

Eurochild Annual General Assembly 2023

16 May 2023, 10h00 – 12h30 CEST
Rue de la Charité 22, 1210 Brussels (with remote online participation)

Minutes

Introduction

Housekeeping and technical introduction

The President welcomed participants and expressed her regrets not to have the General Assembly in person, due to financial reasons. She hoped to have an in-person meeting next year again. She gave the floor to Katharina Moser, the facilitator, to give technical introduction and explain voting procedures and housekeeping rules before formally starting the Annual General Assembly.

Katharina Moser gave technical Zoom instructions, pointing out that children were attending the meeting, advising on child safeguarding and reminding participants about the Code of Conduct circulated prior to the event. She noted that Alice Hagger-Vaughan was the child protection focal person and that the session would be recorded for internal note taking purpose only. She proceeded with technical voting instructions. Every full member registered as a voter would be invited to vote in real time electronically via the online platform “*Election Runner*”. Claire Boutry from the Eurochild Secretariat was referenced as technical support contact.

Welcome, attendance, apologies and communications

The President welcomed attendees and formally opened the meeting. She announced that **119 participants** registered to the Annual General Assembly, including **97 full member organisations**. She confirmed that we successfully attained and exceeded the statutory quorum of **72 full members** present or represented by proxy, with **89 full members (83 attending and 6 written proxies)** present or represented at the opening of the Session.

Before proceeding further, the President wished to warmly welcome:

- The representatives of associate member organisations
- Individuals who are associate members
- Catriona Williams OBE, Honorary Member and founding President of Eurochild
- New members to be officially admitted by this General Assembly
- Members of the Eurochild Children’s Council
- Team members of the Eurochild’s Secretariat including the new interim Secretary General

- The members of the Management Board.

A. GA Meeting agenda adoption and approval of the minutes of the last EGA Meeting on 16/11/2022

Adoption of the 2023 agenda

The President introduced the first official item, the adoption of the agenda. The [2023 agenda](#) was adopted with no objection.

Approval of the minutes of the General Assembly held on 16 November 2022 in Brussels, with remote online participation

The President introduced the second official item, the approval of the [minutes from the 2022 Extraordinary General Assembly](#). No comments had been received in writing regarding the 2022 minutes. The minutes were adopted with no objection.

Introduction to the new interim Secretary General

The President then gave the floor to [Sabine Saliba, new interim Secretary General](#), to introduce herself. The interim Secretary General voiced her honour to be part of the network and the inspiring work of Eurochild and presented herself and her career focused on human rights.

B. Activity Reports

Katharina invited participants to listen actively to the activity reports presentation, by noting and sharing questions in the chat.

Management Board report

The President recalled that 2022 was a very challenging year for Eurochild but that it was also an important year for Eurochild as we started implementing the revised Statutes and Internal Rules, with the organisation of two general assemblies (in May and November), and the adoption of the 2022-2025 strategic framework. At the Away-Days in June, we unpacked the different pillars of the strategy, together with the Management Board members, the Executive team and the Secretariat.

Despite all the organisational challenges faced, the President emphasized that the Management Board met regularly in order to ensure a certain stability and important necessary work going on. She acknowledged

the hard work of the Executive Team: Axelle Stainier, Ally Dunhill and Mieke Schuurman. She also thanked the Vice-President, Tanya Ward, for her support in developing an HR review to meet these challenges and beyond; the Treasurer Ninetta Kazantzis for reviewing the financial situation of the organisation; the former Treasurer Ljiljana Vasic for supporting during this period; all other members of the Management Board for their flexibility and readiness to meet, sometimes at very short notice.

- **Human Resources**

The President passed the floor to Tanya Ward, Vice-President and Chair of the HR Subcommittee. Tanya explained that the recruitment of a new interim Secretary General was a big part of the work done by the Management Board. She highlighted that the Management Board took a direct control when there was a gap in the Secretary General position in supporting the team. As part of that work, they did an HR review to identify what needed to be done in order to help the team prosper and grow. The key thing was to develop a new Executive Senior Management Team and that was in line with the new Strategic Framework.

In developing a new staffing plan for the new Strategic Framework, Tanya explained that there was an opportunity to promote some staff members. In that regard, she praised the team for its hard work and dedication in delivering high quality work for Eurochild.

Tanya informed that the Management Board had commissioned the development of a performance and talents management framework for the staff. With the help of the Executive Team, staffing policies will also be developed for the organisation.

Finally, she explained that the Management Board will be moving ahead with the appointment of the permanent Secretary General. A communication from the MB should be published in the next few weeks.

- **Governance**

The President took over the floor to explain that during the Governance Sub-Committee meeting, which she chairs, the need for a governance review was highlighted and that funding for this was negotiated through OAK Foundation.

- **Membership**

The President gave the floor to the Membership Sub-Committee chair, Uroš Brezovšek. He informed that the action plan was to elaborate a new membership strategy, which is an on-going work. He then recalled that the Sub-Committee is doing a constant oversight of membership: assessment of new applications, upgrades of associates members, etc. More details will be given on the dedicated item of the agenda.

- **Finance and Fundraising**

The President called on the screen the Treasurer, Ninetta Kazantzis. The Treasurer informed that more details will be given on the next item of the agenda. She simply thanked the Management Board for their

support.

Secretariat report

The President then gave the floor to the interim Secretary General, Sabine Saliba, to present the Secretariat Report.

Sabine recalled that while 2022 was the 'European Year of Youth', it was however a very difficult year for many children, young people and families. The continuing impact of COVID, the invasion of Ukraine and the increasing cost of living are affecting the lives of many. She reaffirmed the need for civil society organisations to come together is even stronger.

She then gave an overview of different data on Eurochild events in 2022:

- Total events: 334
- Online: 257
- In person: 77
- With speaking participation: 92

As concerns Child Participation, Sabine stated that children are experts in their own lives and it is essential that they participate in decisions that affect them. That's why Eurochild facilitates dialogue between children and EU policy makers, relying on our extensive network of members to ensure children's participation is embedded in EU, national and local realities. Eleven young people participate in the third Eurochild's Children's Council (ECC) which is a central structure in Eurochild's child participation strategy. In 2022 Eurochild strengthened its relationships with the European Commission including by supporting children to participate at the 14th EU Forum on the Rights of the Child. As a result of its advocacy, EU funding calls from DG JUST related to children's rights now require the involvement of children in proposals and the need to ensure child protection measures are respected.

Sabine informed that Eurochild provided child participation and child protection workshops and welcomed a new Eurochild Children's Council of 11 children each representing a different European country and supported by one of its members. Last year Eurochild also continued to strengthen its work on capacity building and increased the involvement of children in delivering trainings. In September, the Eurochild Children's Council gave a child participation in safeguarding training workshop at the Keeping Children Safe's Summit. In October, along with members of the secretariat team, they co-designed and delivered a full day training on child participation to the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Sabine informed that the rising costs of living and energy prices are regressing the progress made towards ending child poverty. Together with nine members, Eurochild set up a Child Guarantee Taskforce to identify a range of recommendations for all Member States. The work of the Taskforce was included in over 60 meetings and events with EU Institutions. In December the (In)visible Children report was released, highlighting the recommendations and priorities that EU decision-makers and national governments can work on to support the most vulnerable children and prevent widening inequalities.

Sabine recalled that more than 850,000 children are deprived of parental care in Europe and that Eurochild advocates for prioritising family-based care for children in the care system, and influences policies at the EU level to ensure these priorities are embedded across the EU and at national level. Since 2019 and in partnership with UNICEF ECARO, Eurochild has worked with our members, over 50 national experts across Europe on the DataCare project to map how EU Member States and the UK currently collect data on the situation of children in alternative care.

As regards to the ‘First Year First Priority’, Eurochild has raised awareness and increased the visibility of the campaign and of the importance of investing in early childhood among EU policy-makers, by engaging senior European Commission officials and MEPs in public events, participating in civil society events with policy-makers, engaging in EU-level policy discussions and providing input to Commission consultations on key EU policy initiatives that are relevant for the campaign. Three thematic papers were presented:

- Putting early childhood at the heart of the European Child Guarantee;
- Prioritising the professional development of early childhood education and care staff;
- Ensure universal access to maternal healthcare in the European Union.

Thanks to its new and flexible strategic framework, Eurochild could adapt to the new priorities. New thematic areas of work for the network are the protection of children’s rights online and the assistance to families affected by the war. These necessities highlighted how important it is to avoid creating one-sided policies and ensure integrated approaches in EU Member States to tackle exclusion and discrimination.

Sabine reminded the audience that 1 in 5 of Eurochild's members are in and around Ukraine, as with many Eurochild members across Europe, they have been providing direct assistance to the children and families affected by the war. Therefore in 2022, following the war in Ukraine, Eurochild created the Solidarity with Children of Ukraine Hub, which gathered resources for families fleeing Ukraine, professionals and volunteers as well as developed position papers, letters and statements addressed to the UN, EU institutions and national governments – informing them of your lived experiences and on the ground recommendations.

Anti-rights movements continue to gain support through misinformation campaigns in many parts of Europe. Beginning of 2022, Eurochild organised a high-level meeting where its President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca brought together European Commission Vice President Šuica and the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Mijatović to raise the need of having a European mechanism to protect children’s rights defenders.

Considering the growing threat of child sexual abuse online and offline, the fight against this serious offence constitutes a priority for the EU. In September, Eurochild submitted its feedback to the European Commission consultation on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse. In December, Eurochild members were invited to learn more about the Digital Services Act and other relevant digital files affecting children’s rights, led by

5Rights Foundation. This activity was the foundation pillar for the Members Taskforce on children's rights in the digital environment that started from 2023.

Eurochild Children's Council report

Three (3) representatives of the Eurochild Children's Council (Iva, Mor and Jakob) presented their 2022 activity report.

Iva first started to explain how their first meeting, in May 2022, went, informing that they met with the former ECC members, were introduced to the network and talked about the General Assembly, where Ann and Raya represented the ECC. She reported that the ECC had several Zoom meetings to get to know each other, to learn about Eurochild and its advocacy work.

Iva then highlighted the European Commission's 14th EU Forum on the Rights of the Child, where 50 children were present in almost all sessions as both speakers and participants. ECC representatives Iva, Elisabet and Liam were part of the group of young people present in Brussels who were invited to speak at the event. She emphasized that experience as a great example of child participation where their voices were heard and taken into account. Five other members of the council (Sena, Raya, Anna, Mor, Jakob) prepared and virtually presented a session on combatting violence against children.

Iva gave the floor to Jakob to present their activities during the second part of the year. He explained that they gave a training to the Council of the Baltic Sea States about child participation and child safeguarding. They also gave input on some guidelines of the CBSS in order to create an advisory Board.

Jakob also produced a video on how to make conference more interesting and, in November, together with Anna they came to Brussels to discuss with the Management Board about further cooperation.

He emphasized that the ECC were part of the recruitment of Lenia, Child Participation Intern, explaining that the ECC developed some criteria for her role and that Lana and Rayaa were part of the interviews and asked questions to the candidates.

Finally, in March 2023, the ECC did a consultation on the child participation assessment tool and they gave their input on how to measure its effectiveness. Jakob clarified that the Council of Europe came up with 10 actions on child participation and now they ask how to measure their success.

Jakob gave the floor to Mor who presented the ECC's favourite activity during the year.

Mor gave back the floor to the President, who warmly thanked the ECC representatives and praised them for the inspiration they are for all of us. Floor was then opened for questions on the activity reports.

C. Finances

Presentation of audited accounts for the 2022 financial year and 2023 budget of the Association

Eurochild Treasurer, Ninetta Kazantzis presented the [2022 financial report and the 2023 budget](#). Eurochild ended the year with a profit of €30.930. The Management Board suggested that we keep the profit as equity and not allocate it to the Social Reserve. Therefore, the Social Reserve remains the same at 145.700 euros.

Ninetta gave an overview of the balance sheet and income statement figures, as well as of the grants and co-funding that supported the work of Eurochild in the course of 2022.

As for the 2023 budget, the expected income is currently at € 1.761.147, whereas expenditure is foreseen to be € 1.749.426, giving a minimum operating result of € 11.721. Eurochild received approval of its 2023 Work Program and related Budget from the European Commission late in December 2022. The Budget represents our efforts to return to “normality” and to maintain our capacity to implement our work program to the full. Despite our constant efforts to ensure Membership Fees are allocated to reserves, we foresee a close of the year with a reduced profit of 11.721 euros. We are committed to continuous fundraising efforts that will hopefully increase the year-end profit of 2023.

Ninetta clarified that in the online voting ballots, members are also asked to **grant discharge to the Management Board, Secretary General and Director of Finance for their responsibility towards the 2022 accounts**. This means that they cannot be held responsible for any errors or deficiency in management over the past year, unless they would concern facts that were hidden from the General Assembly.

Floor was opened to questions. The President thanked the Treasurer for her presentation and gave the floor to Katharina who facilitated the online voting on all finance items.

Adoption of audited accounts for the 2022 financial year and 2023 budget of the Association, granting of discharge to the Management Board, including the outgoing Management Board members, Secretary General and Auditor for the exercises of their mandate during the financial year ending 31 December 2022

Ninetta announced that the simple majority of full members present or represented at the General Assembly voted in favour of the following:

- Adoption of audited accounts 2022 and the 2023 budget
- Granting of discharge to the Management Board, Secretary General, Director of Finance for their responsibility towards the 2022 accounts

For details of the voting results, please see [ANNEX 1](#).

D. Membership

Presentations of the candidates' members, members' exclusions and withdrawals

This session was led by Eurochild Management Board Member Uroš Brezovsek, chair of the membership sub-committee. Prior to the session, all participants had received [a document](#) introducing the candidate members and withdrawals. Uroš introduced each candidate, supported by slides.

After Uroš's presentation, the full members voted through Election Runner on the admission of new candidate members.

Voting on the admission of the candidates' members, membership exclusion and acknowledgment of membership withdrawals

- **Approval of new members and members' exclusion**

The General Assembly endorsed the admissions of 8 candidate members, by the simple majority of Full members present or represented.

Full Members (6)

ARMENIA

- Child Protection Network

GERMANY

- ENTE, European Network for Traveller Education

ICELAND

- Proskahjálp, the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities

MONTENEGRO

- NGO Parents (NVU Roditelji)

SPAIN

- ASEAF, National Foster Care Association
- Fundacio Privada Pere Closa

Associate Members (2)

AZERBAIJAN

- Fidan Abdullayeva - Individual

SWEDEN

- Ann Rem Loraine Rava-Lynn – Individual

Details of the voting results can be found in [ANNEX 1](#).

• Acknowledgement of membership withdrawals

The General Assembly acknowledged the following withdrawals of members:

Full Members (3)

ITALY

- Mission Bambini Foundation

ROMANIA

- Heart of a Child Foundation

UNITED KINGDOM

- Children's Parliament Scotland

Associate Members (1)

BELGIUM

- Margaréta Kováčová – Individual

Uroš announced that Eurochild now counts 195 members in 41 European countries, and welcomed all new members to the network.

E. Management Board (MB) elections

Presentation of Election Committee Report

The President introduced the item, giving then the floor to the Election Committee representative Catriona Williams.

Catriona shortly presented the process described in their [2023 report](#).

For the 2023 elections, the 2022 Extraordinary General Assembly appointed the Election Committee comprising four (4) member representatives: **Laura Kazilione** (AutoMoto Group NGO, Lithuania), **Ariella King** (Ariel Foundation, Switzerland), **Ene Tomberg** (Estonian Union for Child Welfare, Estonia) and **Catriona Williams OBE** (Founding President and Honorary Member of Eurochild, United Kingdom).

Following the Statutes, Eurochild can have a Management Board of up to nine (9) members. Therefore, the Management Board Nomination call was open for two (2) Management Board member positions, until 27 March 2023, which the Management Board then decided to extend to 10 April 2023 due to a lack of applicants. The Election Committee received by the deadline of the 10 April, seven (7) nominations, all of them resulting eligible according to the criteria set by the Call for nominations for election to the Management Board.

Catriona then explained that today, full members are called to vote on 2 nominees for the Management Board ordinary members positions.

The Election Committee sent the [nominee list](#) with a note with their biographical details and their motivation to join the Management Board. Members had the possibility to send their questions and comments in advance, but none were received. Due to the tight timing during the session, participants were requested to ask only questions which were necessary for enabling being informed.

Before giving the floor to the nominees to present their candidacy, Catriona asked the Eurochild Secretariat to open the online ballots and send the email from Election Runner to the Full Members' voting representatives, so they could start casting their votes.

MB candidates Presentation

Catriona asked the seven (7) candidates to introduce themselves.

- **Altin Hazizaj, The Children's Human Rights Centre (Albania)**

Altin Hazizaj has been the CEO of CRCA/ECPAT Albania since 2002. He has 30 years of experience as a youth movement leader, journalist, child rights expert, with extensive experience in the business sector as well. He is a PhD docent of Law School of Tirana University, while he holds LLM and MA degrees in Law and European Studies. As a journalist he was arrested and imprisoned for his strong articles against the autocratic leadership and lack of democracy in Albania in 1996.

- **Alexandrina Dimitrova, Cedar Foundation (Bulgaria)**

Alexandrina Dimitrova is the Executive Director of the Cedar Foundation – a Bulgarian non-governmental organisation with over 17 years of experience in deinstitutionalisation and provision of quality social services to disadvantaged children and adults with disabilities. She started her professional path at the Cedar Foundation in 2012. After two months as a volunteer, she was hired as Coordinator and was responsible for supporting the team in all fundraising activities, researching good practices for social services development, and assisting in liaising with government officials. In 2014, she was promoted to Policy and Programs Manager. For the past 8 years (since 2015), she has been the primary representative and managing body of the Foundation, leading a team of 100 employees.

- **Ulla Siimes, Central Union for Child Welfare (Finland)**

Ulla Siimes is Executive Director of the Central Union for Child Welfare (an NPN and a Founder member organisation of Eurochild). She is an experienced leader with over 10 years of experience in leading NGO's in Finland (CUCW, Finnish Parents' League, Teacher Student Union of Finland). She is a strong defender of children's rights and has done advocacy work and policy influencing related to children and families for

over 10 years. She is a music teacher by background, but has worked almost her entire career in non-governmental organizations (NGO activities, development) and educated herself as a leader.

- **Sanja Škorić, Society "Our Children" Opatija (Croatia)**

Sanja Škorić is the professional secretary of the Society "Our Children" Opatija since 2003 (from 1991 to 2002 she volunteered at SOC Opatija). She is an advocate for children's rights and active children's participation. Her work with and for children has been recognized in the country and abroad, as evidenced by numerous local, national, European and global awards.

- **Sérgio Costa Araújo, Individual Member (Portugal)**

Sérgio Costa Araújo has been a Portuguese Eurochild member since 2009. In 2009 he was invited to write the Portuguese section of the Eurochild Survey on Children in Alternative Care, published in 2010. Since then, he has been an active member of the "Child in Alternative Care" working group. He collaborated intensively with Eurochild through the years in various projects and reports. He is currently Invited Adjunct Professor at the city of Porto Polytechnic School of Education and a Collaborator Researcher at inED – Center for Research and Innovation in Education. He works mostly in socio-educational areas in thematic domains that includes fighting poverty and promoting social inclusion, with particular attention in the links between children's rights, poverty and exclusion. He is an Independent Expert on child Rights and child poverty.

- **Lucille Allain, Middlesex University (United Kingdom)**

Lucille Allain is a Professor of Social Work (Practice) and Head of Department Mental Health and Social Work at Middlesex University, London, UK. She is also a visiting, independent Vice Chair of a Fostering and Permanency Panel where decisions about vulnerable children and young people are made. She has been a full member of Eurochild since joining in 2016. She also attended the Eurochild General Assembly and Members Days in person in 2019 and during the Covid pandemic she attended on-line and been involved in proxy voting in 2021 and 2022.

- **Deborah Jones, Voices From Care Cymru (United Kingdom)**

Since 1998 Deborah Jones, who is care experienced herself, has been Chief Executive of Voices From Care Cymru (VFCC) managing and growing the organisation. VFCC is the national peer led organisation for care experienced children and young people in Wales. As a passionate and determined campaigner for children's rights, especially their participation, she successfully advocated for a Government funded multi million pound Public Inquiry into Abuse in Care in North Wales in 1998 and consequently the first Children's Commissioner in the UK. As well as with children and young people, she has developed excellent relations with funders such as BBC Children in Need, politicians including Welsh Government First Minister, policy makers and VFCC patron, Michael Sheen the Hollywood actor, to ensure that the messages from care experienced children and young people are heard undiluted. Deborah has been

involved with Eurochild in a variety of ways over the years both in partnership with Children in Wales and as a full Eurochild member, especially through supporting young people to participate and speaking at international events.

Voting on MB candidates

The Election Committee opened the next agenda item on the voting of the Management Board nominees and gave the floor to Katharina who facilitated the election process.

Announcement and Confirmation of the election results

The President announced that the voting was successful, and that 2 candidates were elected by the simple majority of Full members present or represented at the General Assembly, and appointed as ordinary Management Board Members:

- **Sérgio Costa Araújo** (individual member – Portugal) for a first mandate of three years
- **Ulla Siimes** (Central Union for Child Welfare, NPN, Finland) for a first mandate of three years

The President thanked the Election Committee and all the candidates for their willingness to contribute to Eurochild, and welcomed newly-elected members in the Management Board. She then thanked Sean O'Neill, ending his mandate, for his invaluable contribution during the last 6 years.

For detailed voting results, please see [ANNEX 1](#).

F. Meeting closure

Statement of Eurochild President H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca

The President restated that the current context will continue to be challenging: the war in Ukraine, the impact of Covid, the rising costs of living and decreased quality of life, etc. aggravated child poverty across the European continent. In such a context, we clearly know that children are facing further suffering. Therefore, in the face of this adversity, she emphasized the need to further unite and act as one network seeking to stand up for all children living in Europe. She especially acknowledged the work and courage of the members working in and around Ukraine, reaffirming Eurochild's support.

The President reminded that Eurochild is truly a unique organisation and that we should be thankful to our Founders, for coming together and establishing the Association. Eurochild, with its members, is the largest regional network on the ground, embracing over 4000 organisations, in 41 European countries, making it

nearly as big as the Council of Europe. She stated that while growing could mean further challenges for the organisation, by working together, we can continue to strengthen and become more and more relevant to safeguard children's rights.

Closing of the administrative session

The President formally closed Eurochild's Annual General Assembly 2023 reiterating her heartfelt thanks to:

- All members of the Management Board
- The interim Secretary General
- The members of the Secretariat
- Former Presidents and members of the Management Board
- All participants and members of the Eurochild Network, for making Eurochild a strong community for Children's Rights in Europe.

The meeting was closed.