

How the European Commission can make a European Pillar of Social Rights fit for children



The EU Alliance for Investing in Children welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights, and its aspiration to achieve a "[social triple-A rating](#)" by re-balancing the EU's existing prioritisation of financial and economic concerns with social issues.

We recognise that this new social rights initiative has the potential to help **eradicate child poverty** and **promote children's well-being**, and could be crucial to help us build a Europe we wish to leave for our children, who represent one fifth of the current EU population.

The European Parliament **Written Declaration on Investing in Children** (2015), adopted with 428 signatures, gives a strong signal on the need to protect children and their families from deficit reduction measures. More than one in four children continue to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU and this number is rising, along with the impact on our society and economy.¹ Social rights on paper will not be enough to reverse this trend: Strong policies and enforceable measures are necessary to make the Written Declaration a reality for all children in Europe.

The Alliance for Investing in Children calls for the European Commission to recognise and act on the importance of sound social policies and social protection systems for protecting, promoting and fulfilling children's rights, as set out in the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC), which is ratified by all EU Member States, and in the Recommendation for Investing in Children.

Key recommendations

- **Mainstream children's rights**

Each chapter of the Pillar of Social Rights should reinforce and build on the existing principles outlined in the European Commission **Recommendation on Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage**.

The needs of children should be addressed through calling for **inclusive education systems** across the lifecycle and at all levels, including after-school care, home schooling and formal education. Affordable, high-quality pre-natal and early years' provisions needs to be integrated with supportive employment policies and **community-based parenting and family support services** which help parents combine work with parental responsibilities,ⁱⁱ as well as **adequate income support** and **quality social protection**.

Children are affected across all levels and fields of policy-making and will be impacted upon in the implementation of each of the domains included in the draft proposals. As such, we stress the importance for the European Commission to assess, monitor, and if necessary, adapt policy and programme developments to ensure this new social rights initiative will have positive impacts on children and young people.

- **Invest in children**

In order for the Pillar of Social Rights to make our societies and economies more resilient, the European Commission will need to prioritise investment in children. This means acknowledging the importance of supporting families as primary carers through **multidimensional and integrated strategies** focused on the following three pillars – access to adequate resources, quality and affordable services and children's right to participate (as called for in the Recommendation on Investing in Children).

Particular attention should be paid to investing in **early childhood development**: It is the most critical stage of development, influencing greatly the extent to which a child meets his or her cognitive, social, physical and emotional potential.^{iii iv} Commitments to health should also be strengthened; the Pillar should underscore that investment in health promotion and disease prevention for all, at all ages, is central to social cohesion and economic stability, and explicitly state the importance of universal health coverage in **reducing health inequalities**.

Strong EU mechanisms will need to be developed to guarantee that investment at a national level is directed towards children and families, and that policy is translated into practice. Existing mechanisms such as the **European Semester** should be more effectively used to provide parameters to measure the performance of child protection policies and monitor their implementation in national contexts.

- **Strengthen the voice of children**

It is vital to involve children during all stages of the policy-making process. As enshrined in the UNCRC and outlined in Pillar 3 of the Recommendation on Investing in Children, every child in Europe has a **right to be heard** in decisions affecting them. The European Commission should explore options for shaping children's involvement in decision-making such as creating **guidelines for stakeholder dialogue at national level**.

- **A Social Rights Pillar for ALL children**

The Pillar of Social Rights should help to protect and promote the **rights of all children in Europe**. Particular attention should be given to the rights of children in **vulnerable situations**, including children living in poverty, children in alternative care, stateless children, children with disabilities, all refugee and migrant children and specifically unaccompanied children, regardless of their or their parent's residence or migration status.

The Alliance looks forward to continued communication and cooperation. For more information, please contact Jana Hainsworth, Eurochild Secretary General, Eurochild: jana.hainsworth@eurochild.org +32 (0)2 211 05 50

ⁱ [Eurostat data](#).

ⁱⁱ As OECD highlights, 'investing early on and in good quality education up to completion of secondary education is among the most profitable policies'. See: OECD (2015a). Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen. Paris: OECD Publishing.

ⁱⁱⁱ Goldblatt P, Siegrist J, Lundberg O, Marinetti C, Farrer L & Costongs C (2015). [Improving health equity through action across the life course: Summary of evidence and recommendations from the DRIVERS project](#)

^{iv} Fair Society, Healthy Lives, The Marmot Review, Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010