

EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO THRIVE

The role of the EU in promoting and encouraging investment in early childhood development

14 May 2019 • Bucharest

Agenda

13.00 – 13.30 REGISTRATION

Welcome and introductory remarks

13.30 – 13.45

- (TBC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania
- Sascha Marschang, European Public Health Alliance

13.45 – 14.15

ACCESS TO ECD SERVICES FOR THE MOST DISADVANTAGED

How accessible are universal ECD services to the most disadvantaged (including Roma, migrant and refugee parents and children, children with disabilities) and how can more targeted services be developed to adequately support children and families experiencing difficulties?

How can we increase investments in public support for ECD and develop comprehensive community services that support parents, children and carers in the best possible way?
How can policies and public investments tackle inequalities from the earliest age?

- Agata D'Addato, Eurochild
- (TBC), Ministry of Education, Romania
- (TBC), Ministry of Health, Romania
- (TBC), Health mediator, Romania

Moderated dialogue with the participants and Q&A: 14.15 - 15.00

15.00 – 15.30 COFFEE BREAK

15.30 – 16.00

THE ROLE OF THE EU IN ECD POLICIES & INVESTMENT

How can EU policies and funding promote and encourage investment in early childhood development?

What is the state of play at EU and national level? What are the challenges and opportunities?

How does investment in ECD contribute to positive societal and economic outcomes?

- Soraya Post, Member of the European Parliament
- Mihaela Ionescu, International Step by Step Association
- Nadir Redzepi, Roma Education Fund
- Szabolcs Schmidt, DG JUST, European Commission

Group discussions including feedback from rapporteurs: 16.00 - 17.00

Q&A / dialogue in plenary: 17.00-17.30

17.30 – 17.45

CLOSING REMARKS

- Romeo Franz, Member of the European Parliament
- Sascha Marschang, European Public Health Alliance

Background

A growing body of neuroscience points to the importance of early childhood experience in brain development, in particular in relation to self-regulation, empathy and the ability to build positive relationships. Children exposed to prolonged adversity in their first months and years, are less well equipped to cope with adversity later in life, potentially resulting in risk factors having a cumulative or ‘snowballing’ effect. Studies also show that many of the major public health concerns experienced in adult life (e.g. obesity, heart disease, and mental health problems) link to experiences during the first 1000 days. There is compelling scientific evidence that our experience in early childhood has a profound impact not only on outcomes for the individual, but also for society as a whole.

Across the EU, more than 25 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Growing inequality and falling social mobility are key challenges in Europe. It means that children born into a socially and economically deprived environment are likely to themselves be poor as adults. Breaking that cycle is possible in childhood with the right policies and public investments.

Despite important achievements in a number of connected policy fields, at the highest political level in the EU there is little or no recognition of the importance of promoting an integrated and multi-sectoral approach to early childhood development.

Public policy interventions can contribute to ensuring all children especially those who are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds grow up in a nurturing environment. Prevention, early intervention and family support policies will contribute to reducing inequalities at an early age. Effective policies will require integrated strategies and integrated working; as well as a reform of the child protection systems.

The event will be organized during the first Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. ECD being primarily a national competence, a number of initiatives are currently underway that can inspire a holistic European approach. Thus, the event will link European, national and local perspectives on ECD and build on the outcomes of previous conferences (e.g., the 2018 Eurochild event “Building a better Europe with children: All aboard!”, ISSA’s 2017 conference “Local Responses, Global Advances: Towards Competent Early Childhood Systems” and EPHA’s 2018 “Roma contribution to a healthy Europe”) with the objective of gathering valuable inputs from policymakers and civil society for inspiring coherent, well-funded EU policies responding to the need for scaling up ECD across Europe.

Participants will be asked to engage in an open dialogue about how relevant interventions, particularly in the critical period from pregnancy to age 3, can tackle inequalities by reducing the gap in outcomes, particularly for the most disadvantaged (e.g., Roma, migrant and refugee families, children with disabilities, in precarious family situations or at risk of being taken into care).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Increasing political awareness of what is meant by early childhood development and how ECD is integrated with other services and sectors;
- Greater understanding of how the future EU budget can be used to promote an integrated and multi-sectoral approach to ECD, which ensures sustainable impact on services and policies in EU member states;
- Deliver and test recommendations for policies and programmes that intervene in the first 1000 days to help break the cycle of disadvantage.
- Discuss current initiatives at national level and assess the “lessons learnt” for developing an EU-wide approach to ECD interventions.

We will make the link to other relevant ongoing policy development at EU level, in particular:

- The WHO – UNICEF Nurturing Care Framework;
- The development of a possible Child Guarantee, which will aim to increase the access of vulnerable children and families to childcare, housing, nutrition, education and education;
- Follow-up to the European Pillar of Social Rights – in particular implementation of Principle 11 which aims to protect children from poverty and increase access to childcare; and
- Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and adaptation of the global framework to an EU context, which may provide an overarching framework for the post-2020 EU strategy.