

## H.E. MARIE LOUISE SPEAKING POINTS – SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY EVENT

### The Child Guarantee: equal opportunities for every child

#### Info

**Date:** 09 November 2021

**Time:** 09.30 – 12.30

**H.E. Intervention:** in

**Type of the event:** Online event

**Info:** The main theme of the conference will be a discussion on putting the recommendation into practice and how member states can prepare and follow-up measures to provide children across the EU with equal opportunities. More info [here](#)

**H.E. intervention:** H.E. will intervene with a 5-minutes speech in the first session, from 09:00 to 9:30. The question will be asked by a child taking part in the event.

#### Agenda of H.E.'s session

**9:00 – 9:30 Opening Session**

**Moderated by Bilal in Arja Ela (teenagers from Slovenia)**

- **Janez Cigler Kralj**, Minister for Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Slovenia (5')
- **Dubravka Šuica**, Vice-President of the European Commission (5')
- **Nicolas Schmit**, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights (5')
- **Ana Mendes Godinho**, Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Portugal (5')
- **H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca**, President EUROCHILD (5')

**Speech:**

*Her Excellency, could you tell us why the Child Guarantee is so important and how it could help children in the European Union?*

Thank you for this very important question and for inviting me to this timely event.

To understand the crucial role that the Child Guarantee will play in the next years, we must reflect on the critical junction that the European Union is currently in.

There are two opposing factors in relation to children and their rights.

On one hand, we are witnessing the CLIMATE EMERGENCY, we are experiencing the widening of social inequalities and vulnerabilities, and we are living through the fragmentation of our democracies.

However, not everything is doom and gloom!

As on the other hand, we are experiencing, an extraordinary political momentum, for the protection of children's human rights.

The commitment to a Child Guarantee represents a monumental step forward, in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion.

The new agreement on the European Social Fund Plus compels all Member States to dedicate adequate resources to tackle this issue.

Moreover, the European Commission has published its first ever Strategy on the Rights of the Child, and has set a target to lift 5 million children out of poverty by 2030.

**The Child Guarantee is setting a roadmap and clear framework to address Child Poverty.**

**The Child Guarantee, sets Early Childhood Education and Care as one its priority areas.**

**This is an area which is widely researched, yet, despite the evidence that research provides, it receives relatively little attention in politics and public policies.**

**The First Years First Priority campaign, launched in 2020 by Eurochild and the International Step by Step Association, in partnership with the European Public Health Alliance, and the Roma Education Fund, advocates for THE prioritization of early childhood development (ECD) in public policies.**

**This campaign emphasis the need that every child in Europe aged 0 to 6 receives a fair start in life.**

***Evidence in this area, states clearly that many of the major public health concerns experienced in adult life, are linked to experiences during the first 1,000 days OF LIFE.***

**The first 1,000 days are crucial. Quoting Dr Charmaine Bonello, a Maltese expert in early years, *“The first years are crucial for forming and building the architecture of the brain”.***

**In 2018, in Europe, we had a turnout of 95% of children aged between four and the compulsory starting age for primary education, who were in early childhood education.**

**This statistic prompts some very basic questions which need a response and necessary actions:**

**What about the other 5% who are out of school?**

**What are the reasons behind these 5% of children, for not accessing their early childhood education?**

**Who are the children that fall within this 5%?**

**Why have these children not accessed early childhood education?**

**What is hindering these children from attending school?**

**What is the situation now, especially during and after the lockdowns?**

**The first years are fundamental for life.**

**National Governments need and must invest in early childhood education and care.**

**National Governments need to focus their policies and energies to ensure a FAIR START for every CHILD.**

**It is common knowledge that early childhood experiences SHAPE a child's adult life.**

**Investing therefore, holistically in early years is one of THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOLS to stop the escalation of poverty and social inequality.**

**Education, undoubtedly helps children, acquire basic life skills and competences, that are so necessary and important for their full personal development.**

**Education helps children to develop holistically, facilitates their place in society and enables them to attain a level of education, together with, the necessary skills set for their life satisfaction and employment opportunity in life.**

**Education is a RIGHT.**

**Education is KEY to HELP END POVERTY.**

**Quality education may be linked to many different factors. Governments, therefore, need to reflect about their respective educational systems. They need to reflect together with all stakeholders in the sector, including educators, other complimentary professionals, civil society organisations, parents and children themselves.**

**Every child has the right to a quality education.**

**We need to ENSURE that children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, have an effective access to quality education.**

**Healthcare is another important pillar of the Child Guarantee. Investing in high-quality health care and services in the early years, is another key factor towards children reaching their full potential, their growth and development.**

**ALL CHILDREN need nurturing, care and health services to survive and thrive.**

**And let us not forget the importance of having quality health care that starts from the pre-natal period and extends through the**

**pregnancy and beyond to ensure that the child is born in a thriving environment, which can nurture it up to adulthood.**

**A worrying concern exacerbated by the pandemic is the issue of children's mental health. This is an area within the health spectrum, where our governments need to invest to ensure that children today, will not suffer loss of childhood and later their wellbeing in life.**

**Good nutrition is another important pillar that the Child Guarantee addresses. During the first 1,000 days from pregnancy until a child's second birthday, good nutrition is critical for children to grow and develop to their full potential.**

**Children in poverty are denied access to good nutrition. Children have spoken through a report by Eurochild published earlier this year entitled: Growing in Lockdown. It is clearly said, that the closing down of schools during lockdown did not only deny vulnerable children of their education, but also from their school lunches.**

**A growing concern which national governments need to address is childhood obesity. Statistics are showing alarming figures of having increasing numbers of children who are overweight and obese, with increased risk of health problems.**

**Research shows a direct link between obesity and socio-economic status, as well as the need to look at this issue from a multi-disciplinary perspective.**

**The Child Guarantee is providing us with a great opportunity.**

**Let us ensure that each and every pillar, emphasised in the Child Guarantee is effectively implemented at the national level.**

**We cannot waste this opportunity.**

**At least one in four children in the European Union are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.**

**All European countries have children at risk of poverty and social exclusion. No matter how high their GDP is or how strong, their social protection systems are!**

**In every single EU Member State there are children growing up denied of their basic human rights .... Who experience inequalities each and every day of their lives ..... who are hindered from reaching their full potential ..... who cannot enjoy life in a safe environment.**

**Moreover, we are even more concerned with the effects of the COVID crisis on children, on young people and on families across Europe.**

**Eurochild's national member organisations are witnessing on a daily basis, a dire combination of financial stress, uncertainty over the future, mental health problems, the educational and digital divide, and increased violence against children.**

**This is a reality that the European Union cannot accept.**

**The EU institutions and Member States must act now and capitalise on the critical new instruments at our disposal.**

**Children are not only the future of Europe, but a vibrant and fundamental part of THE present.**

**We must respect children, engage with children, protect them and treat them as valued contributors to our societies.**

**We are convinced that *guaranteeing children's equal opportunities* is also guaranteeing a future for our societies, our planet, and our democracy.**

**As often mentioned by Commissioner Schmit: it is not possible to build a strong and fair Europe without investing in children.**

**The Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child are important steps in the right direction, but on their own, it they will not be enough.**

**Child poverty is a burden on Europe's future prosperity and stability. Children need and deserve a strong and sincere political commitment together with political determination to act.**

**We need long term strategies.**

**We need effective action plans.**

**We need comprehensive policies.**

**We need innovative instruments.**

**WE NEED COMMITTED POLITICIANS who understand that CHILDREN'S RIGHTS are HUMAN RIGHTS, and that, EVERY CHILD MATTERS, NO MATTER WHAT.**

**We need our governments to be bold.**

**There is no more time to shy away.**



**CHILDREN have waited for far too long!**

**NO CHILD should be LEFT BEHIND.**