

To:

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

António Costa, President of the European Council

Subject: Protect children, protect Europe - Fund the fight against child poverty

Dear Presidents,

As you shape the next Multiannual Financial Framework, we urge you to protect the social foundations of our Union and place the eradication of child poverty at its core.

Child poverty is a deep and persistent crisis in Europe, affecting millions of children in every EU Member State. Around 20 million children - one in four - grow up at risk of poverty or social exclusion. While the context may vary, no country is free from child poverty, and the outcome is always the same. Children's rights are not respected, protected, or fulfilled.

As networks and organisations working with and for children across the continent, we cannot help but ask: how is such a systemic failure allowed to persist in one of the world's most advanced and equitable regions? What does this mean for the children and families of today, and for the future of our Union? What is our collective ambition for the present and future generations, and for Europe's social model?

We raise these concerns because child poverty is not an isolated hardship. It is well documented that even short periods of deprivation in childhood can lead to long-term harm, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty and undermining social cohesion, economic stability, and democratic trust.

Despite overwhelming evidence on the detrimental impact of child poverty, and in the face of mounting pressures and shifting priorities, investments in children and social services risk being deprioritised. EU and national decision-makers are at risk of focusing on short-term recovery and productivity, often at the expense of the policies that guarantee children's well-being and Europe's long-term societal resilience.

As the Draghi report on EU competitiveness rightly emphasised, Europe's competitiveness must go hand in hand with equity and social inclusion. Investing in children is not only a moral imperative, but also a strategic necessity for the Union's competitiveness, security, and resilience.

If we fail to invest in children today, we put the entire European project at risk. The costs of inaction are not only foreseeable, they are also unaffordable. We must preserve and strengthen the EU's pioneering social model, our defining feature and advantage on the global stage. And that effort must start with protecting children.

We either act now, or we pay a far higher price later.

Therefore, we call on you to:

- **Reinforce the European Child Guarantee.** This historic framework is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. It ensures that children in the most vulnerable situations can access essential services, and it is already delivering tangible results across Europe, from expanded school meal programmes to inclusive and innovative pilot models and policy reforms. This transformative instrument must be strengthened and retain a sharp, targeted focus on reaching the children most at risk, those who would otherwise be left behind.
- **Integrate the Child Guarantee into a strengthened EU Social Agenda.** The forthcoming launch of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, along with the revision of the ESF+ Regulation and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, must place the fight against child poverty and the European Child Guarantee at the heart of Europe's social ambition. These frameworks should be prioritised, adequately financed, and designed to support comprehensive, rights-based, and intersectional policies that address housing, social protection, equality strategies, and a just green transition.
- **Back ambitions with robust funding in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.** The EU has the tools to end child poverty, but only if they are adequately resourced. Social investment must remain a central pillar of the EU's post-2027 agenda. As discussions around competitiveness, productivity, and security intensify, we urge you to protect the social dimension that underpins Europe's cohesion, its unique strategic advantage, and key source of its legitimacy.

This is not only about policy. It is about legacy. It is about securing children's rights, opportunities, and their rightful place in society.

Childhood poverty violates rights, restricts potential, and threatens democracy. If we are to build a truly just, competitive, and secure Europe, then the fight against child poverty must remain a top political priority, backed by clear goals and meaningful investment.

The responsibility now lies in your hands.

This letter has been endorsed by:

- Alliance for Childhood
- ATD Fourth World
- Children of Prisoners Europe
- COFACE Families Europe
- Don Bosco International
- EAPN
- EASPD
- ERGO Network
- Eurochild
- Eurodiaconia
- EuroHealthNet
- FEANTSA
- European Parents' Association
- IFM-SEI
- Inclusion Europe
- Learning for Well-being Foundation
- Make Mothers Matter
- Mental Health Europe
- Missing Children Europe
- PICUM
- QUEST
- Save the Children
- Social Platform
- SOS Children's Villages