

## Roadmap to a Council Recommendation for a Child Guarantee – Ensuring services can support children

October 2020

Following the reports on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Investing in Children, the [final report of the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee](#) and a broad stakeholder consultation on what were the priorities when developing a Child Guarantee, the Commission has launched a public consultation on a proposed Roadmap to a Council Recommendation for a Child Guarantee. EASPD, the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities, has worked on the implementation of both the [Council Recommendation on Investing in Children](#) through the European Alliance for Investing in Children, and on the [Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems](#) through its involvement in the European Commission’s Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care.

In this regard, EASPD fully supports the development of a comprehensive Council Recommendation for a Child Guarantee, that would ensure adequate support is given to Europe’s most vulnerable children. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that investing in children is not only crucial for the child’s development and to empower the child’s rights, but has also numerous short and long term positive impact on society and the economy, such as facilitating a healthy work-life balance, lowering the long-term costs of support care, and facilitate the long-term inclusion in society.

This initiative is the kind of legislation the European Union needs to foster an inclusive Europe of common values, and to show its added value for those most in need. It is therefore critical to ensure this Child Guarantee has the needed tools and framework to succeed.

The Council Recommendation on Investing in Children had highlighted three key aspects, namely family support, access to quality services, and the child participation. The Child Guarantee, should make sure that these three aspects are well represented. **A section should be dedicated to services for each target group, including children with disabilities.**

Services, both public and private, have a key role to play to support families, carers, children, etc. in taking an active part in society and fully benefitting from this Child Guarantee. While other elements, such as a minimum income for families, can help, it cannot be enough as it doesn’t alter the environment’s capacity to support and empower children. Families and children need quality, inclusive services to fully enjoy their rights. However, **children services across Europe face numerous challenges**, such as

- Recruitment of staff;

- Training of staff;
- Sustainable public funding, in particular in times of crisis such as during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Availability of sufficient services to support all children – in particular in rural areas

The Child Guarantee is the perfect tool to support the efforts of the European Union and Member States in improving the legal and financial frameworks for support services for vulnerable children.

In this regard, EASPD urges the European Commission to include in its legislative initiative the following elements:

### **1. Support access to services for families and children**

Better access to services for children should be a clear target of the Child Guarantee, through improved sustainable funding and legal frameworks. Member States should follow the partnership principle and structurally involve service providers and families in the design and implementation of their national implementation plans of the Child Guarantee.

### **2. Promote quality, family-centred models of services**

While one of the target group proposed for the Child Guarantee is children in institutions, the legislative initiative should make sure that other groups are not inadvertently pushed towards institutions. In this regard, the Council Recommendation should promote unambiguously the development and funding of high quality services following a family-centred, community-based model of support, such as the [Early Childhood Intervention model](#), and prohibit the further development of segregating institutions.

### **3. Promote better staff training and retention**

Support services for children suffer from staff shortages and/or lack of adequate training across Europe. The Child Guarantee should build upon the work and research already developed, such as through the Commission's Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, to promote staff training in line with the Council Recommendations and give the tools professionals need to develop inclusive support.

In particular, the Child Guarantee should promote support for the digitalisation of the sector.

### **4. Pay particular attention to transition periods**

Research has shown that moments of transition can be particularly difficult for vulnerable children, where they are at risk of leaving inclusive mainstream environments. The Child Guarantee should put a particular focus on providing ongoing support for children in their transition to school, and their transition from school to employment.

These transition periods also often represent a transition from one ministry to another, and measures should be implemented that the support provided is consistent and sustainable, regardless of the child's age and life choices.

### **5. Support the development of comprehensive, integrated legal frameworks**

The legal framework surrounding services for children is in many countries left in a limbo, leading to a lack of direction and funding in times of crisis such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the legislative and financial responsibility often divided among several ministries, such as the Health, Social Affairs and Education ministries, there is too often a lack of ownership and leadership in this field.

The Child Guarantee should support national reforms that develop comprehensive legal frameworks for children services and integrate the responsibilities within one ministry.

#### **6. Set up strong monitoring tools**

The success and failure of the Child Guarantee will rely heavily on how Member States will choose to implement its guidelines. In this regard, strong monitoring tools should be set up that recognise both economic and social inclusion as key indicators of success. Member States should have to report what actions they have taken for each target group.

#### **7. Link with the new Multiannual Financial Framework**

The European Union should be very pro-active in attaching the EU Recovery Plan – some €1.8 trillion of investment- into ensuring the Child Guarantee is implemented on the ground by helping national, regional and local authorities to invest in inclusive and quality care and support services for children. Whilst the programmes presented offer some opportunities, much of the decisions are to be made by national level. Specific guidance should be developed by the European Commission to ensure that national authorities make the most of the EU Recovery Plan towards the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

The Child Guarantee has the potential to deliver important changes for our most vulnerable children, and we must make sure that we can capitalise on this opportunity.

EASPD is ready to continue its work with the European institutions, its members, and its partners to ensure the success of this initiative.

#### **For more information, please contact:**

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