

# Prevention, Participation and Investment: Eurochild's vision for a Stronger European Child Guarantee

*Eurochild's Response to the European Commission  
Communication "Breaking the cycle of child poverty –  
strengthening the European Child Guarantee" (2026)*



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

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# Prevention, Participation and Investment: Eurochild's vision for a Stronger European Child Guarantee

## ***Eurochild's Response to the European Commission Communication "Breaking the cycle of child poverty – strengthening the European Child Guarantee" (2026)***

Eurochild welcomes the European Commission Communication on strengthening the European Child Guarantee as an important signal that tackling child poverty and social exclusion remains a core priority for the European Union. The Communication includes several elements that Eurochild has long advocated for. In particular, it recognises the scale and long-term consequences of child poverty, the economic and social cost of inaction, and the need for integrated and sustained investment in children and families. We particularly welcome the recognition that individual services must be integrated into broader, coherent and consistent support systems capable of addressing children's needs holistically.

Child poverty is not only a barrier to social inclusion; it is a violation of children's rights. Strengthening the European Child Guarantee must therefore be understood as part of the EU's broader obligation to uphold and realise children's rights across all policy areas.

### **Three pillars for strengthening the European Child Guarantee**

The Communication broadens its approach through three interconnected pillars:

1. Supporting families and households in which children live
2. Strengthening the European Child Guarantee itself
3. Reinforcing governance, monitoring and funding frameworks

#### **First pillar: supporting families and households**

Eurochild welcomes the recognition that robust social safety nets, adequate income support, and measures addressing in-work poverty remain essential for preventing child poverty. We particularly welcome the planned Commission Recommendation on enhancing the efficiency of child-related benefit systems in addressing child poverty, including a stronger focus on adequacy, coverage, accessibility, use and take-up.

At the same time, it is crucial that child benefits remain adequate, unconditional and rights-based. While vouchers may complement support in certain situations, they should never replace cash benefits or restrict families' autonomy and dignity. Safeguards are needed to ensure that monitoring systems aimed at preventing misuse do not become punitive or discriminatory towards families in vulnerable situations. The focus should remain on removing barriers to take-up and ensuring that support reaches children and families, rather than creating additional layers of conditionality or suspicion. This requires simplified procedures, accessible information, multilingual outreach, support for digital literacy and close cooperation with civil society organisations and local communities.

Eurochild also welcomes the stronger focus on activation measures and work-life balance policies. However, given that the Work-Life Balance Directive (2019) was adopted several years ago and the Commission itself recognises the implementation gaps, the Communication could have gone further in promoting concrete models of flexible and remote working arrangements that better support working parents and carers.

Regarding early childhood education and care, Eurochild strongly believes that quality must remain the primary objective. ECEC should first and foremost support children's development, well-being, social skills and interactions. While infrastructure, affordability and accessibility for vulnerable families are essential, these objectives must never come at the expense of quality provision.

We welcome the Communication's stronger focus on families and households, and believe this should be more explicitly linked to the prevention of unnecessary family separation and to support for children in alternative care. Poverty must never be a reason for separating a child from their family. A strengthened European Child Guarantee should support family-strengthening and community-based services that enable parents and caregivers to care for their children safely and with dignity. This includes parenting programmes, early intervention, and accessible services at local level. Support should not stop at prevention: families should also be supported throughout the child protection process, including where safe reunification is in the child's best interests. For children already in alternative care, and for young people leaving care, the Child Guarantee should ensure tailored and continuous support.

While recognising the focus on school meals and healthy nutrition, this should be further strengthened by ensuring that children have access to adequate and nutritious food beyond school days, including during holidays, and by supporting universal or targeted approaches that avoid stigma and reach children most at risk of food insecurity. The link between single-parent households, ECEC, and the gap between the end of parental leave and access to ECEC is particularly important and should be followed up with concrete measures.

### **Second pillar: strengthening the impact of the European Child Guarantee**

The Communication acknowledges that, since its adoption, the European Child Guarantee has delivered important gains. Eurochild believes that the specific added value of the European Child Guarantee must remain clear and protected. While support to families, employment measures, and broader social protection policies are essential, these measures should primarily sit within the broader Anti-Poverty Strategy and complement rather than dilute the core mission of the Child Guarantee: ensuring children in need have access to quality essential services, to protect their rights and combat social exclusion. We welcome the references to continuity of support from early childhood through to early adulthood, including stronger links between the European Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee. This life-course approach, with a focus on support pathways from early years to independent adulthood, is crucial. Eurochild also welcomes the stronger focus on mental health, online safety and mentoring support, as well as the recognition that children facing intersecting disadvantages require targeted and individualised responses. It is particularly

encouraging to see children's perspectives from the latest European Child Guarantee survey reflected throughout the text.

Focusing on Roma children, children with disabilities, children in alternative care, homeless children, and young people transitioning into adulthood is especially important.

However, the Communication remains too vague on how Member States will systematically identify and reach children facing the highest barriers, including children with a migration background and from ethnic minority origins, despite the [Anti-Racism Strategy](#) explicitly encouraging delivery on the European Child Guarantee for these groups.

More attention is therefore needed to the structural drivers of child poverty, including discrimination, segregation, administrative exclusion, insecure migration status, disability-related barriers, territorial inequalities, and the long-term effects of underinvestment in public services. Children do not experience poverty in isolation from these wider systems. A strengthened European Child Guarantee must be supported by disaggregated data, outreach strategies and safeguards against discrimination.

Eurochild takes note of the proposed pilot for a European Child Guarantee Card. If well-designed, such a tool could help reduce administrative barriers, improve take-up of services and support better coordination between authorities and service providers. However, any digital solution must be developed with strong safeguards for children's rights, data protection, accessibility, non-discrimination, and non-stigmatisation. It must never become a precondition for accessing support, and non-digital alternatives must remain available for children and families facing digital exclusion.

We particularly welcome the dedicated focus on children's rights in the digital environment within the Communication. Children's background influences their access to connectivity and devices, their digital skills, the support available to them, their exposure to risks, and their ability to seek help or remedies. We therefore welcome that the Communication links the strengthened European Child Guarantee with broader EU digital policy files, including the Digital Services Act, the forthcoming Digital Fairness Act, the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Better Internet for Kids strategy, and ongoing work to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation.

### **Third pillar: governance, monitoring and funding**

The Communication rightly recognises the importance of involving local authorities, civil society organisations, children and people with lived experience. Nevertheless, Eurochild believes that a more structured and permanent mechanism for meaningful participation is needed at both EU and national level to ensure that policies are designed, implemented and monitored together with those directly affected.

The assessment checklist, as mentioned in the accompanying Commission's Working Documents, including 33 questions to guide Member States to review the National Action Plans and their progress, is a step forward. It should also be complemented by measurable objectives, timelines, dedicated budgets, clear institutional responsibilities and transparent reporting mechanisms. Member States should also demonstrate how they will

systematically reach children who are currently invisible to services, including through proactive outreach, local partnerships, simplified access procedures and cooperation with civil society organisations.

Eurochild welcomes that the European Commission will leverage the European Semester to identify gaps and, where appropriate, put forward recommendations to better embed the fight against child poverty in the coordination of Member States' economic and social policies.

However, while the Communication acknowledges the need for stronger and sustained investment, the overall level of ambition remains insufficient. The absence of a concrete earmarking target or a dedicated financial commitment, such as the European Parliament's proposed €20 billion allocation for the European Child Guarantee, risks undermining the initiative's transformative potential. Eurochild would also welcome a more explicit recognition of the structural causes behind insufficient investment in children, including reductions in public budgets and the diversion of funds away from social priorities.

References to existing EU funds and to the Council of Europe Development Bank's potential €1 billion annual financing envelope are welcome, but they do not yet provide the level of predictable, ring-fenced investment needed to effectively combat child poverty across Europe. Similarly, we look forward to knowing more about the establishment of the [Coalition Against Poverty](#) to mobilise the private sector, businesses, and civil society. Private and philanthropic investment can play a complementary role, but must not replace predictable public funding or public accountability.

### **The Commission Staff Working Document**

Eurochild welcomes that several examples and priorities raised through its [evidence-gathering](#) with members are reflected in the [Commission Staff Working Document](#), which comprehensively analyses Member States' implementation of the European Child Guarantee. It also provides an in-depth assessment of service delivery for children in need across Member States, applying a traffic-light approach, with green indicating stronger performance and red highlighting the most significant gaps and challenges. This clear and accessible methodology helps identify both good practices and areas requiring further attention and investment.

Examples such as Estonia's automated data exchange, Portugal's local Child Guarantee structures, Italy's Youth Advisory Board and DesTEENazione initiative, and Ireland's expansion of school meals show the importance of grounding EU policy in the practical experience of civil society, local authorities and children themselves. The participation of civil society organisations, including the Alliance for Investing in Children and Eurochild, is rightly highlighted. However, following the findings of the 2025 Eurochild Flagship Report, the assessment of stakeholders' involvement on national level appears overly optimistic. Many of Eurochild's members, national and local civil society organisations, continue to face significant challenges in being meaningfully involved in the monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of the European Child Guarantee.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, Eurochild sees this Communication as a useful and promising basis for strengthening the European Child Guarantee. We strongly welcome the increased emphasis on prevention, integrated support services, mental health, online safety, school meals, early childhood education and care (ECEC), mentoring, and support for the transition from childhood into early adulthood, as well as the focus on Roma children. The Communication rightly acknowledges that fragmented, short-term interventions are insufficient, and that stronger governance, monitoring and long-term investment are necessary to break the cycle of disadvantage.

The Commission's own analysis demonstrates that the ECG is not an optional policy initiative, but an essential EU instrument to break the cycle of child poverty. This European commitment must now be fully translated into national action and genuinely owned by Member States, otherwise, there is a real risk that its impact will be diluted. At a time when discussions on the next EU budget are underway, Eurochild strongly calls for the European Child Guarantee to remain a distinct, visible and ambitious child-rights commitment at EU level.

This requires stronger sustained political commitment, dedicated investment under the next MFF, and sustained stronger engagement with children, civil society, local authorities and Member States to ensure the Guarantee remains meaningful and capable of delivering real change for children across Europe.

### **The next phase must now focus on concrete delivery:**

- stronger revised National Action Plans,
- systematic use of the European Semester,
- meaningful participation of children in vulnerable situations and civil society,
- robust monitoring frameworks,
- adequate, ring-fenced funding under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034),
- strengthened targeted measures for children facing the highest barriers, including children with a migrant background and ethnic minority origin.

These elements will be essential to translate political commitments into real change for children and families across Europe.

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