as well as the focus on **addressing rural/urban disparities** in access to ECEC.
- introduction of a **legal entitlement to ECEC**, where public authorities guarantee a place for all children whose parents demand it, as one way of ensuring provision for all children
- **greater national investment** in quality **ECEC** that is available and accessible for all children and for children under three is especially needed.
- ensuring **ECEC staff** are supported and valued, with increased professionalisation – the right training and qualifications, and continuous professional development.
- ensuring a **comprehensive approach to care for children of different ages** by facilitating affordable and high quality **out of school care** for all children in primary school (after-school and holiday cover), including those with **disabilities** or with **special educational needs**.
- **improving data collection** on ECEC participation, including children in vulnerable situations, is timely and needed.

### We are disappointed:

- **children in alternative care are invisible to this policy.** Children in alternative care, some of whom remain **in care** for their entire life, **are not mentioned at all**. Despite the EU's commitment to the deinstitutionalisation of children in alternative care and transition to quality family and community-based care, our latest data suggests that almost **800,000 children are in alternative care<sup>1</sup>** and a total of **303,000 children in residential care in 2021 in EU** countries. Institutions are being reopened in several countries due to the increased pressures on national systems, resulting in part as a result of the COVID pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine.
- the Strategy does not adequately account for the care of children in poverty. With the current spikes in energy and food prices, more families will be forced to abandon their children due to poverty. With this reality in focus, we called for the European Care Strategy to support **increased investment** in measures that **assist parents and guardians** in their role as primary caregivers and fully commit to the transitioning from institutional care to community and family-based care services.
- **additional investment and support** will be needed to enable all children to grow up in **quality family-based care**, including their biological families, extended families or foster care, and avoid family separation and institutionalisation, in line with the Guidelines on the transition from institutional to community-based care<sup>2</sup>.

**Eurochild welcomes** the proposal for **COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on access to affordable high-quality long-term care** with aim to improve the adequacy of social protection for long-term care so it is timely, comprehensive and affordable to those who need it.

### We particularly welcome:

- introduction of a comprehensive approach to provision of high quality long term care including home, community-based and residential care.
- highlighting the importance of family/informal care as an element of a sustainable care system with recommendations to provide appropriate support to informal carers, building on the new rights in the EU Work Life balance directive<sup>3</sup> to mainstream gender equality through EU Care strategy to tackle gender stereotypes, pay and gender gaps.
- development and/or improvement of home care and community-based care and support independent living.
- appointment of a National Coordinator and National Action Plan to be developed within 12 months.

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<sup>1</sup> Data gathered by Eurochild, UNICEF and over 50 national experts across the EU in our [DataCare project - Children-in-alternative-care Comparable-statistics-to-monitor-progress-on-DI-across-the-EU.pdf](#) ([eurochild.org](http://eurochild.org))

<sup>2</sup> [Guidelines-new.indd \(wordpress.com\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU.

However, the proposal is missing clear **common European targets** for long-term care, like ‘the Barcelona targets’ to be able to **monitor and evaluate the progress**.

## A way forward

**The European Care Strategy is not a standalone or isolated policy;** its deliverables are in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan. It also complements the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Council Recommendation on European Child Guarantee. The **National Action Plans** for the **Child Guarantee** should therefore include actions **to secure** access to resources, access to quality services and care, and children’s right to participate. To achieve the Pillar of Social Rights’ target to reduce child poverty by 5 million by 2030, **an integrated approach** will be required. Such an approach recognises every child as a rights holder and places the child at the centre of any and all decisions that affect them, and prioritises fulfilling their needs for healthy development.

To make sure this policy will have an impact on children’s lives, linking to EU funding, we call on Member States:

- ✓ to adopt the **Council Recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care** and **Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care**.
- ✓ to make explicit commitments **to end institutionalisation** of children and **accelerate the transition to family- and community-based care** for children.
- ✓ to release **the Child Guarantee National Action Plans** as soon as possible as agreed on by all Member States in June 2021. These should be **based on an integrated approach** and include the measures and targets on early childhood education and care as well as other vulnerable groups of children.
- ✓ to meaningfully **engage national stakeholders** such as CSOs, children, their parents and professionals in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of both adopted Council Recommendations.

We call on the European Commission:

- ✓ to use the **European Semester** and **Social Scoreboard** to better monitor situation of the most vulnerable children.
- ✓ to develop more **European indicators** to cover all target groups of children including children in their earliest years, children in alternative care, and their access to quality services.
- ✓ to regularly use **the consultation mechanism** for obtaining diversity of views and recommendations from stakeholders such as civil society organisations, children, carers and professionals.