

July 2019

## **POLICY PAPER ON CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

Eurodiaconia is a network of 51 churches and Christian organizations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Among the **over 30 000 services provided by our members** a significant number of them work in areas related to children's well-being, including family support centers, after-school programs, child protection and counseling, trauma therapy and family mediation. Our members experience on a day to day basis allows them to see the structural and systemic changes needed to address the risks of child poverty and exclusion.

Children remain the demographic group at the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Recent data confirms that **24.9% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)** compared to any other age group.<sup>1</sup> The risk of poverty increases for children who are members of single parent households or of large families (three or more children), as well as children from jobless households, underemployed parents or parents suffering from in-work poverty, children with disabilities, and children of ethnic minorities (such as Roma children) or those with a migrant background.<sup>2</sup> In several Member States, for example, over 90% of Roma children are at risk of poverty.<sup>3</sup>

The Financial and Economic crisis of 2008 strongly affected families with children, putting them at an even higher risk of poverty. Eleven years later, this is still the case. This represents an important concern for Eurodiaconia since children in poverty are considerably less likely to have good health, succeed in school, find a suitable job and, therefore, achieve their full potential. We believe that every individual has the inherent right to a life in dignity, security and stability through education, access to social protection and services and other support.

This policy paper follows on from our 2012 Policy Paper on Child Poverty and Social Inclusion, and aims to **reflect on the implementation of the 2013 'Recommendation on Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'**<sup>4</sup>, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the more recent proposal for the adoption of a Child Guarantee. In addition, we provide **testimony from some of our members** who work hand in hand with children at risk of poverty and exclusion. Finally, we offer substantial and **concrete**

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<sup>1</sup> Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-combating-child-poverty\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-combating-child-poverty_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112>

**recommendations** to policymakers regarding what we see as the most suitable course of action in terms of tackling child poverty and social exclusion.

### **The experience of our members**

The projects carried out by our members throughout Europe deal with different aspects of poverty and strive to tackle the issues at the root cause. The **Fédération d'Entraide Protestante (France)**, for instance, recognized that one of the root causes in their context is the inability for unemployed parents to balance looking for a job and taking care of their children. Thus, it created a free nursery that provides parents with the security and time to participate more actively on their job search. Comparably, a project in **Germany** pairs members of different families and tackles language barriers, develops self-confidence, and allows beneficiaries to prepare for the labour market, while creating a sense of community.<sup>5</sup>

Although the projects described focus on helping migrant families, their effectiveness is not limited to this group. We encourage the transferability of innovative projects and policies across Europe, supporting their scaling up and implementation. Likewise, despite the differences across countries made evident by the diversity of services observed by our members, there are some commonalities in the provision of social services that are worth mentioning. These, in turn, might represent an easier approach when it comes to policy making and advocacy at the European level.

First, our members have witnessed an **increasing demand for social services**. The Financial and Economic Crisis saw expenditure on social protection challenged as policies of fiscal consolidation were introduced. Studies have shown a negative correlation between social expenditure and child poverty and, therefore, we encourage MS to increase their levels of social expenditure, especially in countries with low percentage of social expenditure relative to GDP.

Second, there is a noticeable **correlation between poverty and social exclusion**, since they feed off each other. It is more likely that a household facing material poverty, for example, will suffer from social exclusion. Similarly, an individual that feels isolated from society, whether it is due to language barriers, health issues, or any other cause, is at a higher risk of poverty. This link between poverty and social exclusion must be considered when making decisions on the tackling of these issues.

Lastly, **intergenerational poverty** and **poverty traps** are present in every Member State. Defined as the transmitted poverty through generations, intergenerational poverty requires not only the active support of the local and national governments but also the continuous follow-up and monitoring from CSOs and other involved actors and service providers. The 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children had as its main goal the disruption of the poverty cycle, and we ask the Member States to recall this Recommendation and undertake a higher investment aimed at overcoming poverty traps. This will not only reduce poverty levels now but also show investment in future generations.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## **Recommendations**

Eurodiaconia once again recalls its appreciation of the adoption of the '2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' but aligns with other stakeholders who have expressed their concerns on its effectiveness and implementation. In addition, we have followed closely the European Pillar of Social Rights since before its proclamation in 2017, and work with actors involved in the implementation of its 20 principles. Similarly, we have been involved in the discussion on the SDGs as the 2030 Agenda is shaped into a sustainability-focused strategy. Lastly, we welcome the proposal and the current study by the European Parliament and the European Commission to develop a Child Guarantee.

However, adoption and strategies must lead to implementation and so it is with implementation in mind we make the following recommendations.

### **The European Institutions**

- a) *Foster the regulation and monitoring of the implementation of the 2013 Recommendation on Investing in children, as well as the European Pillar of Social Rights.*
- b) *Implement policies and other instruments of hard law that encourage the reduction of inequalities among children, in accordance with SDG 10 and Principle 3 of the EPSR.*
- c) *Support the adoption of a Directive raising minimum standards of living and the availability of adequate housing, reassuring that no child is left behind or on the streets, in accordance with Principle 19 of the EPSR.*
- d) *Ensure that children with disabilities, or of a migrant/refugee background, Roma or other particularly disadvantaged group are specifically addressed in future strategies such as the EU Disability Strategy, the National Roma Integration Strategies etc.*
- e) *Support and encourage the development of quality, accessible and affordable social services to support families and children. This should go beyond employment related child care services and include family therapies and support, specific services for children who have experienced trauma, children with special needs and early years education.*
- f) *Support not for profit social service providers in the transition from institutional to community/family based care settings.*
- g) *Strengthen their social protection systems to ensure that children residing in institutions have access to adequate and subsidized childcare, in accordance with Principle 11 of the EPSR. based on the number of dependents per household, in accordance with Principle 14 of the EPSR.*

*We also give the following specific recommendations based on our members experience:*

### **Children with Disabilities**

- a) *Support not for profit social service providers through financial means to reflect Articles 7.1. and 7.3. of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in the post-2020 Disability Rights Agenda to ensure that there are no physical impediments, and that any child in need of mental or intellectual support receives adequate assistance to realize their human rights and freedoms on an equal basis with other children, in accordance with Principle 17 of the EPSR<sup>6</sup>.*
- b) *Enable not for profit social service providers to offer effective and inclusive educational programs that guarantee that children with disabilities have the same opportunities to succeed in school and in extra-curricular settings.*
- c) *Invest in training and employment of social workers to reinforce the treatment they offer to children with disabilities and special needs.*

### **Children with a migrant background and/or refugees**

- a) *Increase the research, funding and transmission of good practices carried out by NGOs and Civil Society aimed at the integration and protection of migrant and refugee families.*
- b) *“Ensure adequate support through EU funds, such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund + (ESF+) and ensure that these funds are accessible for NGOs and effectively used for migrant children”*
- c) *Mainstream the social inclusion of migrant children throughout all EU policies. In addition, targeted measures should be promoted to prevent the exclusion of migrant children, including access to early childhood education and the integration of children into mainstream education regardless of their legal status. Adequate access to health care services and housing should be promoted for particularly vulnerable migrant children.*
- d) *Support the social inclusion of refugee and migrant families. Develop integration strategies that help overcome special obstacles (such as language barriers) that prevent migrant and refugee parents from accessing the labor market.*
- e) *Actively support the work of involved CSOs and NGOs that foster the provision of necessary services to migrants and refugees.*

### **Children from the Roma Community**

- a) *Continue and strengthen extensive research about the situation of vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities, such as Roma, across the EU in order to effectively analyze, monitor and ultimately strengthen existing frameworks promoting social inclusion and to identify where new strategies are needed.*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

- B) *Promote a child sensitive approach to Roma inclusion on the EU level. Monitor and tackle the multiple discrimination against Roma children, by addressing educational and spatial segregation, insufficient access to housing and health care.*
- C) *Reinforce the adoption of legal instruments that guarantee the protection of incoming migrants and refugees, in accordance with Principle 12 of the EPSR.*

**In terms of children with parents from workless households, underemployed parents or parents suffering from in-work poverty:**

- a) *Ensure that equal access to childcare and other social services is not dependent on the employment status of the parents.*
- b) *Promote policies that allow parents of households to balance work and family life, in accordance with Principle 9 of the EPSR. Eurodiaconia welcomes the Councils adoption on the Directive on work-life balance for parents on 13 June 2019 as a step in the right direction.<sup>7</sup>*
- c) *Prioritize early childhood education and care (ECEC) to ensure that every child, regardless of the condition of their household has access to education and receives adequate care.*

**In terms of children with parents struggling with over-indebtedness:**

- a) *Improve the monitoring and follow closely EU funded projects to confirm that they are being implemented effectively and have a direct impact on the people targeted.*
- b) *Adjust fiscal and economic policies to support indebted families so that they may defeat the poverty trap.*
- c) *Eurodiaconia recommends a consistent and increased support to diaconal organisations offering debt related services, independent advice and social lending.*
- d) *Promote integrated approaches through best practice exchanges, access to EU funding, and the facilitation of staff exchange programs between legal, health, and social actors.*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>