EUROCHILD PRIORITIES FOR THE ITALIAN EU PRESIDENCY

April 2014

Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to promote the rights and well-being of children and young people. Our work is underpinned by the UNCRC.

Our Mission is to promote the rights and well-being of children and young people in Europe.

One of our strategic goals is to put children’s rights and well-being at the heart of policy making.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN, BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DISADVANTAGE

Strengthen the social dimension of the European Semester through supporting the social scoreboard

Eurochild calls for more emphasis on the social dimension in general, and child well-being in particular in the European Semester. In particular we encourage Member States to either set a specific national (sub) target for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion-or to indicate what proportion of their overall Europe 2020 poverty and social exclusion target will cover children.

Child poverty has been identified as a trend to watch by the Social Protection Performance Monitor, which underpins the new social scoreboard launched in late 2013. In March 2014 Council repeatedly stressed need to ensure social inclusion and social protection and noted in its Conclusions on the AGS that “the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU reached the alarming figure of 25% of the total EU population.” Child poverty is even higher, at 28%. The Italian Presidency is invited to take this work further and make the social scoreboard more visible and meaningful in the next Semester.

Ensure the AGS 2015 supports stronger stakeholder engagement and prioritises social inclusion

The 2014 AGS mentioned child poverty in relation to tackling the social consequences of the crisis and highlighted the need to improve social protection systems in order to avoid social exclusion. We urge the Italian government to continue to stress the importance of social inclusion in the overall priorities for the EU during its Presidency particularly encouraging the Commission to include this in the 2014 AGS. The Council Conclusions on the 2013 AGS also advocated for having an increased involvement with the stakeholders throughout the European Semester. We hope that the Italian Presidency will take this point further and promote increased engagement with civil society in its conclusions on 2015 AGS.

Use the Europe 2020 Midterm Review to reaffirm the EU’s commitment to an integrated strategy

With the Europe 2020 strategy reaching five years of implementation, the Midterm Review is crucial to restate commitment to act from both EU and national decision-makers. The Greek Presidency has discussed the
need to strengthen the social element of Europe 2020. The Tripartite Social Summit also contributed to helping to launch the mid-term review process (see here). We urge the Italian Presidency to ensure continuity with this work by focusing on the poverty reduction target and gathering the views of civil society as well on the achievements of the Europe 2020 targets.

Promote the Investing in Children Recommendation, for example through specific Council conclusions

In 2013 the European Commission adopted the Recommendation Investing in Children-breaking the cycle of disadvantage as part of the Social Investment Package. The EC Recommendation is a useful policy guidance to tackle child poverty and promote child well-being. It is to be implemented inter alia through the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Structural and Investment Funds. Eurochild considers that the Council's endorsement (here) of the Package should be supplemented by conclusions on the Recommendation. We furthermore welcome other proposals of the Italian Presidency to promote the fight against child poverty and social exclusion.

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN EUROPE

Ratify the new Optional Protocol to the UNCRC supporting an individual complaint mechanism for children

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty. All EU Member States have ratified it, thereby committing to protecting and promoting children’s rights. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on a Communications Procedure (also called OP3 CRC) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2011 and opened for signature on 28 February 2012. The Protocol enters into force on 14 April 2014, for the tenth ratifying states. Eurochild urges Italy to ratify the new Optional Protocol during its six-month Presidency to ensure that more children can access international justice for rights abuses, and encourage other states to do so, including where possible, through external action policies.

Endorse the upcoming European quality framework on early childhood education and care through specific Council conclusions

Universal, high quality, accessible, and affordable early years’ education and care services have a great potential for increasing child well-being, advancing child rights, achieving fundamental social democratic goals, and ensuring that all children have a fair start in life. There has been considerable work done in this field at European level, among others in the European Commission’s thematic working group on early childhood education and care. We urge the Italian Presidency to take the proposal emerging from the thematic working group forward and adopt Council conclusions endorsing on a European quality framework for early childhood education and care.

Promote a more systemic, integrated approach to child protection across Europe

The European Commission consultation process for EU guidance on integrated child protection systems will end in July 2014. This consultation follows from the outcomes of the European Forum on the Rights of the Child, which in the past two consecutive years looked at the role of integrated child protection systems through the implementation of the EU Agenda for the rights of the child. We encourage the Presidency to bring this to the attention of ministers and allow the Council to react to the consultation appropriately, including by dedicating debate and conclusions in the Justice and Home Affairs Council to the issue.