# Children's rights in Europe

## Eurochild's review of the 2019-2024 EU institutional cycle

Throughout the 2019-2024 EU institutional cycle, Europe has grappled with global challenges affecting children, from the Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip, to high inflation rates. In the face of these crises, the European institutions have demonstrated unwavering commitment to upholding children's rights. **Eurochild has played a key role in supporting, influencing, monitoring, disseminating, and advocating for crucial measures to advance children's rights across the continent. This paper highlights the key initiatives undertaken by EU institutions during the last legislative cycle, in which Eurochild has been actively involved.**

## The European Commission

A significant milestone during this period was the adoption of a comprehensive and ambitious **Strategy on the Rights of the Child**, outlining measures to tackle pressing challenges faced by children today, including social exclusion, violence, and mental health issues. Alongside the Strategy, the **European Child Guarantee** is the first EU initiative that ring-fences European Social Fund Plus funding to address child poverty in EU countries. The countries have not only adopted their National Action Plans, but are reporting on the progress made during the implementation process, in line with the first EU monitoring framework dedicated to child poverty. The **Recommendation on integrated child protection systems**, a commitment within the Strategy, is a reference point for child protection systems in the EU and was also based on a **mapping by the European Fundamental Rights Agency**. The Commission also developed various **guidelines to ensure child participation** and established **the EU Children's Participation Platform**.

In an effort to strengthen a more holistic approach to children's education and wellbeing, as part of the European Education Area, the Commission published a policy guidance on supporting the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in education, and Guidelines for education policymakers, school leaders, teachers and educators on wellbeing and mental health at school. The new **Better Internet for Kids Strategy** and the actions linked to the **EU Strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse** offer a framework to respond to the increasing threats that children may face online.

In light of the consultations with young people conducted during the Conference on the Future of Europe, the European Commission adopted a **Communication on mental health** focusing on children and young people. The EU Roma Strategic Framework, paying specific attention to reducing poverty and increasing participation in early childhood education and care, along with the Gender Equality Strategy, were also adopted. The **EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** is worth noting, as it calls for inclusive and accessible support services for children with disabilities, and the implementation of the deinstitutionalisation process. The **Recommendation to promote the effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes** was also a crucial achievement.

## The Council

The Council adopted its **Conclusions on children's rights** and **the EU strategy on the rights of the child**, focused on the protection of children's rights in crisis or emergency situations. It also recommended revising **the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care**, **high quality early childhood education and care**, and **inclusive primary and secondary education.** It also introduced the initiative **Pathway to School Success**. The adoption of the **European Care Strategy** is crucial to ensure that children receive the care to which they are entitled. The Council has demonstrated its commitment to children's rights in the digital environment through the

Conclusions on support for influencers as online content creators, including a special focus on children.

## The European Parliament

The European Parliament has been vocal in championing children's rights with various policy initiatives. These include reports on **social inclusion for children**, **promoting the right to education**, **the situation of children deprived of liberty**, and **addictive design of online services.** Resolutions on children's rights were also voted to commemorate the **30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, the **2nd anniversary of the adoption of the European Child Guarantee,** and the adoption of the **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**.

## Successful governance mechanisms

During the 2019-2024 institutional cycle, we have observed many examples of successful governance mechanisms. For the first time, a Vice-President for Democracy and Demography at the European Commission has been appointed with a specific mandate on children's rights. This Vice-President established the **EU Network for Children's Rights** to reinforce dialogue and mutual learning between the EU, Member States and civil society organisations. Additionally, the **European Parliament's Intergroup on Children's Rights**, initially founded in 2014, was re-established in 2019. In the same year, the European Parliament nominated the first **European Parliament Coordinator on Children's Rights**. The European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs also established a **Working Group on the Child Guarantee**. Promising steps towards safer online experiences for children have also been taken by forming the Special Group on the EU Code of Conduct on Age Appropriate Design and the Task Force on Age Verification, as well as the Special Group on Code of Conduct for age-appropriate design. The Commission also created a working group on early childhood education and care, which published deliverables on monitoring and evaluation and staff shortage. A working group on schools was also formed.

## Funding

During this mandate, the EU adopted its **financial framework for 2021-2027**. This includes the **European Social Fund Plus**, the main EU instrument for investing in people, which, in line with the **European Pillar for Social Rights**, allocated 25% of its funds for social inclusion including 5% for child poverty (for 11 Member States) and an adequate amount for other Member States. Initiatives on children's rights have been supported by a variety of funding, including the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme**. The Recovery and Resilience Funding Facility, together with its flagship initiative, Next Generation EU, were introduced to address the Covid-19 crisis.

## The EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and EU enlargement

The EU took several measures to support the population affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, such as activating the **Temporary Protection Directive** and adopting the **Ukraine Facility** to support the reconstruction of the country. Furthermore, efforts to revamp EU enlargement resulted in the **candidate status** for countries like Ukraine, Moldova, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Georgia, presenting **new opportunities to advance children's rights in the region**.

## Adopted legislation

This institutional cycle has seen the adoption of several legislative files binding for all EU Member States, such as the new **Pact on Migration and Asylum**. **The recently revised EU Anti-Trafficking**

**Directive** strengthens the measures to protect child victims and recognises the link between child trafficking and institutional care. The EU also ratified the **Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention** and adopted the **EU Directive on violence against women and domestic violence**, paying specific attention to child victims, including those witnessing violence. While the **Digital Service Act** was a milestone in protecting children's rights online, the **Artificial intelligence Act** will contribute to the protection of all citizens, including children, from high-risk tools. The **extension of the Interim Regulation derogating certain provisions of the e-Privacy Directive for the purpose of combatting child sexual abuse online** allowed to maintain a minimum standard of child protection online while a more permanent framework is being negotiated. **The Regulation on parenthood recognition** awaits the first reading in the Council.

## The pending legislative files

Among the many legislative files currently pending, there is the **Revised Victims' Rights Directive**, including amendments strengthening the child protection system. The **Regulation laying down rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse** is awaiting the Council's position in its first reading. Additionally, the **recast of the Directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography** is pending the Committee's decision.

## Looking ahead

As the 9th EU legislative period comes to a close, Eurochild reflects on the manifestos of the political groups, and calls for future EU decision-makers to prioritise children's rights, both online and offline, in the upcoming mandate. We are delighted that many future EU decision-makers have signed up to become children's rights champions.

**Eurochild appreciates the collaboration with the EU institutions in the past years and stands ready to continue collaborating with them to strive for a society where all children and young people grow up happy, healthy, confident, and respected as individuals in their own rights.**

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