

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

A webinar hosted by Eurochild and the ICAM Programme¹

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.² The webinar will showcase how the Including Children Affected by Migration Programme (ICAM) 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 *Growing up in Lockdown* report demonstrated that the pandemic is massively **impacting children's life chances and their physical and mental health**, through school closures, disruptions to learning, loss of social contact and a wide digital divide for children living in poverty.³

¹ The Including Children Affected by Migration (ICAM) Programme is raising awareness and building capacities of school leaders across Europe to improve children's socio-emotional well-being and the climate for inclusion in school and in the family. While originally focused on children affected by migration, the ICAM Programme provides a model for repairing the damage to the life chances of all children in need, whose education has been adversely affected by the pandemic. For more information, see [here](#).

² 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.

³ Eurochild's [Growing Up in Lockdown report](#) (2020) reflects on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on children, compiling information from 25 countries across Europe, and provides recommendations for improving public policies in the short and long-term

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.
- 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.”⁴

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.⁵

to support better outcomes for children and families. It was launched as part of Eurochild’s *Putting children at the heart of Europe’s recovery* webinar series in November 2020.

⁴ This quote is from a young asylum seeker from France, consulted in the survey *“Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future”*, a consultation that was coordinated by five child rights organisations – Eurochild, UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision and Child Fund Alliance – on request from the European Commission to prepare the new Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Child Guarantee. The results were launched on 23 February 2021.

⁵ The consultation issued recommendations around inclusive education for children with disabilities, addressing hidden costs to education, the need for quality education (including digital learning), issues of equity and safety for girls and boys, accessing extra-curricular activities, and ensuring good quality distance learning. For more information, see [here](#).

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.⁶

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.

⁶ To read the *Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life*, contracted by the European Commission, see [here](#).