

Friday, 12 March 2021

EU Alliance for Investing in Children statement to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

On Thursday, 4 March, the European Commission presented the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights¹.

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children is convinced that **a strong Social Europe needs to start by investing in its children.**

Therefore, the EU Alliance welcomes the European Commission's strong reference to child poverty reduction and the setting of the EU poverty target and its sub-target **aiming to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty in the EU by 2030**. We firmly agree with the European Commission that reducing child poverty is a prerequisite to granting children equal access to opportunities and will contribute to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

In addition, the EU Alliance welcomes the reference to the importance of children's access to services, such as children's access to quality education and early childhood education and care (ECEC) that will allow them to reach their fullest potential from an early age, while also supporting their parents to better reconcile work and family life. In particular, the renewed Barcelona targets to be launched in 2022² must give a new push to EU Member States to ensure that more children will participate equally in early childhood education and care, and that is fully inclusive also for children with disabilities.

We are confident that the forthcoming Child Guarantee Council Recommendation, as well as the Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation, the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Commission Action Plan on integration and inclusion - if adequately funded by EU and national resources - will support not only the achievement of the child poverty target but might also exceed it.

With this statement, the EU Alliance provides recommendations for strengthening the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and calls on:

- **EU Member States to set national targets that will exceed the EU target of lifting at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030.**

The EU target is an essential start in tackling child and family poverty; it sends a clear message that child poverty reduction and the rights of children growing up in poverty and social exclusion should be at the heart of Member States' activities towards fulfilling the European Pillar of Social Rights.

¹ European Commission, [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), March 2021

² On average, the EU has reached the 2002 Barcelona target of 33% of children below the age of 3 in early childhood education and care (35.5% at EU-27 level in 2019) and the target of 90% of children from 3 to primary school going age (90% at EU-27 level in 2019). In 2022, the EU will present a revision of the Barcelona targets

Child poverty figures were already high even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and the socio-economic consequences that it has caused will only increase poverty levels in the years to come, and families with children are very likely to be one of the groups affected disproportionately.

At the same time, the EU and its EU Member States have committed to implementing the UN 2030 Agenda and its targets. Sustainable Development Goal 1³ aims at eradicating extreme poverty and halving child poverty in all its dimensions by 2030.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 22.5%, or approximately 18 million, children growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU 27⁴. **If the EU wants to achieve the child poverty reduction target set by the UN 2030 Agenda, then we should aim to ensure that at least 9 million children will be lifted out of poverty by then.**

We are therefore calling on EU Member States to aim higher and set national targets that will go beyond the EU target, taking into consideration the COVID-19 impact and their commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Action Plan also includes an important target on employment, **which aims to ensure that at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 is in employment by 2030.** We positively welcome this request, which has the potentiality to strengthen the fight against poverty and ameliorate the economic conditions of parents and carers. On the other hand, it must be noted that anti-poverty policy cannot be merely reduced to employment policy. For this reason, the child poverty target must remain a priority for the Union.

- **The European Commission and the Council of the EU to set disaggregated indicators that will include those children and their families in vulnerable situations.**

The revision of the Social Scoreboard is a particularly good way forward to monitor the tackling of child poverty more efficiently. **The EU Alliance welcomes the new headline indicator for at-risk-of-poverty rate or exclusion for children (0-17).** It also welcomes the constant attention to children's access to formal child care. The Alliance is also pleased with the strengthened secondary indicators, particularly the one related to children from the age of three to mandatory primary school age in formal child care and those related to Member States expenditure on social protection, education, and healthcare. However, we should also note that expenditure figures do not always mean that children, and especially those in the most vulnerable situations, will be the ones to benefit or that the provision of services will be comprehensive and of good quality.

Therefore, the EU Alliance also recommends that the European Commission, in cooperation with the Social Protection Committee and the Employment Committee, further develops the secondary indicators as included in ANNEX 2 of the Action Plan. The secondary indicators will help to give a more thorough assessment in the European Semester and deciding on the investment priorities in national but also regional contexts. All relevant indicators should be disaggregated to take into account those in the most vulnerable situations focusing on the target groups identified in the Child Guarantee Feasibility Study⁵, such as children living in precarious family situations, children growing up in income-

³ United Nations Development Programme, [Goal 1 Targets](#)

⁴ Eurostat, [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion – United Kingdom excluded](#)

⁵ European Commission, [Feasibility Study for a child guarantee](#), 2019

poor and single-parent households, children living in segregated areas, homeless children, Roma children, children in alternative care including those residing in institutions, children in migration, children with disabilities and other support needs.

In addition, all relevant indicators should be disaggregated to better align with the areas⁶ identified by the upcoming Child Guarantee. The EU institutions should work intensely to ensure that these indicators are also incorporated in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation.

Moreover, EU Member States should set up different and specific indicators that holistically cover all the Social Pillar principles.

In this way, it will be possible to provide more comprehensive and disaggregated data on the multifaceted dimensions related to children and their families, leading to poverty and social exclusions.

The EU Alliance stands ready to support the European Commission and the Council in their work.

- **EU Member States to support more concretely the engagement with civil society and reinforce the national, regional and local civic dialogue. Member States to ensure that children, families, carers, and care and support professionals will be meaningfully consulted in these processes.**

The Action Plan rightly emphasises the pivotal role of stakeholders, including civil society organisations, in the Social Pillar implementation. Yet, while mentioning the importance of strengthening social dialogue processes, the importance of reinforcing civil dialogue processes is not sufficiently recognised in the Action Plan. Civil society actors, including care and support services, are primary interlocutors of children and families in and at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Hence, we call on the Member States to ensure all stakeholders' full participation in all the steps connected with implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Social Pillar Action Plan.

We believe that the participation of children, parents, carers and care and support services in the Social Pillar implementation will be essential. Consequently, EU Member States should ensure their meaningful participation and develop structures that will support their involvement in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating all the activities connected with the Action Plan and that of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation. In particular, attention should be paid to the participation of children and families, from socially excluded and marginalised groups experiencing structural inequalities in social, economic and political participation as well as children and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion and civil society organisations representing them.

⁶ Access to free education, early childhood education and care, healthcare, adequate nutrition and decent housing.

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.

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