

Beyond Employment: Making the European Pillar for Social Rights Deliver for Children

**Eurochild's position paper on the
renewed European Pillar of Social
Rights 2026**



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

September 2026

Beyond Employment: Making the European Pillar for Social Rights Deliver for Children

Eurochild's position paper on the renewed European Pillar of Social Rights 2026

Eurochild welcomes the Commission's renewed commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights and its ambition to accelerate implementation as Europe faces profound social, economic, demographic and technological changes.

There has been important progress since the 2021 Action Plan. The EU employment rate reached **76.1% in 2025, putting Europe on course to achieve its 78% employment target by 2030**. However, progress is much slower on skills and poverty reduction. The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased by only around 3.5 million between 2019 and 2025, against the EU target of at least 15 million fewer people, including **at least 5 million children**, by 2030. For Eurochild, this imbalance demonstrates why social progress cannot be measured through employment alone. **Reducing child poverty and inequality must remain at the heart of the implementation of the Pillar.**

We particularly welcome the Commission's recognition that **inequalities start early in life and accumulate over time**, and that early investment can prevent disadvantages from being transmitted across generations. The recently adopted **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy** and the **strengthened European Child Guarantee** are rightly identified as key instruments in addressing these inequalities. Recognition alone, however, will not be sufficient. Strengthening the European Child Guarantee must mean clearer objectives, stronger monitoring and accountability, and adequate and sustainable funding to support its effective implementation in every Member State.

The Communication also rightly focuses on the growing **cost-of-living and affordability crisis**. Housing, food, energy and transport costs, as well as barriers to essential services, have a major impact on children and families experiencing poverty. Eurochild therefore welcomes forthcoming initiatives such as the **Affordable Housing Act and European Care Deal**, while stressing that their design and implementation must systematically address the needs of children and families.

We also welcome the stronger focus on **education, digital transformation and young people**. The forthcoming Education Package should help address persistent educational inequalities and improve the performance and inclusiveness of school systems. The **post-2027 EU Youth Strategy** provides another important opportunity to ensure that all young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, can realise their full potential.

Digital transformation and AI offer opportunities to strengthen education, public services and access to support. At the same time, the Communication recognises risks related to **algorithmic bias, discrimination and unequal opportunities**. For Eurochild, a human-centred digital transition must protect children's rights, promote digital inclusion and ensure that technological change does not deepen existing inequalities.

Better monitoring will also be essential. We welcome the Commission's intention to develop new indicators reflecting **affordability and different dimensions of poverty**, including for the groups of children identified under the European Child Guarantee, such as children with disabilities, children with a migrant or minority ethnic background, children in alternative care, and children experiencing severe housing deprivation or precarious family situations. This data should be systematically used within the European Semester and Social Convergence Framework to assess not only poverty levels, but children's effective access to and ability to afford key services.

The stronger integration of social priorities into the **European Semester** is another positive development. The first-ever Human Capital Recommendation, which highlights the importance of investment in education, skills and people for Europe's long-term prosperity and competitiveness, demonstrates a greater recognition that investment in people is fundamental to Europe's future. At the same time, children should not be viewed primarily through the lens of their future contribution to Europe's workforce and competitiveness. Investment in education and skills must also respond to children's rights and needs in the present, including their wellbeing, mental health, social inclusion and equal opportunities.

Alongside strong social dialogue, structured, meaningful and continuous engagement with **civil society organisations, including organisations representing children and children themselves**, should be ensured in the design, implementation and monitoring of social policies at EU and national level.

Funding remains a key concern. The Communication recognises ESF+ as the main EU instrument supporting implementation of the Pillar and calls for social investment to continue through the future National and Regional Partnership Plans. These ambitions must be matched by **adequate and dedicated EU funding for tackling child poverty and implementing the European Child Guarantee in the next MFF**. In the next MFF, investment in children should be protected through clear funding requirements and accountability mechanisms, ensuring that resources reach children experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Finally, children's rights cannot be confined to **Principle 11 on childcare and support to children**. Children should be visible across the implementation of the Pillar, including in policies on education, equal opportunities and adequate income, as well as housing, healthcare and access to essential services. **The strengthened European Child Guarantee** should provide an important framework for connecting these policies and turning Europe's social commitments into tangible improvements in children's lives.

Eurochild therefore calls on the European Commission and Member States to:

- make children's rights, wellbeing and protection from poverty a cross-cutting priority in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights;
- reinforce the European Child Guarantee as the principal EU framework for delivering children's social rights, supported by clear objectives, adequate and sustainable funding and stronger accountability;

- ensure that future EU and national investment prioritises children experiencing poverty and social exclusion, including children facing multiple and intersecting disadvantages;
- strengthen integrated governance at national, regional and local level so that income support, education, healthcare, housing, nutrition and social services work together around the needs of children and families;
- ensure meaningful participation of children, civil society organisations and organisations representing families and communities in the design, implementation and monitoring of social policies;
- strengthen the use of child-specific indicators, targets and monitoring within the European Semester and the broader implementation framework of the Pillar.

The renewed Action Plan provides an important opportunity to move from commitments to implementation. **Reaching the employment target will be an important achievement. But the success of the European Pillar of Social Rights must also be measured by whether Europe succeeds in reducing child poverty, breaking the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage, and ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to thrive.**

For more information, contact:

Zuzana Konradova
EU Affairs Coordinator, Eurochild
Zuzana.Konradova@eurochild.org

Eurochild AISBL

Avenue des Arts 7/8, 1210 Brussels
Tel. +32 (0)2 511 70 83
info@eurochild.org – www.eurochild.org

© Eurochild 2026