**Call to national CSOs to express for their interest to participate in Europe-wide campaign on *Early Childhood Development***

***Deadline: 31st October 2019***

1. **What is this call about?**

Eurochild and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) are co-leading a European campaign aimed at raising the visibility of Early Childhood Development at EU and national levels. The partnership at EU also currently involves the Roma Education Fund and the European Public Health Alliance.

This call is targeted at civil society organisations active in the field of ECD at national level, who see the opportunity to harness the political will being expressed at an EU level towards improving their own government’s policies, their implementation, as well its funding and its performance in supporting Early Childhood Development interventions – particularly for those groups that currently are excluded or underserved such as Roma communities.

With a new EU Commission expressing strong political commitment to children in general, and a child guarantee in particular, this campaign will provide potential for additional leverage to secure EU funds nationally and strengthen national calls for improved domestic policies and practices.

The EU partners in this campaign have many national members. The intention is to strengthen these existing networks as well as build new alliances at a national level with member organisations. This call for expressions of interest seeks to identify those who wish to be involved, as well as those willing to assume a national coordination function, bridging the national and EU levels of the campaign. Coordination will involve the building of a broad coalition of civil society that represents a variety of excluded groups to implement the campaign at a national level.

1. **Campaign concept**

The seeds of inequality are sown in a child’s first months and years. Even at birth a child can be disadvantaged because his or her mother lacked access to health care or adequate nutrition. The next months of the child’s life are key to their development into adulthood. There are too many children in Europe who do not have equal chances to grow, develop and learn during these critical first months and years to later life. All families with young children need support and some families need all the support they can get, often support specific to their community and needs.

The purpose of the campaign is to influence **public policies and spending so that *all* families get the support they need to provide a healthy, safe and nurturing environment for their youngest children.**

European countries have the technical know-how and the financial means to offer the necessary welfare as well as health, education and social support to vulnerable families. If a country does not do so currently, it is because of weak political will, leadership and effective mobilisation of public resources at all levels: local, national and at the EU level.

We believe the EU can and should be an important driver of change. It can set the example by giving early childhood development the visibility it deserves in its political vision, whilst also applying pressure on Member States and Accession Countries through its policy governance processes and funding tools.

The EU institutional cycle 2019-2024 offers a unique window of opportunity. The von der Leyen Commission is to give children a far higher priority for their work than any of their predecessors. The mission given to Commission Vice President Šuica includes the explicit promise to “invest more in the future of our children”, and produce a “child guarantee, ensuring children have access to the services they need”, as well as promising to promote children’s rights. Meanwhile the SDGs are set to provide the overarching framework for the EU’s future vision for the next decade.

But for this political momentum at EU level to impact policies and public budgets nationally (where it matters most), it will need to capture the attention of governments in the Member States and Accession Countries. This requires civil society campaign advocacy from the bottom-up. That’s why the success of this campaign depends on the ownership, engagement and capacity of civil society working at local and national levels. It is the synchronised efforts of the campaign core team in Brussels and the national advocates that will determine our success.

The campaign is therefore designed around a “bottom up & top down two handed” approach:

On the one hand EU policy making can give national authorities greater incentives to take action as well as provide funding opportunities (“top down”). On the other hand, national civil society can press their authorities, both to take action and act as a voice for children in EU policy making (“bottom up”).

As a result, the campaign will require coordination at both the EU and national levels. The EU coordination will ensure the campaign is aligned across the EU, brings together the variety of representative constituencies and voices, and is evolving in ways that mutually support both EU and national progress. Meanwhile national coordination will ensure national input is provided into the EU campaign, harnessing it as a lever for national progress. It will also draw together the representative constituencies and voices at a national level.

The campaign will also harness the diversity of situations across Europe – with National campaigns organised in those countries both with the greatest political will and those with the weakest government engagement. In countries implementing comprehensive and progressive policies as well as those yet to do so. In EU member states and Accession States. Combining this diversity of national situations will provide the European campaign a strength and maximise the leverage power the EU dimension may provide national campaigners.

1. **Campaign partnership & funding**

The campaign at the EU level currently has four partners:

* Co-leaders: Eurochild and International Step by Step Association (ISSA)
* Partners: The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and The Roma Education Fund (REF)

The campaign partners at the EU level bring together complimentary expertise on public health, early childhood development and education, children’s rights, and quality early childhood service provision for children and families. They also have a combined experience in advocacy, campaigning, research, policy making, capacity building, network development and program implementation.

All campaign partners at the EU level have members or partners at national and local level active in the field of early childhood.

At the heart of the campaign’s approach is the recognition of the need to engage all excluded constituencies that will benefit most from policy interventions. As a result, the campaign is also reaching out to organisations of other constituencies, in particular families with children with disabilities, migrants and those living in extreme poverty.

For the initial establishment of the campaign funding has been provided by the Open Society Foundations. Other funders have expressed an interest in the campaign and transforming this interest into substantive support will depend on how, and how well, the campaign becomes established.

The initial funding for the campaign runs from the establishment phase in 2019 through to its launch in 2020 and first full year of operation up to March 2021. But this period is foreseen as the start of a campaign that would last a longer period – potentially through to the start of the next European Commission at the end of 2024.

**4. Expectations from the National Campaigns**

We aim to run the campaign in 12 to 16 countries from across the EU and accession countries. This should include countries where early childhood policies have already attracted political visibility and are a public spending priority as well as countries that are lagging behind. Selection of the countries and partners will depend on the extent to which the campaign can be expected to bring added-value to national advocacy efforts and/or the extent to which the country is willing to champion the issue at EU level.

Ideally each National Campaign will involve a range of organisations with different knowledge and expertise. One organisation will be expected to take on a coordination role, to be the main interlocutor with the EU coordination team and convenor of a national coalition. (In some circumstances it may be appropriate that this role is rotating between organisations).

We envisage that a variety of excluded communities would be represented by organisations involved in the campaign, including Roma, disabled, children in precarious situations, those living poverty, and migrant children.

Organisations expressing an interest to coordinate the campaign nationally should ideally be able to point to similar experiences they have in bringing together various constituencies within a coalition or campaign.

National campaign activities are expected to include (but not necessarily be limited to):-

* Engagement with relevant EU processes, for example the European Semester cycle, to highlight investment in early childhood policies & state-of-play
* Gathering evidence on the current situation regarding early childhood for vulnerable groups of children & families
* Development of national advocacy strategies, in particular highlighting how EU policy influence & funding can support progress nationally
* Participation in at least one 2 ½ -day meeting per year with the EU coordination team & peers from other countries
* Input to, and adaptation of, common campaign materials and policy documents.

Actual time input is difficult to estimate. Coordination of the campaign is likely to require between 60 to 100 working days per year. The amount and type of support provided to the National Coordinator will be dependent upon the country specific circumstances they operate within. In some locations there may be a synergy with existing grants and projects that the National Coordinator is able to at least in part direct towards the campaign coordination function.

EU partners are seeking additional funding to support the national campaigns. Those organisations interested in campaign coordination, but requiring additional finance and resources to do so, should make this clear in their expression of interest.

**Timeframe**

We are expecting the campaign to be officially launched in Spring 2020. We expect it to continue until 2024. However funding has currently only been secured until Spring 2021 and its renewal is subject to a positive evaluation of its establishment.

**4. Interested? How to apply**

We want to hear from organisations interested to contribute to a national campaign as partner, as well as organisations who would like to take on a coordination role. Please outline your motivation to be part of such a campaign, and what expertise and experience your organization would bring.

Letters of expression of interest should be received by 31st October 2019 and should include:

1. What motivates your organization to join the campaign and how your organisation shares the values of this campaign.
2. How your organisation’s values and mission are compatible with the campaign vision of the necessity for public policies to support all families to provide a nurturing environment for every young child’s well being.
3. What particular capacities and strengths your organisation has that can add to the campaign (specialist in advocacy or campaigning, expert in ECD, representative of an excluded group, experienced program implementer in various contexts, policy developer, etc.). Include how your organisation’s work and mission relates to early childhood development and aiding excluded communities.
4. Any activities or national campaigns you are engaged in that can be harnessed by this campaign. Which other organisations will you expect to join this national campaign and outline from which constituencies (Roma, people in poverty, migrants, people living with disabilities, children in care etc.) they come from.
5. What human resources your organisation currently has that would be available to contribute to the campaign &/or what additional support would be needed
6. If your organisation is interested in acting as the national coordinator, or if not, suggestions of others that could take on this role.
7. In case your organization does not have the experience and capacities indicated under all the points above to play the leading role, please mention: if you would be interested to be part of a national coalition carrying on the campaign, why your organization is well suited to be part of it, and what would type of expertise and experience your organization would bring in.