

An ambitious EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

POLICY BRIEFING



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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About Eurochild



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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.

Eurochild AISBL

Avenue des Arts 7/8, 1210 Brussels
Tel. +32 (0)2 511 70 83 Fax +32 (0)2 511 72 98
info@eurochild.org – www.eurochild.org

For more information, contact:

Ally Dunhill
Head of Advocacy, Eurochild
Ally.Dunhill@eurochild.org

This first response is prepared by the Eurochild Secretariat building on knowledge and experience gathered from its almost 200 members working across 35 European countries. In the coming months, together with members, we will analyse the Commission's proposals in more detail and develop further our recommendations for implementation.



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Eurochild is celebrating the new EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, published on 24 March 2021. A comprehensive and ambitious Strategy that represents a strong focus on the human rights of children and was developed with children. A child-friendly version was also launched informing children of how this Strategy aims to protect and promote the rights of every child in the EU.

The Strategy acknowledges the dominant threats and challenges that children's rights face today, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digital security, violence, poverty and social exclusion, and mental health. It includes measures to tackle these through key actions planned by the European Commission and by way of a variety of EU instruments and national policies. One such initiative is the creation of an EU Children Participation Platform encouraging Member States to establish new and improve existing mechanisms of child participation at local, regional, and national levels. This reinforces the strong message throughout that child participation is a right and must be promoted and improved across the EU.

This is a preliminary analysis carried out by the Eurochild Secretariat will be discussed and developed further with the members in the coming months. In order to best support its members in capitalising on this new EU framework document, Eurochild will be developing a guidance tool for its members, outlining how they can apply and refer to the Strategy to support their national advocacy goals, collaborate with national governments and children in its implementation, monitoring and use of EU funds to put the Strategy into practice and achieve tangible change for children in the EU.

Eurochild recognises many positive elements in the Strategy, the highlights of which include:

- The Strategy aims to protect and promote **the rights of every child** in the European Union.
- The **six thematic areas** and the **key actions** planned by the European Commission under each priority.
- The **commitment to Child Participation** and the recommendation for Member States to establish, improve and provide adequate resources for new and existing mechanisms of child participation at local, regional and national level. We also appreciate the reference to the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).
- The creation of an **EU Children Participation Platform** and the encouragement to Member States to introduce child participation at local, regional, and national levels. Eurochild is invested in contributing to the establishment of this Platform and hopes for a quick timeline for its creation.
- The commitment to include children in the upcoming [Conference on the Future of Europe](#).
- The promotion of **child-friendly and accessible language** in documents published by the EU institutions.
- The **link and complementarity between the Strategy and the Child Guarantee Recommendation** in that it fights child poverty, promotes inclusive and child-friendly societies, health and education systems.

- The setting up of the **EU Network for Children's Rights** with the aim to reinforce the dialogue and mutual learning between the EU and the Member States on children's rights.
- The recognition that every child has the **right to an adequate standard of living**, and to equal opportunities, **from the earliest stages of life**.

In addition:

- We particularly welcome the **inclusion of child rights in EU external action**, for the commitment to include this topic in the political negotiations and agreements with neighbouring and candidate countries and to support civil society working on children's rights outside the EU;
- We support the Commission's call to Member States to **prioritise funding for child rights** in channelling EU funds, and we specifically welcome the call for child-friendly budgeting;
- We endorse the Commission's call to Member States encouraging them to develop, where not yet available, **robust and evidence-based national strategies on the rights of the child**, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, including children;
- We welcome the Commission's commitment to step up the **fight against all forms of online child sexual abuse**, including the proposing of necessary legislation that will include obligations for relevant online service providers to detect and report known child sexual abuse material online;
- The development of **Annex I**, demonstrating the alignment of the Strategy with the main international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals, makes it a valuable instrument to contextualise the Strategy in the global development on child rights;
- The development of **Annex II** represents an extremely valuable comprehensive overview of the most relevant pieces of EU legal acts and policy documents that relate to the rights of the child. We hope that with time this list will grow and be updated, in order to give visibility to the way children's rights are mainstreamed in EU policies.

In order for the Strategy to achieve its goals, we believe:

- **Mainstreaming of children's rights in all EU policies** is a commendable goal, but to be effective requires concrete mechanisms, such as for instance [Child Rights Impact Assessments](#). As mentioned in the Strategy, 'a mainstreaming checklist on the rights of the child will be developed' – Eurochild calls for civil society and children to be involved in the development of such a checklist.
- **Commission Coordinator on children's rights** – in order to monitor and coordinate implementation of the Strategy effectively, the proposed Unit needs to have the necessary mandate and human resources.

- **Early childhood is a crucial stage of a child's life**, and as such requires a specific focus. Very young children, and their families/caregivers, are not sufficiently recognised as requiring specific attention. The focus on early childhood services should not be limited to early childhood education and care (ECEC). Through the [First Years, First Priority campaign](#), Eurochild and its partners aim to demonstrate the importance of early childhood development policies. **National strategies on the rights of the child** must include specific attention to children's rights in early childhood, including through integrated policies and increased public investment in early childhood development support and services.
- **Access to quality maternal, newborn and child healthcare** is a key prerequisite for the healthy development of children, yet receives no mention except in the context of humanitarian action outside the EU. Universal access to quality healthcare in pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care (including mental and psychosocial support) should be a priority within the EU as well as in its global action.
- The Child Participation pillar to include recommendations and actions to **ensure the participation of young children and marginalised children** in policy-making.
- **Informing children about their rights and of the existence of the Strategy** is an element that could have been more strongly emphasised in the document itself, and in the recommendations to Member States, as children have the right to be informed about their rights (Art. 42 [UNCRC](#)). A statement that all children have rights would have also been valuable in the child-friendly version.
- **The Strategy rightly draws attention to the need for more comprehensive and systematic data collection.** We believe that this must include several crucial areas. We would like to see **more disaggregated data on children in vulnerable situations**, which would allow both to measure the extent of the problems, but also track and measure progress. This should include improved **data on children in their very early years**. Data collection on **mental health issues** should also be a key priority, especially in view of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also stress the need for **comparable data on children living in alternative care** - as shown by the [DataCare project](#) (a joint initiative by Eurochild and UNICEF). Even though large disparities exist between the systems of data collection on children living in alternative care in the EU, we believe it is possible to use officially published data to give a comparable overview of the situation of children in alternative care across the EU. This will bring greater transparency and visibility to the sector and accelerate much needed child protection reforms.
- Last but not least, national governments should allocate adequate funding through sub-granting schemes to enable **civil society organisations to participate in the implementation of the Strategy**.

We applaud and recognise the efforts of the European Commission to create this key EU framework, which demonstrates the commitment of the EU to deliver on the rights of its youngest citizens.

However, much work remains to be done to put it into practice. As the largest network of child rights organisations in Europe, Eurochild is committed to supporting its implementation in every way possible.