

Why Investing in Children needs the support of the European Parliament

For Members of the European Parliament the Written Declaration (42/2015) on Investing in Children is the opportunity to raise awareness about the situation of children in Europe.

Of the 100 million people under the age of 18 in the European Union, over 26 million are at risk of poverty or social exclusion – that is more than one child in every four.

Child poverty is not only a result of the current financial and economic downturn in Europe, although it has made the situation of millions of children worse. Even before the crisis, child poverty levels were unacceptably high. 8.4% of children lived in jobless households in 2007, which now stands at 9.5%. At the same time, 9 million working households still live in poverty.¹

“Children growing up in poverty or social exclusion are less likely than their better-off peers to do well in school, enjoy good health and realise their full potential later in life.”

European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children (2013)

Child poverty is widely recognised to be a major drain on resources and waste of human potential. The moral duty on governments to respect and implement children’s rights is also gaining credence. For the first time, world leaders adopted at the United Nations a set of universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): this new global development agenda will apply to all countries (including all 28 Members of the EU) and includes a target to reduce the proportion of children living in poverty by 2030, showing that child poverty is a universal challenge that requires a response at the national, European and global level.

But despite this understanding, investment does not necessarily follow, and the crisis has often resulted in spending cuts. The EU policy framework can help to highlight the gaps and the risk they pose to the lives of millions of children. By withdrawing investment in children and families, we store up problems for the future. By contrast, breaking the cycle of poverty in childhood means Europe can achieve an overall reduction in poverty in society by preventing a new, upcoming generation of poor and disadvantaged.

Viewed through a lens of children’s rights, child poverty is understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, encompassing not only income deprivation, but also other forms of deprivation and loss of dignity – lack of access to appropriate housing and living environment, education, health

¹ Source: EU-SILC

services, social services in the field of prevention and care, and a more general lack of opportunity in society.

Since the adoption of the Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children the ball has been in the court of the Member States to use the EU guidance and invest in children's well-being.² Although some progress has been made at EU level, for instance the European Commission has led on seminars for national authorities on implementing the Recommendation on Investing in Children through the European Social Fund; and the European Parliament³ has given its support on several occasions.

In 2014, 24 European networks and organisations sharing a commitment to end child poverty and to promote child well-being across Europe, set up an EU Alliance for Investing in Children⁴ to more effectively engage national stakeholders in implementing the Recommendation – making maximum use of Europe 2020 and Structural and Investment Funds. By joining forces, civil society has been helping to ensure the EU policy and funding makes a real difference to the daily lives of children and young people, by mobilising their national member organisations to influence policy reform and investment.

In March 2014, this Alliance, including both child-focused organisations as well as networks focusing on health, poverty, homelessness, education, coordinated by Eurochild⁵, published the Implementation Handbook of the Investing in Children Recommendation⁶. The book includes 15 detailed case studies outlining policies and practices that we believe reflect the principles and guidance of the Recommendation and show how the Recommendation can be implemented in practice.

The Written Declaration of the European Parliament is an occasion to remind Member States to take action and break the cycle of disadvantage.

Protecting children and their families through macroeconomic policies

It is increasingly acknowledged that the economic governance cycle, as a key driver of national policy reforms, is wanting a stronger social dimension. Child poverty has been repeatedly recognised as a political priority at EU level.⁷ The past Annual Growth Surveys mentioned child poverty as a priority, albeit as part of active inclusion strategies; and the Joint Employment Report of 2014 accompanying the Survey highlighted child poverty in the EU as a trend to watch.

2 Analysis reports of the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion

3 European Parliament resolution of 4/6/2013 on the Commission Communication 'Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020'; European Parliament resolution of 28/11/2014 on the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

4 <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/>

5 <http://www.eurochild.org/>

6 <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/EU-Alliance-Implementation-Handbook.pdf>

7 See e.g. 2011 the Council Conclusions on child poverty and well-being; 2012 Social Protection Committee's report on child poverty; adopted by Council.



A better understanding is needed from financial and economic policy-makers about their role in promoting social inclusion through social investment and social protection, and not undermining the importance of automatic stabilisers. The European Semester should be better used to monitor national governance efforts of investing in children.

Making best use of the social dimension of EU policy processes to tackle child poverty in Europe

An indicator on the risk of child poverty or social exclusion within the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union would help to take better account of the social impact of macro level economic and financial decisions on children and their future.

Our aim is that an **indicator measuring child poverty or social exclusion** is included in the scoreboard of social and employment indicators, and that this scoreboard receives equal attention as other indicators such as the unemployment rate, within the European Semester coordination. Indicating it at the same time and giving it the same importance as economic performance indicators would enable governments to choose adequate policy responses that do not undermine social cohesion.

The indicator would thus stimulate Member State action to invest in children. The European Semester process could be used to give countries recommendations where experts deem it necessary. Experts interpreting the indicator on child poverty and social exclusion would have a background in social inclusion and social investment policies.

The indicator would in no case be used to apply economic sanctions in any way when countries are not performing on the child poverty indicator as that would go counter to the purpose of the indicator itself; but would be applied to induce policies and actions to address the situation.

If the indicator were included in the social and employment scoreboard but this were not binding, this would not give a balanced weight to the social and economic dimensions of the process.

Holding Member States to account on commitments to prevent and tackle child poverty

Almost all Member States have acknowledged that to eradicate poverty in the long term, particular priority must be given to children and families. These commitments need to be realised to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion in general, and child poverty and social exclusion in particular.

The Written Declaration of the European Parliament is important to keep the pressure high on the EU and Member States to set specific **sub-targets to reduce child poverty and social exclusion** as a contribution to the overall poverty reduction target of Europe 2020. This would provide a highly visible mechanism for showing whether progress is being achieved, providing public and political accountability, providing a key tool for catalysing action and applying pressure on policy makers and practitioners to deliver but also for stimulating public support for policy measures.

It is clear that targets cannot do this alone, but have to be part of an overarching anti-poverty strategy embedded in an integrated policy delivery mechanism – at national, regional and local level. Targets need to be used to effectively drive policy development tied to resources.

Ensuring effective implementation and follow-up to the Investing in Children Recommendation

The European Commission should dedicate sufficient resources to the effective follow-up of the Recommendation on Investing in Children – for example further developing the portfolio of child well-being indicators included as an annex to the Recommendation; more and better monitoring of how Structural and Investment Funds are being used to implement the Recommendation nationally; strengthening mutual learning and exchange across Member States to support progress; strengthening analytical capacity and ensuring investment in new areas, e.g. strengthening family support, participation in decision-making, social determinants of health, social return on investment in preventative approaches; facilitating and supporting national and sub-national stakeholders' involvement, with EU support.

The Written Declaration of the European Parliament is an opportunity to reiterate the urgency of putting in place an **EU Roadmap for the implementation and monitoring of the Recommendation** and ensuring strong EU leadership to drive implementation based on active partnership.

This paper was drafted by Réka Tunyogi and Agata D'Addato from Eurochild with the support of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children.

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children brings together over 20 European networks sharing a commitment to end child poverty and to promote child well-being across Europe. Its added-value is to push for the full implementation of the European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage.

The Alliance mobilised national level civil society cooperation across sectors, by supporting two national pilots in Spain & the United Kingdom and through a targeted workshop on using EU instruments supporting organisations from five further countries (Belgium, Ireland, Estonia, Latvia, Greece) in 2014.

Partners of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children include:

Alliance for Childhood; ATD Quart Monde; Caritas – Europa; COFACE – Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union; Don Bosco International; Dynamo International – Street Workers Network; EAPN – European Anti-Poverty Network; EASPD – European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities; ECSA - European Child Safety Alliance; ENSA – European Network of Social Authorities; EPA - The European Parents Association; EPHA - European Public Health Alliance; ESN – European Social Network; Eurochild; Eurodiaconia; EuroHealthNet; FEANTSA – European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless; ISSA - The International Step by Step Association; Mental Health Europe; PICUM – Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants; Save the Children EU Office; SOS Children's Villages International; UNICEF EU Office



THE CHILD POVERTY CYCLE

26 MILLION CHILDREN at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU

POVERTY AFFECTS CHILDREN DISPROPORTIONATELY



27.7%
Children



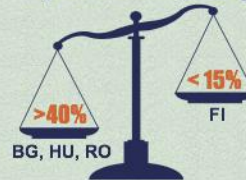
24.5%
Total Population

WORK IS NO GUARANTEE

9 MILLION CHILDREN in working households live in poverty = population of **Sweden**



CHILD POVERTY IS Spread unequally



The Life Cycle



Poverty is more than just not having enough money. It means lacking access to good health care and education or not living in a decent house. It is also about not having equal opportunities or not being supported to reach their full potential. Poverty is experienced in different ways and at different stages of the life cycle.

1 CHILD IN 4



live in **unsafe or unsanitary homes**

RO (36%), BG (25%)
HU (23%), LV (27.3)



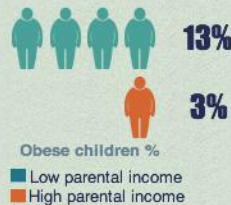
ONLY 7 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES guarantee affordable **early education and care**

0 years —————>>> DE, NO, SE, FI, DK, EE, MT —————>>> Up to 3 years

9 Million Children are unable to pay for **any leisure activities**



Poorer households have higher **OBESITY RATES**



15 years

10 years

11% children **leave school** before completing **secondary education**



ONE THIRD OF YOUTH ARE UNEMPLOYED



15 years

24 years

CHILDREN DESERVE BETTER!



#INVESTINGINCHILDREN



bit.ly/WDinvestinginchildren

Source: Eurostat 2013 and HBSC

Supported by the EU Alliance for Investing in Children