

Brussels, 31 August 2023

Dear President von der Leyen,

With your State of the Union speech approaching, we call for you as President of the European Commission to ensure children are the top policy priority for the upcoming year, upholding the commitments you have previously expressed. It is essential to ensure the rights and well-being of children drive EU policy today and is not put aside as something for future action.

Current data shows that **one in four children** (24.7%) in the EU are **at risk of poverty or social exclusion**. The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis are exacerbating existing hardship and inequalities. The situation is further aggravated by the impact of accelerating climate change and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

We have identified five areas for action to ensure the EU meets its commitments towards children's rights:

1. **Child poverty**
2. **Anti-child rights movements**
3. **Children's mental health**
4. **Digital environment**
5. **Children in migration**

First, in this polycrisis situation, the number of **children at risk of poverty and social exclusion** will continue to grow. The European Commission should ensure all mechanisms are implemented by all Member States, including the European Child Guarantee and the European Semester. The latter is a key instrument to guide and foster the implementation of the National Action Plans of the Child Guarantee to achieve the necessary reduction of child poverty by lifting at least five million children out of poverty by 2030.

Second, the growth of **anti-child rights movements** across the EU represents a significant challenge that needs to be properly addressed with the priority of **strengthening democracy** across the Union. Concrete measures need to be taken to counteract the movements and refocus on children's rights. The recent [2023 Strategic Foresight Report](#) intends to put **the necessity for sustainability and people's well-being at the heart of Europe's Open Strategic Autonomy**. Unfortunately, children and their rights are rarely mentioned in this report.

Third, the Commission must take efficient measures to care for and strengthen the **mental health of children**. The pandemic has deteriorated the mental situation of children across Europe, with [suicide being the second highest cause of death](#) among young people. While the communication on Mental Health is a good step forward, further commitment is needed.

As the Foresight report mentions, **children are among the most affected by extreme weather events due to climate change**. Nine out of ten young Europeans agree that tackling climate change would improve their health and well-being. We urge you to continue your efforts on the European Green Deal to make the European continent a sustainable and liveable place so that today's children have a future.

Fourthly, [92% of European citizens](#) agree that children are increasingly at risk online; therefore, the work on creating a **safe digital environment for children** is as important as ever. We welcome the Commission's proposal for a child sexual abuse mechanism to protect children in the digital sphere. However, the European Commission must uphold the pressure on the EP and the Council during the inter-institutional negotiations to have a meaningful and protective regulation on child sexual abuse.

Lastly, **the EU and Member States** have an obligation to guarantee the necessary social support and child protection as well as access to early childhood education and health care **for all migrant children**. We call on the European Commission to address the widening gaps between migrant children caused by the polycrisis, putting children from different ethnic backgrounds at a greater risk of discrimination. The revised Anti-trafficking directive and intended civil protection mechanisms should learn from the current failures to ensure no child is left behind. The war in Ukraine forced an estimated [1.5 million children](#) to flee across borders into the EU, however, many have not been ensured access to all services children are entitled to.

We welcome the launch of **the [EU Children's Participation Platform](#)**, one of the deliverables of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Nonetheless, financial support to civil society organisations on the ground is missing, which is a crucial part of meaningful child participation to ensure children are at the core of all future policy proposals.

Dear President, we call you to address these five significant challenges faced by children in Europe to make them safe, healthy, confident and supported to fulfil their full potential. We call on you to continue making the voices of children heard and bringing children's rights to the top of the political agenda.

Yours sincerely,

Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President, Eurochild

Sabine Saliba, Secretary General, Eurochild