

EU Alliance for Investing in Children statement on the European Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the Child Guarantee.

On 24 March, the European Commission launched its proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the Child Guarantee<sup>1</sup>.

As identified in the European Commission's proposal and press release, 18 million children or 22,2% of children in the EU were growing up at risk of poverty and social exclusion, before COVID-19. This figure will increase further due to the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic.

This means that almost 1 in 4 children in the EU are growing up without eating a daily hot, nutritious meal, or they live in inadequate housing conditions. 1 in 4 children are unable to fully attend school due to hidden and extra costs such as school trips or school meals, they cannot participate in sports or other activities like their peers and do not receive the healthcare that they need. 1 in 4 children in the EU grow up in vulnerable families that need support to break the cycle of poverty and provide for their children.

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children welcomes the European Commission's ambitious proposal on the Council Recommendation establishing the Child Guarantee. The Alliance particularly welcomes the proposal for national Action Plans, the enabling policy framework that will allow EU Member States to take a comprehensive approach in tackling child and family poverty when implementing the Child Guarantee as well as the strong reference to the use of EU funds (ESF+, ERDF, REACT-EU, RRF, InvestEU and the Technical Assistance Support) and national budgets in implementing the measures outlined in the Child Guarantee Action Plans.

It is now up to the EU Member States to prove that the EU's youngest population gets the support they need to thrive and reach their full potential.

The Alliance calls on the Council of the EU to:

- Adopt the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as a matter of priority.

Child poverty is unacceptable as it is a condition that severely violates the rights of children. It is even more unacceptable in one of the world's wealthiest regions. **Therefore, the EU Alliance calls on EU Member States to prioritise child poverty reduction as a matter of urgency and to adopt the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation under the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU.**

- Ensure that the Child Guarantee starts being implemented within six months from the adoption of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Commission proposes action to uphold child rights and support children in need - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

The Alliance welcomes the European Commission's proposal that each EU Member State submits a Child Guarantee Action Plan covering the period until 2030, within six months from the adoption of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation. The Child Guarantee Action Plans will allow the Council Recommendation to become implementable and will showcase the challenges, as well as the measures that EU Member States will take to tackle child poverty at the national, regional and local level.

The Alliance also welcomes the proposal for Child Guarantee National Coordinators equipped with adequate resources and mandates, who will effectively coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Recommendation.

**The Alliance calls on EU Member States to adopt the Commission's proposal and to ensure that the Child Guarantee starts being implemented within six months from the adoption of the Child Guarantee by having the Child Guarantee Action Plans submitted and the national Child Guarantee coordinators in place. Child Guarantee Action Plans must be reviewed on a regular basis in consultation with relevant stakeholders.**

The Alliance also calls on the Council to strengthen the following parts of the European Commission's proposal, ensuring that:

- Stakeholders as well as children and parents participate meaningfully in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plans.

The Alliance welcomes the European Commission's proposal that EU Member States should consult stakeholders, including civil society organisations and children in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee Action Plans.

The Alliance calls on EU Member States to further strengthen this proposal to ensure that children participate meaningfully in the action plans' development, including through dedicated outreach measures targeting the most vulnerable of them. Specifically, we call on the Council to include a new part calling EU Member States to:

***"Put in place mechanisms that promote children's meaningful and rights-based participation in decision-making that affects their lives and in particular in relation to the fulfilment of the Child Guarantee. Develop structures to promote the meaningful participation of children in need in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee Action Plans and relevant frameworks developed as part of these plans as well as in the annual reporting of EU Member States to the European Commission".***

In addition, the Alliance for Investing in Children calls on the Council to also include parents among the stakeholders to be consulted on the Child Guarantee Action Plans.

- Access to healthy nutrition should not be only linked to school settings.

The Alliance welcomes the emphasis given by the European Commission's proposal to ensure that children in need have adequate, sustainable access to healthy nutrition, in particular considering that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools, many children have suddenly been deprived of a reliable source of nutrition.

**However, considering that children, from age 0 to 18, only spend 20% of their lifetime in formal settings,** the Alliance calls on the Council to strengthen the European Commission's proposal and add a new paragraph emphasising the necessity to support access to healthy meals also outside of the school system.

***“EU Member States should set up a comprehensive framework regarding children's access to healthy nutrition and ensure where needed direct distribution of free meals to children and their families such as soup kitchens, social cafeteria and door to door deliveries. Parents must also be empowered to provide healthy and nutritious meals for their children, including through in-kind or financial support”.***

- Children have equal opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities – not only in school-based activities.

Sport, leisure and cultural activities play a crucial role in the personal and social development of children. Yet, children in need often face financial barriers to participate in these activities, or non-financial barriers such as the lack of proper infrastructures, language obstacles, discrimination or lack of qualified personnel. The Alliance welcomes the European Commission's proposal to ensure equal and inclusive access to school-based activities. On the other hand, it is important to consider that in numerous Member States schools do not have the capacity or the infrastructure to ensure such activities, that it would be important to ensure children's access to such activities also on days in which schools are closed, and that there are children who are receiving different kinds of education outside of the national school system and that would consequently be excluded.

Hence, the Alliance calls on the Council to strengthen the European Commission's proposal and to include in the Recommendation children's effective access to also sports, leisure and cultural activities organised outside of the school system and the school curricula.

- EU Member States set ambitious targets in their fight against child poverty.

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan sets a target to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030. Although the target goes in the right direction, it could have been more ambitious.

The Alliance welcomes the European Commission's proposal that each EU Member State should present qualitative and quantitative targets in their Child Guarantee Action Plans. It calls on EU Member States **to adopt ambitious targets that will exceed the European Commission's** target by taking into consideration the impact of COVID-19 and their commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals which call on States to half poverty in all its forms by 2030.

Sub-targets covering regional and local disparities also should be developed for each area of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation, i.e. children's effective free and access to early childhood education and care, all forms of inclusive education, healthcare, including maternal health care, effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition, and effective access to adequate housing.

- The Child Guarantee is properly monitored and feeds into the European Semester annually.

An efficient system of monitoring and evaluation will be essential to ensure the Child Guarantee is an implementable instrument that triggers concrete reforms within the national and local systems.

The Alliance welcomes the European Commission's proposal to monitor the implementation of the Recommendation in the context of the European Semester and the revised Social Scoreboard, including through the development of relevant monitoring indicators.

The Alliance stands ready to support the European Commission and the Social Protection Committee in this important task and calls on these two EU **bodies to ensure that indicators are disaggregated and take into account children in need**, including homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation; children with disabilities; children with a migrant background; children with a minority, racial or ethnic background (particularly Roma); children in alternative (especially institutional) care; children of single-parent families; as well as children in precarious situations as defined in the European Commission's proposal on the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, all relevant indicators **should be disaggregated to better align with the areas identified by the European Commission's proposal**, i.e. children's free and effective access to all forms of education, early childhood education and care, healthcare, effective access to adequate nutrition and decent housing, as well as children's access to leisure, sports and cultural activities within or outside the school settings and school curricula. Finally, all relevant indicators should be disaggregated at local level, where it is possible, to have a clearer figure of the territorial differences and to better plan and monitor the implementation of the Recommendation.

The Alliance calls on the Council to adopt the European Commission's proposal and to ensure the monitoring of the Recommendation through the well-established policy coordination framework of the European Semester. **To further strengthen this proposal, the Alliance calls on EU Member States to**

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<sup>2</sup> 'children in precarious family situations' means children exposed to various risk factors leading to social exclusion, such as: living in a single-parent household; living with a parent with a disability; living in a household where there are mental health problems or long-term illness; living in a household where there is substance abuse, or domestic violence; children of a Union citizen who has moved to another Member State and who themselves remained in their Member State of origin; children having a teenage mother or being a teenage mother; children having an imprisoned parent;

**annually report to the European Commission on the progress made in implementing the Recommendation and this reporting to feed into the annual Country Specific Recommendations.**

- Support a child rights approach in tackling poverty and the fight against all forms of discrimination, segregation and bullying of children and their families when trying to access key rights, resources, and services.

The European Pillar of Social Rights reaffirms the commitment to mainstream equal opportunities in all relevant policy fields, and to build a Union of Equality, where children should reach their full potential.

The EU Alliance also welcomes the rights-based approach taken by the European Commission in the Child Guarantee proposal.

However, for all categories of children in need identified by the proposal for a Child Guarantee Recommendation, discrimination is an important deterrent to wellbeing, both in itself, leading to emotional distress and isolation, as well as in impeding effective access to income and services.

Segregation in housing, education, healthcare, and other aspects of life also breeds a sectioned view of society, which fuels inequalities and poverty. Stigmatization based on ethnic or racial origin, disability, socio-economic background, and other criteria significantly contributes to non-take-up of benefits and services by those who most need them.

**We call on EU Member States to take a bold stance against all forms of discrimination on all grounds, including intersectional discrimination, and concerning all groups of children. Preventive, targeted and proactive measures are needed to alter public perceptions and prevalent misrepresentations, through comprehensive anti-bias measures and specific training for services and local authorities, as well as through ensuring diversity in the staff.**

- Ensure that no child is placed in institutions and reinforce the transition from institutional to community-based care.

The Alliance wants to emphasise that all language and activities as described in the European Child Guarantee should be in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and all EU policies and legislation.

In this regard, EU Member States should not allow the placement of children in institutional care or emergency shelters even as a last resort (wording proposed by the European Commission in recital 24). Extensive evidence shows that institutions can inflict long-term harms to children's development and expose them to all manner of human rights abuses.

Therefore, to reinforce the proposal and to ensure it is in line with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the Alliance calls on the Council to amend Recital 24 as follows:

*“Aiming at ensuring adequate protection and care for all children without or at risk of losing parental care, family support, quality community and family-based care should be promoted and the transition from institutions to quality alternative care should be actively pursued. Adequate services should also be provided to prepare children leaving care in order to support their independent living and social integration, including for unaccompanied migrant children”.*

The Recommendation and national Action plans should thus promote the development and funding of high-quality family and community-based care and support services with a family-centred, community-based model of support.

#### **Endnote**

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children has been advocating for a multidimensional, rights-based approach to tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being since 2014. This statement was endorsed by the following partner organisations of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children:

- Alliance for Childhood European Network Group
- ATD Quart Monde
- Caritas Europa
- COFACE Families Europe
- Don Bosco International
- Dynamo International – Street Workers Network
- ERGO Network
- Eurochild
- Eurodiaconia
- EuroHealthNet
- European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities – EASPD
- European Anti-Poverty Network – EAPN
- European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless – FEANTSA
- European Parents’ Association
- European Public Health Alliance – EPHA
- European Social Network – ESN
- Inclusion Europe



- Lifelong Learning Platform
- Lumos
- Mental Health Europe
- Make Mothers Matter
- Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)
- Roma Education Fund
- Save the Children
- SOS Children's Villages International

The statement was also endorsed by The European Expert Group on the transition from institutional to community-based support (EEG).

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