

# **Prioritising Children's Rights for a Democratic, Prosperous, Competitive, Digital and Green Europe**

**Eurochild's Post-European  
Parliament Elections Analysis**



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

June 2024

# Prioritising Children's Rights for a Democratic, Prosperous, Competitive, Digital and Green Europe

## *Eurochild's Post-European Parliament Elections Analysis*

The recent European Parliament elections have drawn significant attention from European citizens, reflected in a turnout of 51.8%. The European People's Party (EPP), led by Ursula von der Leyen, emerged victorious, potentially securing von der Leyen a second term as Commission President. While the Socialists and Democrats maintained their position, Renew Europe (liberals) and Greens suffered losses. Notably, far-right parties gained substantial support, particularly in France, Germany, and Austria. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group now holds a more influential position.

In general, the composition of the new European Parliament (2024-2029) might suggest some continuity in policy direction. However, there is a risk that the more radical parties will be in a better position to promote their agendas.

The political and legislative priorities for the upcoming European Commission (2024-2029), in line with the priorities of the European Council and newly elected European Parliament, will be agreed through coalition-building efforts. Key policy priorities will be spelled out in a mission statement, presented by the candidate nominated for the Commission President in September, and followed by specific policy statements for individual commissioners. All designated Members of the next European Commission will undergo a hearing and an affirmative vote by the European Parliament. The new College of Commissioners is expected to be appointed by the end of 2024.

### **Eurochild's Advocacy for Children's Rights**

Eurochild, as the largest network of children's rights organisations in Europe, with **more than 200 organisations and individuals in membership from across 42 European countries**, strives for a society that respects the rights of every child, including very young children. We fight against child poverty and advocate for systemic reforms that address structural inequalities by prioritising public investment in childcare, education, healthcare, housing, and family support. We work with and for children and engage children from diverse backgrounds in everything we do, including advocacy, governance and events.

Based on political groups' manifestos, which we have already analysed in this [earlier article](#), our recommendations emphasize the need to specifically address **children's rights** within **the EU's future agenda** focusing on competitiveness, digitalisation, greening, and security.

*"We are the present, not the future, we are here."* Valentina, 15, Croatia ([Our Rights. Our Future. The Europe We Want.](#))

Here's a detailed look at our proposals:

## 1. Democratic European Union

Indeed, the EU's **democratic resilience** should be strengthened in the upcoming European cycle. As demonstrated in the latest European elections, young voters had also voted for far-right parties. Their dissatisfaction with the lack of job opportunities and the increasing cost of living, combined with disinformation including anti-human rights and anti-child rights rhetoric through social media, have increased young voters' support for right-wing parties. To counter this, it is crucial to ensure quality and accessible education for all children. Such education fosters critical thinking skills, helping young people to recognise and resist fake news and disinformation. It also paves the way for better employment opportunities.

To uphold European values, we must prioritise continuing the **European Education Area** to reach its goals by 2025. Similarly, monitoring and reinforcing the implementation of the Council Recommendation on **Pathways to School Success** should receive more support.

The first 1,000 days of a child's life are a time of unique and rapid development and are highly influenced by the child's environment, early experiences, and interactions. Increased support and public investment in nurturing care and quality early years services are essential for tackling child poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Therefore, we call on the current **European Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care** to continue and expand. The implementation of the Revised Barcelona Targets guaranteeing early childhood care should be enhanced.

Moreover, monitoring and **countering anti-child rights movements** must be central to upholding European values. **Children should be recognised as agents of change in their own right**. Building on the achievements of the EU Children's Participation Platform, more resources and space should be given to facilitate children's active role in shaping European laws and policies.

- **European Education Area:** Continued support to achieve its goals by 2025.
- **Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success:** Enhanced implementation and monitoring.
- **Recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child:** ensure the implementation and monitoring, with the inclusion of civil society organisations.
- **Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC):** Increased public investment in early years services to combat child poverty and social exclusion.
- **Anti-child rights movements and child participation:** Monitoring and countering these movements while promoting children's active participation in shaping European policies. It is crucial that EU decision-makers, particularly the future Members of the European Parliament, continue to lead by example and ensure rights-based, meaningful, inclusive, and safe child participation, involving children from within and outside the EU in all debates and decisions that affect their lives.

- **Strengthen national legislative frameworks:** ensure children’s rights are taken into account during the transposition and implementation of key legislative frameworks, including the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the recently revised EU Anti-Trafficking Directive, the EU Directive on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
- **Europe must be a guarantor of peace, and promote the respect of international law and fair international relations. It is indispensable that the EU does not lose sight of the wars that are taking place around the world and continues providing humanitarian support**

## 2. A prosperous and competitive European Union

*“Children living in poverty live a difficult life and struggle with problems that most do not recognise.”* Child from Croatia ([Poverty Takes Away Right to Childhood, Eurochild](#))

*“I believe that there should more additional subjects focusing on topics important for our future, such as those related to the labour market.”* Denis, 16, Bulgaria ([Our Rights. Our Future. The Europe We Want.](#))

We can’t achieve prosperity without lifting children and their families out of poverty. Yet, there are still **20 million children at risk of poverty and social exclusion** in the EU, with an upward trend since 2021 reflecting the impact of the costs of living crisis on the population at risk. To reverse this trend, the EU must continue to invest in children, as committed to in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. All children deserve a family to grow up in. Therefore, **families with children** should be prioritised, because low-income families, single parent and large families are mostly affected by poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, the EU must capitalise on the historic opportunity offered by the **European Child Guarantee**, maintaining the fight against child poverty and the protection of children’s social rights at the centre of the EU political agenda. By providing access to the key services (education, ECEC, nutrition, housing, and health-care) we will ensure that most vulnerable children will break the cycle of disadvantage.

Children from marginalised groups, including Roma and other racialised children, those in institutional care, children with disabilities, homeless children and children with a migrant background, are particularly vulnerable to poverty and its consequences. Instead of solely focusing on attracting external talent to address labour shortages, we should prioritize supporting **the children** already within the EU. By investing in their potential, we can unlock the opportunity for a more prosperous and competitive future for Europe.

In regards to **EU Enlargement**, the European Child Guarantee should become a model for fighting child poverty, advancing their social inclusion policies, and support children’s integration into the EU.

The implementation of this tool requires a thorough monitoring and sustainable funding. We call for using the existing tools, such as **the European Semester**, to provide **thorough guidance** via Country Specific Recommendations regarding the implementation of the Child Guarantee. In view of the preparation of the **new MFF**, **child poverty** must remain a thematic priority.

Achieving prosperity involves addressing child poverty and social exclusion. Key measures include:

- **European Pillar of Social Rights:** Continued investment in children and prioritisation of families with children, especially low-income and single-parent families.
- **European Child Guarantee:** Ensuring access to essential services, such as education, ECEC, nutrition, housing, and healthcare, to break the cycle of disadvantage.
- **Marginalised Groups:** Special focus on children from marginalised backgrounds to ensure their inclusion and unlock their potential.
- **EU Enlargement:** Ensure children's rights are upheld within the context the accession process, including by using the Child Guarantee as a model for advancing social inclusion policies in candidate countries.

### 3. Digital and Green European Union

*"I think that there is a need for more restrictions in terms of inappropriate online behaviors."*  
Niya, 16, Bulgaria ([Our Rights. Our Future. The Europe We Want.](#))

Children are significantly impacted by digitalisation. Although many initiatives exist at EU level to promote children's digital literacy and support the Member States still lag behind in holding online service **providers accountable to keep children safe on their platforms and uphold children's rights online** through comprehensive legislation and policy, as indicated by the UN General Comment No. 25. It is important to recognise the interplay between digital literacy and legislation: while the former is key to support children in the exercise of their rights, the latter is needed to create enabling environments for them to be able to exercise such rights. As part of the **Better Internet for Kids+ Strategy**, implement initiatives to promote age-appropriate and empowering digital experiences for children – including advancing the work on a Code of Conduct on Age-Appropriate Design.

As highlighted by Eurochild members, **cyberbullying** is still one of the main concerns children face online. It is, therefore, crucial **to reinforce the network of child helplines and hotlines across the EU** to ensure that all children have equal access to quality support services at national level.

In response to the rise of child sexual abuse (including new forms of abuse - i.e., AI-facilitated abuse) and earlier exposure to online risks, the **EU must level up the fight against child sexual abuse online**, including homogenous action at EU level to demand online platforms to prevent and stop the dissemination of child sexual abuse on their services.

- **Ensure child safety online** by continuing to implement existing policies and regulations, most notably the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the AI Act.
- **Ensure age-appropriate experiences for children:** As part of the **Better Internet for Kids+ Strategy**, implement initiatives focusing on promoting age-appropriate experiences for children, promoting their active participation, and ensuring their protection as consumers.

- **Develop the protection of children as consumers:** Address the rights of children as consumers, by addressing their specific rights and vulnerabilities and the heightened risks stemming from digital services and products, notably in the implementation and enforcement of consumer law and the context of the upcoming Digital Fairness Fitness Check.
- **Cyberbullying:** Strengthening child helplines and hotlines to provide quality support services.
- **Child Sexual Abuse:** Intensifying efforts to combat online child sexual abuse, including by ensuring strong criminal legal frameworks at national level and homogenous action at EU level to enable online platforms to prevent and stop the dissemination of child sexual abuse on their services.

*“We are often discussing climate change at school. I think that the topic concerns all of us. I think that maybe politicians believe that they are doing enough but they should do more.”*  
 Denis, 16, Bulgaria ([Our Rights. Our Future. The Europe We Want.](#))

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups affected by climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss regarding health, food, and living environment. In line with the UN General Comment No. 26 which introduces a child rights approach to environmental policies, we call for all children to have the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment without discrimination. On the other hand, the EU's **environmental policies**, such as the Green Deal, must not lead to deepening the poverty of the most vulnerable population groups.

- **Environmental Rights:** Ensuring children’s right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and aligning EU environmental policies with the UN General Comment No. 26 to avoid exacerbating poverty.

**Eurochild highlights the need for targeted attention to children’s rights and well-being within the broader European agenda. Our recommendations aim to create a more inclusive, safe, and prosperous Europe for all children.**

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