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Eurodiaconia feedback on: Basic services for children in need - European Child Guarantee

Eurodiaconia welcomes the Commission's proposal to develop a Child Guarantee as part of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and will take an active role along with its members to further promote its implementation at national and local level. Eurodiaconia is a network of 52 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 counselling, 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. In today's Europe, it is unacceptable that one in four children is at risk of social exclusion and poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic consequences it has already caused are worryingly expected to escalate this figure exponentially, further affecting health and wellbeing, and the living conditions of millions of children in Europe.

Eurodiaconia, as part of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children, therefore strongly echoes the Alliance's call to the European Commission to take a rights-based integrated approach to tackling child poverty and to incorporate the three Pillars of the Investing in Children Recommendation in its proposal for the European Child Guarantee.¹ Further, incorporating parents' access to resources (pillar 1) and children's access to decision making (pillar 3) in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation are of utmost importance.

The 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children had as its main goal the disruption of the poverty cycle, and we ask all the Member States to recall this Recommendation and undertake higher (social) investment aimed at overcoming poverty traps. This will not only reduce poverty levels now but also shows investment in future generations. The European Commission needs to have better and stronger systems in place to monitor the situation of (child) poverty in the EU, which currently is often far too outdated. However, adoption and strategies must lead to implementation (which clearly has been lacking so far) and so it is with implementation in mind we make the following general recommendations²:

¹ <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/contribution-of-the-eu-alliance-for-investing-in-children-to-the-european-commission-public-consultation-on-the-child-guarantee/>

² <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Revision-of-Policy-Paper-on-Child-Poverty-July-2019.pdf>

- 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.
- Support not for profit social service providers in the transition from institutional to community/family based care settings.
- Implement policies and other instruments of hard law that encourage the reduction of inequalities among children, for instance, in accordance with SDG 10 and Principle 3 of the EPSR.
- Support the adoption of a Directive raising minimum standards of living (e.g. Minimum Income) 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.
- Ensure that children with disabilities, or of a migrant/refugee background, Roma or other particularly disadvantaged group are specifically addressed.

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

Children with a migrant background and/or refugees

- 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.
- Prioritize quality family and community-based care in the EU Member States along with access to holistic integration programs, including access to sport and recreational activities and the provision of psychological support to mitigate the impact of covid-19 on migrant and refugee children.
- Reinforce the adoption of legal instruments that guarantee the protection of incoming migrants and refugees, in accordance with Principle 12 of the EPSR.

Children from the Roma Community

- 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, and insufficient access to early childhood education and care, primary and secondary education, healthcare, nutrition and decent housing.
- Create synergies between the Child Guarantee and the upcoming Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030 ensuring that the needs of Roma children are prioritised in the EU framework and that their rights are also reflected in the national Roma integration strategies.
- Enhance the collection of data on Roma children and their families, ensuring that EU policies reflect their needs.

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

- Ensure that equal access to childcare and other social services is not dependent on the employment status of the parents.

The new Multiannual Financial Framework, in particular, the European Social Fund+ and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, will once again be the EU funding cornerstones in implementing measures to support the participation of children and families at risk of poverty and social exclusion throughout the next decade. Eurodiaconia welcomes the specific reference to the European Commission's and European Parliament's proposal for EU Member States to earmark 5% of their ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty. We urge the Council of the EU to support this proposal.