

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DUTCH EU PRESIDENCY



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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About Eurochild



Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

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Upon its taking office as Presidency of the Council of the European Union for January-July 2016, Eurochild calls on the Netherlands to commit to children's rights approach and ensure that children are fully recognised as independent rights holders, and guarantee respect for the principle of the best interests of the child in all policies and actions affecting them.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN – BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DISADVANTAGE

Increase coordination on tackling child poverty and promoting children's well-being

In light of its commitment to tackle poverty and promote decent work conditions, the Presidency should step up coordination on social inclusion. We recommend to build on the social Open Method of Coordination to create an enabling environment for mutual learning and exchange of practice across Member States to support progress on reducing poverty and social exclusion; to use more extensively peer reviews and to support new tools for mutual learning and exchange, such as projects for transfer of expertise between Member States.

We also suggest that the Presidency works with the Commission to **better monitor and review the implementation** of the [Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'](#). In particular, the Presidency should call on the European Commission to allocate sufficient resources to the effective follow-up of the Recommendation and to launch a roadmap for its implementation and monitoring. The Social Protection Committee (and its Indicators Sub-Group) should continue working on **child well-being indicators** with the aim to review and complement the portfolio of indicators annexed to the Recommendation. The development of better indicators and data will be vital to ensure better reflection on the needs of children and effective monitoring of the implementation of policies for children. Member States' reporting on progress on tackling child poverty and promoting well-being should be based on an agreed portfolio of indicators.

Put children at the heart of a stronger social dimension of EU policies across the board

The Trio Presidency (i.e. the Dutch, the Slovak and the Maltese Presidency) announced that they will join up efforts to reinforce the **social dimension of the EMU** and the European Commission will shortly be launching a **pillar of social rights**. To lead to a greater

convergence of national social and employment policies, the Commission would promote the use of common principles and reference benchmarks. Debates in the Council on the initiative should lead to a clearer understanding of the opportunities it provides and the policy coherence it enhances with other, existing policy and financial frameworks.

More specifically, the Presidency should advocate for clear indicators on the risk of child poverty and social exclusion, and on early childhood education and care (“Barcelona targets”) to be integrated in the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union. Including such benchmarks and giving them the same importance as economic performance indicators would enable governments to choose adequate policy responses that do not undermine social cohesion and take better account of the social impact of macro level economic and financial decisions on children and their future.

As a part of **investing in human capital**, the Presidency should encourage Member States to step up their efforts in investing in developing children’s full potential from an early age. Programmes supported by the recently created **European Fund for Strategic Investments** - the tool for rolling out the new Commission’s Investment Plan - should contribute to such a child-centred investment strategy.

With the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework expected later in the year, we encourage the Presidency to look at the implementation of **cohesion policy**, making sure it sufficiently supports tackling child poverty, fostering social inclusion and the transition from institutional to community-based care.

Make children more visible in the European Semester process

We regret that the focus of European Semester on poverty reduction and children has been weakening over the past years. Whilst the 2015 **National Reforms Programmes** (NRPs) recognised the urgency of addressing child poverty and social exclusion they did not emphasise the positive interlinkages between the Europe 2020 targets or with the Investing in Children Recommendation. The number of child-focused **Country Specific Recommendations** (CSRs) decreased significantly from 2014 to 2015, and although some Member States did not deliver on their child-related 2014 CSRs, these did not necessarily get followed up with CSRs in 2015.

Despite a past public consultation, the **mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy** has been on hold. The 2016 Annual Growth Survey made reference to the necessity to review Europe 2020. Eurochild recommends that the Dutch Presidency drives forward the mid-term review of the strategy that reflects commitments of all countries to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. The review should pay particular attention to **balancing between economic and social dimension**, strengthening its social aspects. In order to facilitate meeting the targets, Member States should be required to set a specific national (sub-) target for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion. This should be underpinned by better monitoring and consideration of social developments, including children’s well-being throughout the **European Semester process**.

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS AND WELL- BEING OF CHILDREN IN EUROPE

Foster engagement and participation

Eurochild commends the intention of the Dutch Presidency to support mutual solidarity among EU citizens by making connections and taking into account citizens' input, including the participation of young people with mental disabilities. Eurochild invites the Netherlands to continue strengthening the role of **civil dialogue** in policy processes and governance, and fostering a meaningful engagement of the civil society and especially children themselves.

Promote the reconciliation of work and family life

During the Dutch Presidency the **Commission is expected to launch a new package of measures aiming to improve the work-life balance** of working parents and promote women's participation in the job market. As quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services can contribute to the social and personal development of the child and give the child a good start in life, we remind Member States to take the best interest of children into account in this crucial debate.

Encourage Member States to ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure

Despite having signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Netherlands has not yet ratified the **Third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a Communications Procedure**. All EU Member States ratified the UNCRC, but to date only seven EU Member States have ratified the **Third Optional Protocol**. The Protocol, which was opened for signatures in February 2012, aims to guarantee that every child has access to justice. The mechanism allows children or their representatives to report violations of children's rights to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in cases where the national legal system fails to provide remedy for these violations. The Committee then investigates the complaints, and can ask governments to take action. Eurochild urges the Netherlands to ratify the Protocol during its six-month tenure and expects it to call on other Member States to follow its example.