



The Post-2020 MFF Must Invest in Children and Aim to End Child Poverty

This week the European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the EU will sign the inter-institutional proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in Gothenburg,(1) which reiterates commitments to promote social inclusion and the rights of the child.(2) The future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should contribute to translate these commitments into action.

More than 20 organisations within the EU Alliance for Investing in Children urge the EU institutions and its Member States to invest in children and develop a future MFF that works to end child poverty and promotes the social inclusion of all children in Europe.

The future of Europe depends on investing in children, in particular in children and families in vulnerable situations. The EU and its Member States need to act urgently to protect around 25 million children estimated to be living in or at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Growing up in poverty can negatively affect children's opportunities for the rest of their lives, with far-reaching consequences - for instance, on their future education, health, participation in the labour market and society. Acting early on child poverty and investing in early childhood education and care is not only a moral imperative, it is also a cost-effective measure.

The MFF is an important instrument for the EU and its Member States to leave no-one behind and to invest in children. In June 2017, the Council of the EU stressed the EU' and Member States' commitment to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through greater efforts to promote social inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as children.(3)

The Commission's Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances acknowledged that investing in people, from education and training to health equality and social inclusion, is the overarching priority for the EU.(4)

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children fully supports these commitments and is proposing the following recommendations to ensure that the next MFF invests in children:

1. Ending child poverty and social exclusion in Europe should be a clear and visible priority in the next MFF

2. The next MFF should be underpinned by a strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Recommendation on Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage:(5)

- This strategy should prioritise the drastic reduction of child poverty in Europe in line with SDG 1 to "reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty".

- The strategy needs to integrate the European Pillar of Social Rights and its relevant principles, including principle 11 which recognises that children have a right to protection from poverty.⁽⁶⁾
- The Recommendation on Investing in children is the strategic framework to realise principle 11 of the Social Pillar. The Recommendation's implementation should be financially supported by the EU.

3. The size of the next MFF should be adequate to fight child poverty in Europe:

- The resources for social inclusion in the next MFF should be increased. At least the equivalent of 30% of the current European Social Fund should be earmarked for social inclusion. Such spending on social inclusion must cover efforts to prevent and tackle child poverty.
- The UK leaving the EU and the possible development of new financial instruments for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) should not result in fewer resources for social inclusion.

4. The next MFF should promote a life cycle approach to social investment and social protection:

- The Alliance recommends that in case EU funding for boosting employment, skills and combating poverty are gathered under one financial instrument, its main objective should be promoting social inclusion, social investment and adequate social protection with a life-cycle approach.
- This would ensure a strong focus on investment for the most vulnerable children and families so that they have access to quality, accessible and inclusive community-based services (e.g. health, social services, family support, education, housing, and child protection) and adequate social protection for children and families throughout the life cycles (e.g. minimum income, unemployment, child and housing benefits).

5. The EU funds aiming at poverty reduction and social inclusion under the next MFF should be linked to national poverty reduction strategies and action plans:

- EU funds should support Member States in implementing policy reforms to tackle child poverty in line with the EC Recommendation on Investing in children and its three pillars: access to resources, access to quality services and child participation.
- In doing so, Member States should make sure that EU funds reach all children and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion regardless of their migration or residence status.
- Local stakeholders play an important role in the implementation of national poverty reduction strategies and action plans. EU funds should support the capacity of local stakeholders, who provide frontline services and are best placed to deliver policy outcomes such as those included in the Recommendation on Investing in children.
- The European Commission's monitoring role of EU funds needs to be strengthened, and formalized in the monitoring committees, as well as ex-ante conditionalities should be monitored both at the programming and the regulation levels. Civil society and service users should also be fully involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of projects.

6. The simplification of the rules of the future MFF should aim to further promote the engagement of stakeholders, including CSOs, and increase funds absorption:

- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have an important role in reaching people in vulnerable situations and the most disadvantaged. To support, monitor and report on implementation of EU and national policies CSOs need sufficient capacity and support to play this role and to help improve financial mechanisms. EU funds are essential to strengthening the capacity of CSOs, and access to these funds also needs to be ensured for grassroots organisations.
- New resources should be dedicated to involving children and their families in vulnerable situations in the design, delivery and monitoring of child poverty strategies and in the related EU funding.

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; 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 – EPA; European Network of Social Authorities – ENSA; European Public Health Alliance – EPHA; European Social Network – ESN; Mental Health Europe; Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM); Save the Children; SOS Children's Villages.

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Notes

(1) Social Summit for Fair Growth and Jobs <https://www.socialsummit17.se/>

(2) European Commission, Council, European Parliament "Proposal for an interinstitutional proclamation endorsing the European Pillar of Social Rights" : "The Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child", available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/draft-joint-proclamation-european-parliament-council-and-commission_en

(3) Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions (20 June 2017): A Sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/20-2030-agenda-sustainable-development/>

(4) European Commission (June 2017), "Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances", available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/reflection-paper-future-eu-finances_en

(5) European Commission Recommendation (20 February 2013) Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage (2013/112/EU) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112&from=EN>

(6) European Commission (26 April 2017), Commission recommendation on the European Pillar of Social Rights https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/commission-recommendation-establishing-european-pillar-social-rights_en