

Equal chances for every child: Tackling inequalities and ensuring access to education for Europe's children in need during and after the pandemic

Date & time: Thursday 27 May 2021, 14:30-17:00 (CET)

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is having far-reaching effects on Europe's economic and social fabric and, consequently, on children's well-being. The crisis is exacerbating existing inequalities, further impacting those children living in poverty or exclusion, and putting huge pressure on key services for children, including education, health and social welfare services.

In this webinar, Eurochild - Europe's largest network of nearly 200 children's rights organisations - will bring together key stakeholders, including children, **to call on education policymakers and school leaders to place greater emphasis on the social emotional well-being and inclusion of children in need in order to ensure their equal access to education during recovery and post-pandemic Europe.**

- We will examine how the pandemic has disproportionately negatively impacted the education of children in need.
- We know that prioritising socio-emotional well-being can positively impact on children's ability to learn at school, including children in need.¹ The webinar will showcase how the [Including Children Affected by Migration \(ICAM\) Programme](#) is working in this area to bridge the educational, digital and the social divides widened by the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that every child's right to an education, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), is realised.
- [Eurochild's Children's Council](#) will actively participate in the webinar and share their experiences and views on education.

How can the EU strengthen children's inclusion and socio-emotional well-being in education?

Even before the pandemic, nearly **one in four children lived in poverty or social exclusion** across the European Union (EU). Eurochild's (2020) [Growing up in Lockdown report](#) demonstrated that the pandemic is massively **impacting children's life chances and their physical and mental health across Europe**, through school closures, disruptions to learning, loss of social contact and a wide digital divide for children living in poverty.

The EU is prioritising children's rights and well-being like never before. These upcoming initiatives offer Member States vital opportunities to promote socio-emotional well-being and tackle inequalities and multidimensional poverty in education:

- The **European Child Guarantee** urges Member States to guarantee free access to quality, inclusive and safe education, including early childhood education and care, for every child. Education should be designed to meet present and future needs, and take full account of children's views and experiences of curricula, teaching methods and school environments.

¹ Cefai, C.; Bartolo, P. A.; Cavioni, V.; Downes, P. (2018); [Strengthening Social and Emotional Education as a core curricular area across the EU. A review of the international evidence](#), NESET II report, Publications Office of the European Union.

- One of the six pillars of the new **EU Child Rights Strategy** emphasises the need to promote inclusive and child-friendly societies, health and education systems, and that each child has the right to the highest attainable standard of quality education irrespective of their background.
- The **European Pillar of Social Rights and its recently launched Action Plan** encourages Member States to develop comprehensive policies to provide access to quality education for all and provide targeted support to disadvantaged learners.
- The new **‘Pathways to School Success’ initiative**, within the European Education Area, will also have a special focus on groups of children that are more at risk in schools.
- The **National Recovery and Resilience Plans**, within the EU’s recovery plan to address the economic and social damage of the COVID-19 pandemic, must tackle child poverty and social inclusion by supporting national and local actors to provide services based on universal and targeted care provisions in areas such as health care, education, early childhood education and care, and social services.

Children have spoken – “School lets you open up to the world and talk to people. School is life.”²

Children themselves have called on decision-makers to re-think education systems, and to include them in these decisions at the highest levels. Despite the tremendous impact that the crisis is having on children rights and well-being, **their voices continue to remain alarmingly underrepresented**, despite this being a fundamental right under the UNCRC.

According to the [“Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future”](#) consultation with more than 10,000 children aged 11-17, **one in five children report growing up unhappy and anxious for the future**. Children describe these alarming rates of mental ill-health as caused by anxiety about the future, bullying, challenges in coping with school and loneliness, much of it compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eurochild and RAND’s [Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life](#) has shown that children are most familiar with participation practices at schools. The study offers valuable lessons for decision makers on how to ensure that the voices and rights of children are at the heart of all decision-making that affects them.

Webinar format

Duration: Two webinar panel sessions over a 2.5 hour period. Participants will be welcome to attend one, or both sessions. Eurochild will provide technical support and coordination for this webinar, including managing an interactive Q&A function and sharing relevant resources with attendees.

Target audience

Attendees will be drawn from practitioners working in education and supporting children in need, policymakers at EU/international, national and local level, civil society, and children themselves.

² This quote is from a young asylum seeker from France, consulted in the survey [“Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future”](#) (2021).



Equal chances for every child, 27 May 14.30-17.00: Webinar Programme

14.30-14.40	<p>Session 1: Restoring access to education for children disproportionately affected by the pandemic</p> <p>The webinar room opens at 14.30. At 14.35, as host Eurochild (Chair) will open the conference with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome & introductions from the chair • Guidelines & <i>digital</i> housekeeping for the day
14.40-14.50	<p>Introduction to the challenges faced in education for children in vulnerable circumstances who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.</p> <p>– Ally Dunhill, Head of Advocacy, Eurochild</p>
14.50-15.10	<p>What is needed to restore access to learning and improve equality of opportunity for disadvantaged children returning to school after separation – Examples from practice, including the ICAM Programme.</p> <p>- Chris Gittins & Marius Frank, lead partners in the ICAM Programme</p> <p>- 2 Practitioners from Italy and Spain (names TBC)</p>
15.10-15.30	<p>How can school staff be supported to repair the damage to learning caused by separation from school as disadvantaged children return to the classroom after home schooling? Featuring presentations from:</p> <p>– Chris Gittins & Marius Frank lead partners in the ICAM Programme</p> <p>– Frederik Smets, Education Officer, UNHC</p> <p>– Pierre Cazenave, Terres des Hommes International Federation</p>
15.30-15.40	<p>Audience Q&A and concluding remarks for Session 1 from the chair</p>
15.40-16.00: VIRTUAL COFFEE BREAK	
16.00-16.10	<p>Session 2: 16:00-17:00 - How can the EU strengthen children’s inclusion and socio-emotional well-being in education?</p> <p>Welcome from the Chair and opening remarks:</p> <p>– H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Eurochild and President Emeritus of Malta (Chair)</p> <p>– Eurochild’s Children’s Council</p> <p>– MEP Laurence Farreng (Renew Europe), Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Children’s Rights and Renew Coordinator in the Culture and Education Committee at the European Parliament (TBC).</p>
16.10-16.50	<p>Panel discussion: How can Europe’s schools be supported to achieve the improved inclusion, social and emotional well-being and access to learning of disadvantaged children in the pandemic?</p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eurochild Children’s Council • Chris Gittins & Marius Frank, lead partners in the ICAM Programme • Brecht Demeulenaere, Director of the City of Ghent’s Education Centre and Eurocities Network member • Mr Michael Teutsch, Head of Unit for Schools and Multilingualism, European Commission Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
16.50-17.00	<p>Audience Q&A and concluding remarks for Session 2</p>