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.

Latvia has declared the following values for the Presidency: involvement, growth and sustainability.\(^1\) As for involvement, it is understood as follows: “Involvement - in which cooperation, solidarity and responsibility play a central role. Awareness that every action by individuals has a direct impact on society as a whole permits the promotion of well-being, security and the rule of law in order to stimulate economic and social freedom and personal advancement”.\(^2\) Latvia has also declared the following priority directions: competitiveness and entrepreneurship to create jobs, seizing the digital opportunities, and Europe’s global outreach.

**INVESTING IN CHILDREN, BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DISADVANTAGE**

Strengthen the social dimension of economic governance

In reaction to the values and priorities of the Latvian Presidency in particular for competitiveness and entrepreneurship to create jobs, Eurochild stresses the need for structural reforms that pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient recovery. In particular, in the context of the new Investment Plan of the European Commission and the reformed European Semester, more emphasis should be put on investing in human capital, hence investing in children from an early age. Quality and inclusive education systems; early childhood education and care; increased access to better and safer healthcare for all children in the EU; local community support and welfare and social protection reforms should be investment priorities for structural reforms which would pay huge dividends in the future and be actually much less costly.

In addition, more and better indicators need to be developed to measure child poverty and well-being in the European Union, hence better reflecting children’s needs and reinforcing the use of data when evaluating implementation and impact of new and previous policies. This work should be done in coordination with the Social Protection Committee’s Indicators sub-group.

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indicators should then form part of the Annual Growth Survey, the Social Protection Performance Monitor which forms the basis of the Trend to Watch of the Social Protection Committee, and reflected in the Country-Specific Recommendations. Member States should be asked for specific detailed multiannual reporting on progress on child poverty and well-being, on the basis of an agreed portfolio of indicators.

Moreover, given the negative impact that austerity measures are having on children's well-being, ex-ante and ex-post impact assessments should be carried out to determine the effect that all policy measures (including macroeconomic and financial) will have on children and in particular on children at greatest risk of severe poverty and social exclusion. These are important tools to assess the potential impact of policies before they are introduced and to monitor the actual impact they have after being put in place.

**Promote ending institutional care, and strengthening of families and community-based services for children**

In line with international human rights treaties there is an urgent need for the transition from a system relying on institutional care to a system of family care and community level services for children in Europe. A systemic change requires an integrated approach towards a number of policy areas that are often addressed in a fragmented way: poverty and social inclusion, disability, ethnic minorities, children rights and family support.

In terms of implementation, this requires aligning the thematic priorities for Structural and Investment Funds with the social dimension of EU policies. In this respect, the Commission Recommendation 'Investing in Children, Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage' and the new cohesion policy legislation represent a historic opportunity to holistically support and implement systemic reforms of children’s services across Europe. These documents reflect a firm commitment both idealistically and financially to end institutional care and strengthen families and community-based care. Yet, there is still more work to be done to keep the momentum towards Europe wide de-institutionalisation going. The right decisions and concerted political will can transform the lives of millions of children. We therefore recommend the Presidency focus efforts on:

- Ensuring that the cohesion policy for 2014-2020 is properly implemented and sufficiently supports the transition from institutional to community-based care;
- Mobilising efforts for the collection of comparative data and research relating to families outside traditional homes including children in institutions, children coming from vulnerable or ethnic minority backgrounds, migrant children, children from an ethnic minority in order to monitor the impact of policies adopted to implement the Commission Recommendation on ‘Investing in Children’;
- Facilitating the sharing of good practices among Member States in relation to de-institutionalisation policy;
- Working together with Member States towards full implementation of the UNCRC and the UNCRPD, to ensure that all children (including children with disabilities) receive sufficient support to live with their families and communities.
- The role of NGOs is very important in promoting de-institutionalisation reforms. Latvia should promote its example of involving more and more NGOs in the development of relevant policies and laws.

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3 COM(2013) 778
Ensure better use of the European Structural and Investment Funds

Linked both to the European Semester and de-institutionalisation reforms, the Presidency should help ensure the better use of the European Structural and Investment Funds. Member States should be asked to report on their use of Structural Funds for promoting the social inclusion of children in their NRPs. They should also be encouraged to use Structural Funds in a strategic manner to support the implementation of their overall strategies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The use of EU Funds should be monitored to ensure at least the agreed minimum threshold is spent effectively on social inclusion in every Member State. Especially the first year when the Operational Programmes are agreed and launched is critical. Therefore, during its Presidency, Latvia should keep in mind and on the agenda an idea that ESIF must be used for children’s social inclusion and overall well-being.

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN EUROPE

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

The European Commission recently concluded a consultation process for EU guidance on integrated child protection systems. 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.

We vote for a holistic child rights approach that we see as a cornerstone to guarantee children’s right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect. We advocate for ‘4Ps’: protection, provision, participation and prevention. We urge the Presidency to support and promote the development of integrated child protection systems at the EU level and in the Member States; and to encourage cross-sectoral cooperation and investment into early prevention and allocation of sufficient financial and human resources. The development of indicators to measure progress, ideally harmonised across countries and further research to understand what works, why and when would contribute to advancing this important agenda.4

Promote child-friendly justice systems across Europe

We welcome the draft Directive from the European Commission on procedural safeguards for children suspected or accused in criminal proceedings as a positive and necessary development in the framework of the EU’s commitment to promote child-friendly justice.

In particular, given the recent European progress to reach higher standards for procedural safeguards, specifying heightened standards of protection for children is especially relevant. In this light, we hope that this Directive can be more than a mere collection of minimum safeguards, and inspires Member States’ reforms. In leading the negotiations with the European Parliament on the draft Directive, the Presidency should promote that the best interests of the child be

4 For more detailed information on possible actions, see Eurochild’s response to the public consultation on the EU Guidance on Integrated Child Protection Systems.
retained a fundamental principle across its entirety and not just under certain provisions and articles.\(^5\)

**Engage civil society and children**

Among the three priorities of the Latvian Presidency, the first one is *involvement*. Eurochild welcomes Latvia for including this crucial element and hopes that the partnership principle will be fully respected. We urge the Latvian government to continue to stress the contribution of civil dialogue to social inclusion during its Presidency.

**Ratify the new Optional Protocol to the UNCRC supporting a complaints 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. It will allow the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to hear complaints alleging that a child’s rights have been violated. Eurochild urges Latvia to take steps to sign and ratify the new Optional Protocol, and encourage other states to do so.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) For more detailed information on possible improvements to the text, see Eurochild and IJJO position.

\(^6\) For more information on the Optional Protocol, see [here](http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi).