

National Partner Network Meeting

6-7 October 2020

Child Guarantee Session

7 October 2020, 10.00 – 11.30 (CET)

Minutes

The purpose of this session was to launch a fruitful dialogue on the Child Guarantee by summarising the latest updates on this crucial issue and by discussing the future advocacy priorities. With both EU policy proposal and financial negotiations rapidly progressing, the discussion aimed to reflect on how national organisations can play a crucial role in monitoring and influencing the future implementation of the Child Guarantee. Indeed, not only are there important hooks and moments for us to influence, but Eurochild also has a strategic position in the process to maintain and to capitalise on.

Summary of the key outcomes and follow-up actions:

- The much-needed funds for the implementation of a Child Guarantee are not yet committed by the Council and European Member States. This is why it is essential for Eurochild and its members to tirelessly lobby on a national level by reminding that sustainable development needs sustainable investment and sustainable investment is investing in children. In particular, the Council should compel each Member State to allocate **5% of the European Social Fund Plus** to tackle child poverty
- Eurochild and its members must also urge the EU to adopt a **Council Recommendation** regarding the **Child Guarantee**, as this will ensure that the Child Guarantee will have the highest level of commitment within the European Union to truly and effectively put child poverty to history



Topic/Agenda item	Discussion Points
Welcome and setting the scene	
<p>1. Opening remarks: H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, Eurochild President</p>	<p>The President of Eurochild, H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca welcomed the participants to the webinar underlining the important role played by these meetings in sharing information about the work members carry out at a national and regional level and to reflect on current and future priorities.</p> <p>The President then focused her speech on child poverty in Europe, a crucial issue which impacts in a multi-dimensional way the lives of millions of children. She underlined how recent studies are indicating that child poverty is on the rise due to the pandemic, and is creating even further havoc in the lives of those who were already vulnerable and disadvantaged. This is why the Child Guarantee must be urgently put in place and implemented. Investing in Children to prevent and reduce child poverty is indeed a shared aspiration and a commitment within and across our network.</p> <p>The president highlighted that never before the European Union has afforded as much visibility, attention and resources to put children at the top of its agenda. This is clearly shown by the commitment towards the Child Guarantee and the Comprehensive Strategy on the Rights of the Child.</p> <p>In particular, Vice-President Dubravka Šuica has addressed our Annual General Conference and met the President a couple of few weeks ago to share a specific agenda for the forthcoming months. The Vice President has already committed herself to be with us again, during the November breakfast webinars. This is definitely telling how much she is committed to giving not only the visibility to children but also her disposition to Eurochild and her recognition of Eurochild as a valuable contributor in the process of the development of a Comprehensive Strategy on the Rights of the Child. It is also encouraging to note that the Commission is saying that The Child Guarantee initiative will be published in early 2021, and that it will have links to the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and to the EU’s social agenda.</p> <p>The President has then stated that Eurochild and its members must continue to influence the content of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Our network through Eurochild is an important partner in the Child Rights Action Group (CRAG), which has already presented to Vice President Šuica a Joint Position Paper on a Comprehensive Child Rights Strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ From a political point of view, Eurochild is also monitoring the building of this essential framework and lobbying for a Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee, as this will ensure that the Child Guarantee will have the highest



level of commitment within the European Union to truly and effectively put child poverty to history.

- From a **financial point of view**, it is important to underline that the **much-needed funds for the implementation of a Child Guarantee are not yet committed by the Council**. Governments are often mainly interested in short-term successes of their economies and for some, investing in children is a far-away objective. This is why it essential for Eurochild not take things for granted and to **tirelessly remind everyone on a national and European level, that sustainable development needs sustainable investment and sustainable investment is investing in children**. Eurochild and its members thus need to work very hard on a national level by networking, lobbying and encouraging our governments to take up the initiative of affording the necessary funding to invest in our children. Investing in children is the solution to obtain a better Europe, to ensure that no one will be left behind, and to allow children to grow in dignity and enjoy their much-deserved rights. This is the only way to end Child Poverty.

The President then underlined that we need to campaign with our respective governments by making sure that our **societies and communities are aware of the need to invest in children** and of the positive outcomes that can be reaped for our respective countries and Europe as a whole, if we invest sustainably in our Children by addressing Child Poverty in all its dimensions.

The President was also pleased to note that some National Partners' Networks and individual organisations have already started this campaign, however, even those who have started must understand that this is an ongoing campaign until we secure the necessary European Funds. The European Parliament and the Commission already support the recommendation of putting aside **5% from the next 7-year European Social Fund Plus** in every country for the Child Guarantee. Now there is the need for our push with our national governments in order to obtain the support of the European Council as well. Indeed, it is through the availability of the necessary funds that we can ensure the implementation of the long-needed reforms, in the best interest of all the children living in Europe, and in particular, in the best interest of all the children living in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations.

The President concluded her speech reiterating that she has hope and full confidence in all the members.

2. Setting the scene:
Réka Tunyogi, Eurochild
– see also ppt

5 years ago, the European Parliament asked for the first time the establishment of the Child Guarantee and a related feasibility study. The first phase of the feasibility study has been launched in 2018 and is now completed; Eurochild has been one of the partners involved in the study. The final findings are available [online](#). Phase 2 and 3 are currently running; phase two is focused



on the financial costing of the scheme, while phase 3 concerns piloting projects run by UNICEF in a number of different EU countries.

The European Commission has recently unveiled a [Child guarantee Roadmap](#), i.e. a description of the upcoming proposal. The document has many positive sides; it is encouraging to see in writing a lot of what we have been advocating for in the last years:

- There will be a **Council Recommendation** on the child Guarantee; this means that this scheme will see the participation of the Council and EU Member states, and not only of the Commission.
- The document also speaks about the necessity for Member States to adopt **National strategies to reduce child poverty** and national **Child Guarantee Action Plans**. The first will be a broad national strategy with a timeline of 10 years and with a series of targets. The latter will be specifically looking through the actions and services of the Child Guarantee.
- The document also encourages the **link with other EU funds** other than the ESF+
- The Child Guarantee will contribute to the implementation of the **Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights**, another initiative from the European Commission which sets out principles in the area of social rights. Notably, principle 11 concerns child poverty and early childhood education and can be seen as ‘the legal basis’ of the Child Guarantee

A less positive point concerns the **scope** of the Child Guarantee. Indeed, the document is mainly focused on six services areas: free healthcare, free education, free early childhood education and care, decent housing, adequate nutrition and culture and leisure activities. We are thus missing a part concerning access to resources and child participation. Eurochild is advocating for the Child Guarantee to have a **comprehensive approach** based on the **three pillars** of the 2013 Commission Recommendation on Investing in children:

1. Access to adequate resources and reconciling work and family life
2. Access to good quality services
3. Children’s participation in decisions that affects them, and in cultural, leisure and sports activities.

How? **Services** for vulnerable groups of children can be covered by the **Child Guarantee Action Plans** while the **long-term national strategies** should focus on the **three pillars** and concern all children. Moreover, we are also advocating to enhance the engagement of civil societies: we would like to see it spelt out more in the document, especially in monitoring the national strategies.



As concerns the **funding**, the EP proposal asks each Member States to dedicate 5% of their ESF+ to tackle child poverty by addressing the six service areas. The European Commission is supporting this position, so now we only miss the support of the European Council, i.e. of the Member States. The European Parliament has been meeting with the Council to negotiate on numerous files but they haven't discussed the ESF+ yet because the national governments haven't managed to reach a common position on the issue. Over the last years, we have met with all the national representations based in Brussels to advocate for the Child Guarantee and we saw that some countries are against earmarking as a matter of principle: they want to be free to choose how to spend the money.

Next steps: we can respond to the broad consultation on the Pillar of Social Rights which will be open until 30 November 2020 by indicating what do we want to see in the Child Guarantee. Eurochild has already submitted three different reactions to the Child Guarantee Roadmap: [a general one as Eurochild](#), one as part of the [First Years First Priority European Campaign on Early Childhood Development](#), and [one in cooperation with the EU Alliance for Investing in Children](#). It would be important for members to reach out to their national ministries responsible for child poverty (EU affairs, cohesion policies, ESF+...) to ensure they will support the Child Guarantee in the European Council's meetings. The negotiations on this specific file need to be concluded by the end of the year, so we need to act now.

3. Experience in advocating for the Child Guarantee with national decision-makers: Emma Archbold, Children's Rights Alliance Ireland – see also ppt

Advocacy and the Child Guarantee:

- European Election campaign as part of No Child 2020 was based on the same 5 pillars of the Child Guarantee and Child Participation. It represented an important occasion to bring MEPs attention on this issue and to understand how to use more efficiently EU funds
- 41 Political Briefings as part of No Child 2020 to underline the necessity to have child national strategies, end child poverty and establish a child poverty unity in the government. The Child Guarantee and the material provided by Eurochild played an important role in this advocacy strategy.
- Part of our Programme for Government campaign asks
- Budget 2020 and Budget 2021
- Child Guarantee features in Child Poverty Subgroup (Better Outcomes Brighter Futures) submissions
- Central to our recent advocacy work in the area of Early Years

How Ireland can implement the Child Guarantee

- Event organized in September in cooperation with Eurochild: it examined child poverty in the Irish context, spoke about the feasibility studies, analysed future opportunities and challenges concerning the implementation of the Guarantee



- Keynote speakers Prof Hugh Frazer and Prof Mary Daly
- Panel with political representatives as well as NGO representatives leading in the area of child poverty
- Over 100 RSVPs
- Event details and materials sent to full database
- Live tweeting event
- Reach of event posts: 42,000 people
- Reach of livestream: 1,200 views

Following on from the event

- Promotion of webinar recording
- Follow up with attendees with information resources, it is an example of how we linked the campaign on child poverty and the Child Guarantee
- Follow up with Alliance child poverty campaign group (delete)
- Political party raised a Private Members Bill on the issue included Child Guarantee briefing notes including EU elements: we had a very positive conversation about it. The government finally voted against it but we obtained the commitment from the minister for children on specific targets. Moreover, it was positive to have a public conversation about child poverty and to reiterate that child poverty must be ended – not reduced.
- Threaded through Alliance media and communications outputs as well as key member campaigns
- Budget 2021 – call to for Government to commit to ending child poverty
- CRA to advocate for Successor strategy to BOBF to focus on child poverty with Child Guarantee as lynchpin

Discussion in smaller groups on the state of play at the national level

4. group discussions

Discussion on the necessity to ensure accountability to the Child Guarantee and comprehensive national strategies for reducing child poverty:

- In some member states there is a risk not to have **independent monitoring systems** and that money feed **corrupted mechanisms**
- For many counties, child poverty is **not a priority**: it is seen from a charitable mind-set rather than an issue that is the Government’s responsibility
- **Civil Society Organisations must have a role**



- **Children and family** in vulnerable situations **should be included** in the monitoring of the Child Guarantee – their voice should be heard
- In many countries the Child Guarantee will involve the cooperation among different ministries. We must ensure a good cooperation among these ministries and help Civil Society Organisation cooperating with them
- Many NGOs perceive the EU reality as **too complex**: they need easy processes to interact with
- The biggest challenge for national NGOs is to understand how to **combine the EU level instruments, such as the child guarantee, with the national ones**

Discussion on primary areas of investment in targeted services for children in need:

- Enhance the access to **good education** will support children participation processes, especially for most vulnerable children
- Enhance the quality of services concerning **mental health**
- **Transportation** and **access to the internet** must be guaranteed to all children
- Given that children living in foster care are increasingly isolated, it is difficult for them to participate to democratic processes
- **Child participation** should be the result of a more holistic approach
- **Nutrition** is another crucial priority, especially considering that many children cannot rely anymore on the meals provided by the schools
- It is crucial to work with children, not only for them
- It is necessary to adopt a more holistic approach

Discussion on next steps for implementing the Child Guarantee:

Recovery and the European Semester

Réka Tunyogi (Eurochild) highlighted that many Country Specific Recommendations do not have any recommendation on child poverty. This is definitely a concern that we have been raising with the EU institutions. The priority of child poverty decreased even if the Semester became more social. Indeed, the Semester is mainly focused on labour rights.

Nonetheless the Child Guarantee will be linked to the European Semester. Moreover, the Child Guarantee and the Pillar for Social Rights will assume a high political role for DG EMPL.



We need to ask for the Child Guarantee to have its own implementation framework with targets and indicators. The latter then have to feed into the Semester process. These indicators should concern early childhood education, de-institutionalisation, child protection reforms and family support.

Briefing & Outcomes of the session and closure

Closing & Summarizing what has been shared and how to move forward

Jana Hainsworth (Eurochild) took the floor for the closing remarks:

- We need to influence the EU political machinery in order to obtain indicators for the Child Guarantee that are not only based on family income but include a holistic approach.
- We need to prioritise child poverty and child rights in the national agendas.
- COVID 19 is going to create a huge increase in poverty, we must understand where do we position ourselves in relation to this issue: how will we defend who was already marginalised before the crisis?
- We need to have a clear idea of what will be our position and strategy when the economic crisis will kick in. We need to ensure the protection of all children and the most vulnerable, marginalised and discriminated