

More than words: European Union must step up action on social policies, starting by early childhood

Investing in early childhood development is unavoidable means to tackle health inequalities

Bucharest, 14 May 2019. European and national policymakers have been called on by the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) to make investing in children a political priority for Europe.

Policymakers, civil society organisations and health and education mediators from local communities echoed this call during the event “Every child deserves to thrive” hosted by EPHA in Bucharest. The event, under the patronage of the Romanian presidency of the Council of the European Union, discussed how a holistic, coherent and multisectoral approach to early childhood development (ECD) can be achieved in practice.

In light of the ongoing discussion about ECD in Europe and Romania almost 100 conference participants discussed how ECD funding policies should serve the goal of a holistic approach towards ECD, and learned about the challenges experienced by some of the most disadvantaged communities in Romania (including Roma).

The 0-3 age group is most neglected by policymakers, yet it’s immensely important to provide a good start in life to avoid negative health, social and economic consequences in the future, for children, families and society at large.

An integrated approach is needed to strengthen ECD – starting from health and education and encompassing social and employment policies, poverty reduction, housing and sanitation, creating child- and family friendly environments in the community, and workforce development.

“ECD is as much about access as it is about quality. Participation in quality ECD services makes the difference for the future of every child and that means that policies and investment in these types of ECD services should be a priority for each of us” said leading Romanian ECD expert Carmen Lică, Step by Step Centre for Education & Professional Development.

“The May 2019 Sibiu declaration signed by EU leaders stresses fairness and protecting the future of next generations. If the European Union wants to make a solid commitment to this vision for the future, early childhood development should be recognised as the unavoidable, all-important investment it is” stated speaker Agata D’Addato, Senior Policy Coordinator, Eurochild. “Such an investment would mean tackling inequalities in early life and supporting families and children in vulnerable situations through EU funds and policy making”, she added.

“Many of the SDGs are relevant in a child health context. The European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights provide tools for addressing and monitoring ECD progress in Europe. The upcoming EU elections provide an opportunity to stress the importance of ECD now – but only strong political commitment can ensure that ECD is scaled up at EU and national level” commented Sascha Marschang, Deputy Director, EPHA.

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ABOUT EPHA The **European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)** is a change agent – Europe’s leading NGO advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), and the Better Regulation Watchdog. <http://www.ephaproject.org/>

More information about EPHA’s *Every child deserves to thrive* at <https://ephaproject.org/every-child-deserves-to-thrive/>