

Poverty & inequality in Childhood: The state-of-play of the Portuguese national strategy on the rights of the child & the potential role of a European Child Guarantee

21 October 2020

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Dear Participants and Friends

Good Morning to every one of you

I would like to start my contribution to this webinar on Poverty & Inequality in Childhood, by first of all congratulating the Instituto de Apoio à Criança for organising this important event.

This is an event, which I am proud to say, that it is also supported by Eurochild, being one of its annual member-led, event for 2020.

Thank you so much Dulce and your team, for bringing us all together today, to discuss and share the important issues concerning poverty and inequality in childhood an event which is being organised at a very important time, that is when

Portugal, is just two months away, from taking over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

We hope that your advocacy on these worrying concerns in Europe, and that Eurochild, as a pan-European network, dedicates its energies to, will also be taken on board by the Portuguese Presidency.

I would also like to wholeheartedly thank you, Honourable Minister, for your invaluable remarks. It is truly encouraging, to feel your sense of dedication and commitment to implementing, the Portuguese National Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

Truly well done Minister.

The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union will come, at a very important time, for child rights advocates and activists. It a very important time, because the pandemic is highlighting, the difficulties that all children are facing, however, as research is showing us, its dreadful impact, is further compounding the multi-dimensional inequalities, faced by children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

On the other hand, the civil society organisations, which work on the ground, with children across Europe, are working under huge pressure.

Despite such a bleak situation, Eurochild is hopeful never before was there so much visibility, to Children's Rights in the European Union.

This is thanks to the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, who has specifically mandated Vice President Dubrovka Suica, to develop an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

Moreover, the fact that this Commission has also upheld the proposed Child Guarantee, which was originally proposed by the European Parliament in November 2015, and the President also mandated Commissioner Nicolas Schmit, to work on the effective development of this guarantee, to help children in the EU to access:

- free healthcare;**
- free education;**
- childcare;**
- nutrition; and**

- **decent housing;**

gives us great hope.

It is in this context that Eurochild is expecting the EU to now make progress, on promoting the wellbeing of children at the highest political level.

We are hoping that, The EU's Strategy on the Rights of the Child; as well as the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee, will see the light of day early next year.

Child Poverty is a Europe wide issue.

Nearly one in four children in the EU are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and this indicator is a pre-pandemic statistic.

Not one EU country is unfortunately, spared from this social reality.

According to UNICEF and Save the Children the number of children living in multidimensional poverty has soared to approximately 1.2 billion globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of the pandemic on children's wellbeing is a reality, which also Europe, is experiencing.

It is common knowledge that children growing up in poverty and social exclusion, are less likely:

- **to do well in school;**
- **to enjoy good health; and**
- **to realise their full potential later in life, when they are at a higher risk of, becoming unemployed, poor and socially excluded.**

The cycle of disadvantage runs deep - in 2018 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, estimated that it would take on average, 5 generations of children from poor families, to reach the average income in their country.

Poverty is a complex issue that requires an integrated approach, sustainable investment and a dedicated commitment from our policy makers. Our only success for the future can only be achieved by investing in children to ensure that we break the cycles of disadvantage and overcome inequalities.

The only way to ensure that our present and future generations can feel socially included in their own countries, and also believe in our European Project, is to put poverty to history.

The Child Guarantee is a roadmap for our national governments and policy makers. It is also a clear framework of how the European Union can create a harmonised way forward to ensure that children in our respective countries, are effectively recognised as rights holders and appreciated as valid contributors to our societies.

The *Investing in Children* approach, which was promoted by the 2013 European Commission Recommendation, immediately found Eurochild's full support.

Eurochild is a believer of sustainable integrated investment in children. The 2013 European Recommendation was based on children's rights and took children's best interests as its primary consideration. It promoted a comprehensive approach to address child poverty and promote wellbeing. It also provided an integrated approach by looking at:

- family income;**
- children's access to services; and**
- their participation in decision-making.**

We are keen to see an investing in children strategy, become the driver, of the necessary reforms across Europe.

We, therefore, believe that we need:

1. The necessary Political commitment, determination and the much needed targets that would be adhered to by our respective countries across EU to reduce child poverty.

If every EU country commits to reduce Child Poverty by half by 2030, then we will also be effectively working to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, as set out by the UN Agenda 2030.

2. Comprehensive national strategies are needed to prevent and reduce child poverty and social exclusion. Such strategies need to take a child-centred approach in policies and bridge the economy, the labour market, welfare, social protection and family support, together with, healthcare, education, early childhood development, to ensure the effectiveness of strategic reforms.

We need to understand, identify and acknowledge all the gaps, to make sure that we reach all children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Through a Child Guarantee and its subsequent national action plans, we believe we can reach all children, and particularly those

children from vulnerable situations, to improve their access to essential services, such as childcare and adequate housing.

3. As Recovery is on the mind of every EU government, the mobilisation of EU and National Funding are very important. How resources are prioritised now, will have a long-term impact on the resilience of our societies.

The need for the necessary resilience in our communities and our societies, was further highlighted since the onset of the pandemic. Building resilience by investing in our children will help the economy, to weather out further potential shocks.

The next seven-year EU budget affords tangible possibilities.

We are at a most opportune time to ensure that the necessary resources are afforded and put aside, to seriously tackle child poverty.

This most important issue of mobilising EU and National Funding is now up to the responsibility of each Member State. The European Parliament and the Commission have already given their support to putting aside 5% from the European Social Fund Plus to be dedicated to every country for this priority.

Eurochild is proud to be effectively helping in shaping the Child Guarantee. We have been supporting this initiative from its inception and have actively contributed in both phase 1 and 2 of the feasibility study.

Eurochild's 200-member network, is present in every EU Member State. We are also active in a group of EU networks supporting the Child Guarantee.

We are promised that a tangible proposal for a Child Guarantee, will be ready by early 2021. We are hopeful, encouraged and excited for this historical breakthrough, however we know that the success of the Child Guarantee, will ultimately depend on all of us, and most importantly it will depend on our leaders' commitment to invest in children and act upon to break the cycles of disadvantage.

Portugal's role, in the driving seat of the European Commission, will be crucial in the coming months.

The Child Guarantee will be published and hopefully agreed and approved during the Portuguese Presidency.

We need the Child Guarantee to trigger the change, and introduce the long needed reforms to safeguard children's rights, end child

poverty, to effectively ensure the deserved support to disadvantaged children.

I would like to end my contribution with an inspiring quote from Nelson Mandela about poverty and I quote:

'Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.'

I urge all of us to be the GREAT generation of all times and put child poverty to history once and for all.