

Brussels, 16 June 2014

Press Release of the EU Alliance for Investing in Childrenⁱ ahead of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) 19-20 June 2014 and in view of their expected approval of the Country-Specific Recommendations, as a reaction to the 2014 National Reform Programmes

WILL EUROPE 2020 DELIVER FOR CHILDREN?

Europe is at a crossroads. The mid-term review of Europe 2020 offers an opportunity to re-focus hearts and minds on what matters most for Europe's political, social and economic future. Partners in the EU Alliance for Investing in Children believe that the rights and well-being of children and young people need to be at the heart of political choices. Europe's present and future depend on it. The EPSCO Council Meeting on 19-20 June should therefore address how to strengthen Europe 2020 so that it promotes policies and investment which allow *all* children including children with special needs to reach their full potential and fully integrate in society.

Growing up in poverty is known to severely curtail life chances. Across the European Union, every fourth child under 18 lives in, or is at risk of, poverty and social exclusion. In just one year, their number has increased by more than half a million – making it even more urgent to act now.ⁱⁱ These children are particularly vulnerable and have more difficulties to afford appropriate services. Whilst there is talk of economic recovery, the situation of vulnerable children and families is worsening in many countries as austerity measures begin to bite. Child poverty is not only about growing up in families that are income poor. It is also about not living with families that offer appropriate care and protection not living in adequate or safe housing, not having access to affordable and quality education and health care, not having appropriate support to your needs, and not having equal opportunities to thrive.

The integrated approach taken by Europe 2020 was the right one. But Europe is moving farther away, rather than closer to, its poverty reduction target.ⁱⁱⁱ The EU needs to ensure Member States take the target seriously. This year, seven countries received Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) calling explicitly for increased efforts to reduce child poverty.^{iv} More received CSRs on inclusive education and increasing early childhood education and care service provision. This is to be welcomed. However, the Alliance for Investing in Children is concerned by the overall lack of coherence of CSRs and the increasingly narrow focus on employability – particularly with respect to young people. A sustainable and inclusive exit from the crisis requires that economic and employment measures reinforce, rather than undermine, efforts towards poverty reduction and social inclusion.

The Recommendation *Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* can help guide policy choices. It takes a child rights approach, emphasising the best interests of the child, equal opportunities and support for the most disadvantaged. It promotes integrated strategies based on 3 pillars: access to resources, access to quality services, and child participation.

If Europe 2020 is to deliver concrete immediate and lasting positive outcomes for children and young people, we believe the EPSCO Council needs to:

- **Prioritise implementation of the European Commission Recommendation Investing in Children** by ensuring National Reform Programmes reflect its priorities. More needs to be done to systematically monitor the situation of children in Member States by using the indicators based on the Recommendation. More should also be done to compare outcomes for children across the EU as a result of Member States different policy choices.

➤ Strengthen **the governance and reporting mechanisms of Europe 2020** particularly by ensuring more transparent and direct involvement of stakeholders including children and young people. More stakeholder engagement will help to bring greater coherence between and within CSRs so that children's well-being becomes a core priority of the EU rather than an add-on. Hence, the Europe 2020 strategy should include a specific sub-target on the reduction of child poverty and inequality.

Europe 2020 is about the future we are building together. There is no better way to build a brighter future than to invest in children and to ensure every child is able to fulfil their potential.

-end

Further information on the **EU Alliance for Investing in Children**: <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/>

Contact: Eurochild, info@eurochild.org Avenue des Arts 1-2, 1210 Brussels, Belgium

ⁱ The EU Alliance for Investing in Children is a temporary initiative developed in the framework of 'Module 1: Facilitation of joint actions' supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS / EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation.

Members of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children include:

- Eurochild
- Alliance for Childhood
- ATD Quart Monde
- Caritas - Europa
- COFACE – Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union
- Dynamo International – Street Workers Network
- EAPN – European Anti-Poverty Network
- EASPD – European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities
- ELIANT Network
- ENSA – European Network of Social Authorities
- EPHA - European Public Health Alliance
- ESN – European Social Network
- Eurodiaconia
- EuroHealthNet
- European Child Safety Alliance
- FEANTSA – European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless
- Mental Health Europe
- PICUM – Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
- Save the Children EU Office
- SOS Children's Villages International
- UNICEF EU Office

This programme is implemented by the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in these fields. The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-28, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>

ⁱⁱ Statistical office of the European Union, EU-SILC 2013

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/database

ⁱⁱⁱ The Europe 2020 strategy is about delivering growth that is: smart, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation; sustainable, thanks to a decisive move towards a low-carbon economy; and inclusive, with a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction. The strategy is focused on five ambitious goals in the areas of employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction and climate/energy. One of its targets is to have at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU by 2020.

^{iv} The Country-Specific Recommendations were adopted by the European Commission on 2 June 2014, as a reaction to Member States' National Reform Programmes and Stability/Convergence Programmes. Of the 28 EU Member States the following countries received a specific recommendation on tackling child poverty: Bulgaria, Hungary, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Romania and United Kingdom. Recommendations were also issued to various countries regarding early childhood education

and care; inclusive education and early-school leaving; and de-institutionalisation. The 2014 CSRs can be found here: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm