



## BRIEFING FOR MEMBERS

# RECOMMENDATION ON “INVESTING IN CHILDREN: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DISADVANTAGE”

March 2013

On the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013 the European Commission adopted a [Recommendation](#) on child poverty and well-being entitled “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage” which is an unprecedented step forward in terms of the Commission’s commitment to addressing child poverty in Europe. The Recommendation comes as part of the long-awaited SIP (Social Investment package) <sup>1</sup> and is accompanied by the main SIP [Communication](#) and [eight other Staff Working documents](#). The SIP aims to help Member States use their social budgets more efficiently and more effectively, by promoting best practices and providing guidance on social investment. This Recommendation is the only one in the package and together with the Communication holds the highest status, with the staff working documents being mainly informative and not adopted by the Council.

### What force does the Recommendation hold?

Whilst a Commission Recommendation to the Member States holds a certain level of status, it has no binding force. However the EPSCO Council, made up of national ministers for social affairs and employment will make conclusions on the SIP in June, in which they will make a commitment on the topics covered in the package. The main impact of the SIP will be seen in how it is mainstreamed through Europe 2020 and the European Semester, Cohesion policy and other EU funds, and hopefully in agenda setting at Member State level.

The Commission says it will ensure the implementation of the SIP by reviewing Member States' performance on the basis of the employment and poverty targets of the Europe2020 strategy and social protection reform. This would be based partly on a number of specific criteria that Member States have agreed should be included in a [Social Protection Performance Monitor](#). More specifically, the Recommendation states that child poverty and social exclusion should be firmly placed as a key issue in the Europe 2020 Strategy and National Reform Programmes, taking into account relevant Country Specific Recommendations adopted by the European Council. The Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC) should also provide a tool to improve the monitoring and evaluation of policies addressing child poverty and well-being including the use of the proposed *indicator-based monitoring framework* found in the annex of the Recommendation.

### Summary of the Recommendation

The Recommendation gives guidelines by which Member States should organise and implement policies to address child poverty and social exclusion, promoting children’s well-being, through multidimensional strategies. It aims to establish a common European Framework, to strengthen synergies across policy areas and to help Member States review and exchange on better practice and innovative approaches. In particular

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<sup>1</sup> Briefing





the Recommendation calls on Member States to develop integrated strategies based on three key pillars: access to adequate resources, access to affordable quality services and children's right to participate.

The paper begins by acknowledging that children are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than the overall population in a large majority of EU countries. It considers that early intervention and prevention are essential, recognising that the costs of public expenditure are greater addressing the consequences of child poverty than that of intervention at an early age. It also recognises that budget consolidation efforts in a number of countries present significant challenges to ensure that social policies remain adequate and effective in the short as well as long run.

In the *horizontal guiding principles*, the Commission recommends that Member States address child poverty from a child's rights approach referring in particular to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Treaty on the EU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. They also call for an appropriate balance between universal and targeted approaches, aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged and go on to stress the need to ensure a focus on children who face an increased risk due to multiple disadvantages. They also highlight the need to tackle child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies that go beyond ensuring material security and which promote equal opportunities.

Below, we have outlined positive aspects of the Recommendation and highlighted some aspects which are missing or are less positive. Although the document is not perfect, overall we are pleased to see that many of the Recommendations are in line with Eurodiaconia's policy paper on child poverty and social exclusion<sup>2</sup>.

#### Positive aspects of the Recommendation:

- ✓ The Recommendation stresses the need for a **long-term approach** to investment and refers to "long term planning and policy continuity" and the need for "sustained investment in children and families"
- ✓ It stresses the need to provide **adequate living standards though combinations of benefits** in particular through supporting family incomes through adequate, coherent and efficient benefits, including fiscal incentives, family and child benefits, housing benefits and minimum income schemes and through complementing cash income support schemes with in-kind benefits.
- ✓ **Affordable quality services** is one of the three main pillars in the Recommendation including access to high quality, inclusive early childhood education and care.
- ✓ It makes reference to the need for measures to be aligned to the **Active Inclusion** Recommendation
- ✓ The Commission calls on the Member States to focus on children with a migrant background and to deploy special cultural mediators and role models to facilitate the integration of **Roma and children with an immigrant background**.
- ✓ The Commission calls on member states to address **obstacles to accessing health** care faced by children and families in vulnerable situations (costs, cultural and linguistic barriers, lack of information etc).
- ✓ Member States are asked to devote special attention to **undocumented children or non-registered children**
- ✓ The Commission call on Member States to support the participation of all children in **play, recreation, sport and cultural activities** and goes expands on the need to provide opportunities for children to participate in informal learning activities.
- ✓ The Recommendation calls on member states to **strengthen synergies across sectors** and improve governance through comprehensive design and enhanced coordination between key actors. They go on to say the close **cooperation and regular dialogue** should be promoted between public authorities at all levels and **civil society** organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> [Eurodiaconia's policy paper on child poverty and social exclusion](#)



- ✓ Europe 2020 is to be used as the main implementation mechanism, monitoring indicators and through the NRPs and CSRs and Member States are invited to consider developing national sub-targets on child poverty

### What is missing/ concerning?

Under the section on *access to adequate resources* Member States are asked to use discretion when making “family benefits conditional on parenting behaviours or children’s school attendance”. Whilst this may be considered good practice in some parts of the world, concerns have been raised that such conditionality can also have a detrimental and negative impact on children.

The section on the implementation of the Recommendation is fairly weak: despite an indicator-based monitoring framework the Recommendation fails to set concrete goals and a timeline for implementation (although it does invite Member States to consider setting national targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion).

### How is Eurodiaconia working on this? What does it mean for you?

In 2012 Eurodiaconia was consulted on the Recommendation by the European Commission and the Social Protection Committee and is pleased to see that many of our suggestions and positions have been reflected in the document. And whilst we welcome the SIP in general, and in particular this Recommendation, it is imperative that European networks like Eurodiaconia follow up on and insist on efficient and effective monitoring of its implementation through engaging in the European Semester process. A detailed [proposal](#) on a roadmap for implementation has been made by an *Adhoc Group*<sup>3</sup> of which Eurodiaconia is a member.

Given the non-binding nature of the Recommendation, it is essential that members of Eurodiaconia who are working to fight child poverty and promote children’s well being partake in monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation at national and local level. Since the process of monitoring should be done through the European Semester, the best way to contribute would be through the official process of your National Reform Programme (NRP) and National Social Reports (NSRs) on which governments should consult all stakeholders including NGOs. The consequent country specific recommendations (CSRs) issued by the European Commission and the Council can also help to identify the issues raised by the European Union to each government. Thus by following the process, you can assess and help report on whether action specifically to fighting child poverty has been taken. For more on this, see our briefing on [“ENGAGING IN EUROPE 2020 AND THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER”](#).

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<sup>3</sup> Proposal by Ad hoc group made up of Eurodiaconia, ATD Quart Monde, Caritas-Europa, Coface, EAPN, Eurochild, ESN and PICUM