

BECAUSE...

Putting children at the heart of societies.
Their future starts with our investment today.

A compilation of promising initiatives and practical ways to act for children today.



Foreword

Children are rights holders and an integral part of our society. Yet millions still face barriers to accessing their rights and reaching their full potential.

This year's World Children's Day is a reminder that prioritizing children is not only the right thing to do, it is one of the smartest choices we can make. Sustained, well-designed investment can deliver benefits that last for generations, creating more resilient, equitable, and prosperous communities.

At a time of constrained public budgets, investing in children is not a question of weighing out budget lines against another. Smart investment is inter-generational and economic at the same time. It addresses problems children face now, by looking at the root causes that enable future potential. But alongside adequate funding, advancing children's rights requires effective policies, enforced legislation, meaningful child participation, committed individuals, and "political will".

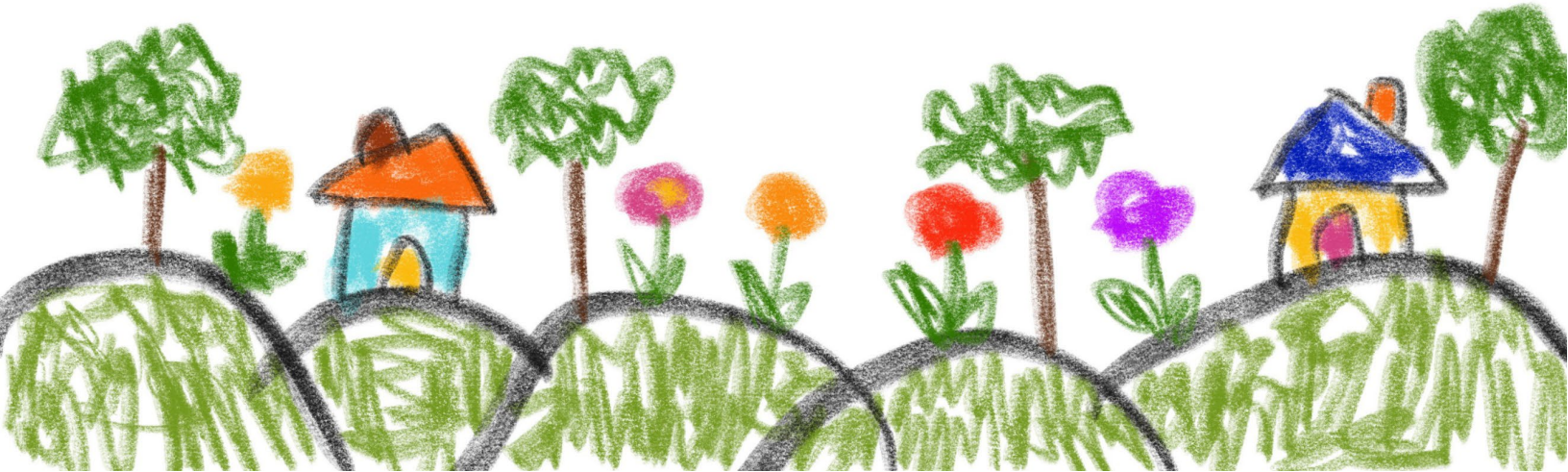
In this publication, organizations working on children's rights asked European policymakers what drives them to act for children[1]. In a world increasingly shaped by forces that can feel beyond our control, these initiatives show that we are not powerless: meaningful change for children can start with the actions we take within our own sphere of influence.

Halfway through the 2024-2029 EU mandate, we have also asked policymakers to look ahead: What remains to be done to make every child thrive, feel safe and enjoy their rights? Our Child Rights Manifesto developed by the Child Rights Action Group (CRAG[2]) at the beginning of this EU mandate can offer a useful compass for furthering children's rights - and the next European Union long-term budget (Multiannual Financial Framework) has the potential to make a change for all children.

- *Investing in children is both an obligation and a duty.*
- ***Because** children have rights.*
- ***Because** they are not only our future, but already our present.*

[1] Inclusion in this document does not constitute an endorsement of any individual, political affiliation, viewpoint, voting record, or public position. The examples are presented solely to highlight positive actions for children when and where they happened, and to encourage greater engagement for children from all of us. We also recognize that progress for children is a collective effort, and that the initiatives highlighted here are the result of teamwork, collaboration and the contributions of many committed individuals and organizations.

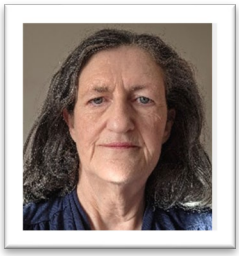
[2] The CRAG is an informal group of NGOs committed to working together to ensure that children's rights are protected, respected, and fulfilled in both the internal and external dimensions of EU policies and legislation.



1. Ensure meaningful, inclusive and safe participation of children and young people

The meaningful, inclusive and safe participation of children is important for democratic participation and should be ensured in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all initiatives concerning children.

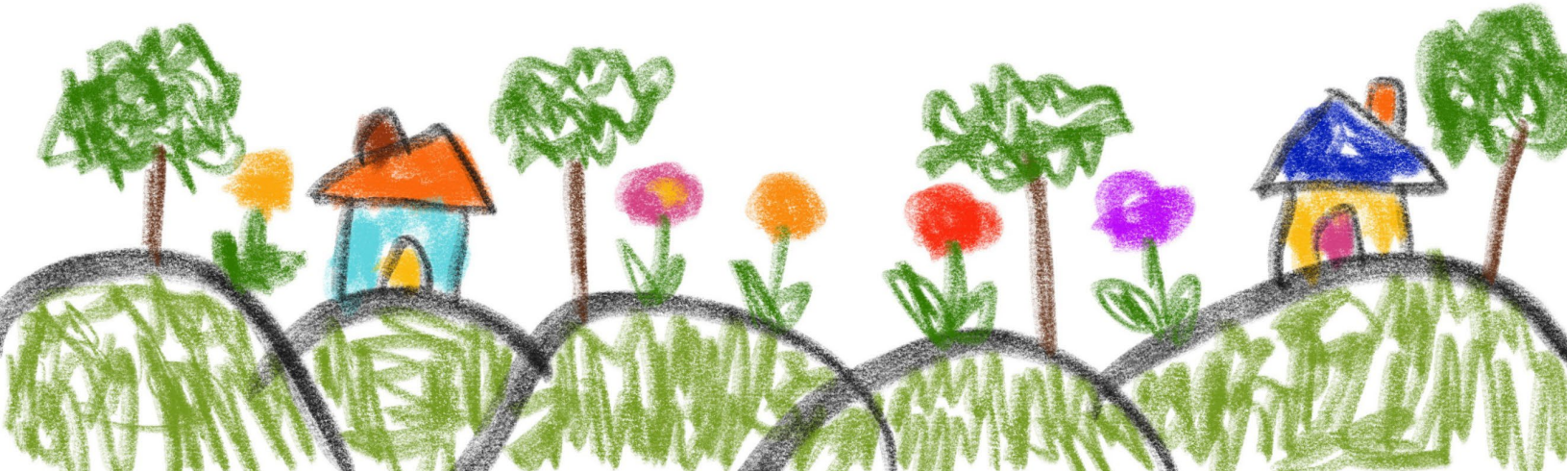
THE INITIATIVE: Policies for the present and the future – putting children and young people centre-stage in decision-making



Supported by: Bairbre Meaney, Principal Officer, Participation, Play and Recreation Unit; An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais agus Comhionannais/The Department of Children, Disability, and Equality; Government of Ireland

The EU Irish Presidency has been putting its commitment to the rights of children and young people high on the political agenda. Meaningful participation is a stated priority of the Irish Department of Children, Disability and Equality, with a commitment to ensuring that children and young people have a genuine voice in decisions and policies that affect their lives. Ireland started its EU presidency with a High-Level conference on child and youth participation, bringing together policymakers, practitioners, civil society, researchers, and children and young people to discuss how Europe can address the challenges that children and young people face today. This reflects Ireland's strong tradition of championing children's rights, participation and the protection of the most vulnerable. At a time of growing pressures on children, from conflict and poverty to rapid digital transformation, Ireland's approach to child participation offers a positive example, showcasing that a positive future can only be built by investing in, protecting and listening to children and young people.

Why does meaningful child participation lead to better, more effective and more responsive policymaking?



BECAUSE when treated as key stakeholders, children can provide insight that is not available from any other cohort of people. This is particularly valuable when policy that will impact their lives is being developed. Children have a unique perspective on the issues they and their contemporaries face and can provide fresh approaches to overcoming barriers. Underpinning the value of their contribution is their right, recognised and guaranteed under international agreements, to be included in decision making processes, when they will be impacted by the decisions taken.

What needs to be put in place to ensure children's views are heard, taken seriously and translated into policy decisions?

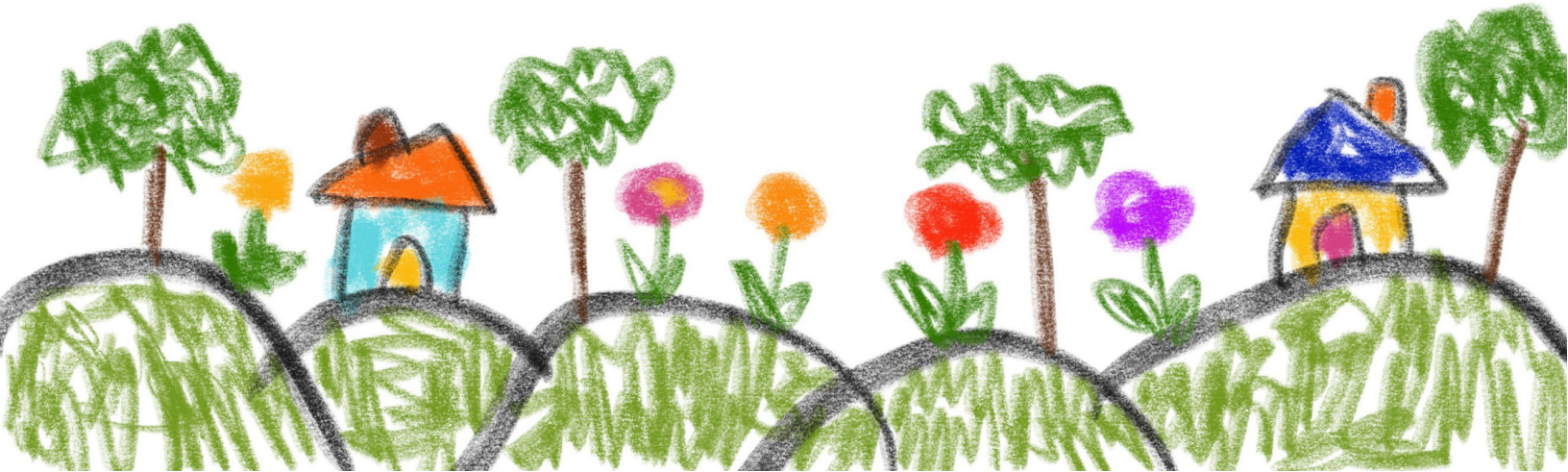
Well established and visible participation structures are needed, available and known to children as a space where they can get involved with decision making. These structures should be open to all children regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. The adults supporting children to engage with participation initiatives should be trained and experienced in ethical, meaningful participation. These structures should operate under a framework that supports this ethical, safe and meaningful participation, and brings a consistency to practice. Capacity building in the sector will further strengthen the implementation of children's right to be involved in decisions that impact their lives.

THE INITIATIVE: The EU child participation platform: giving children a voice in EU decision-making



Supported by: Marie-Cécile Rouillon, European Commission Coordinator for the Rights of the Child

The EU Children's Participation Platform is the Commission's initiative that promotes children's rights, including their right to participation and gives children a meaningful opportunity to express their views, and to contribute to decisions that affect their lives. It provides a safe space for children to engage with one another, exchange ideas and participate in discussions on key issues, as identified by children. By connecting children with EU institutions and decision makers, the Platform aims to ensure that children's perspectives are heard, considered in EU policymaking and that children receive feedback on how their input was used.



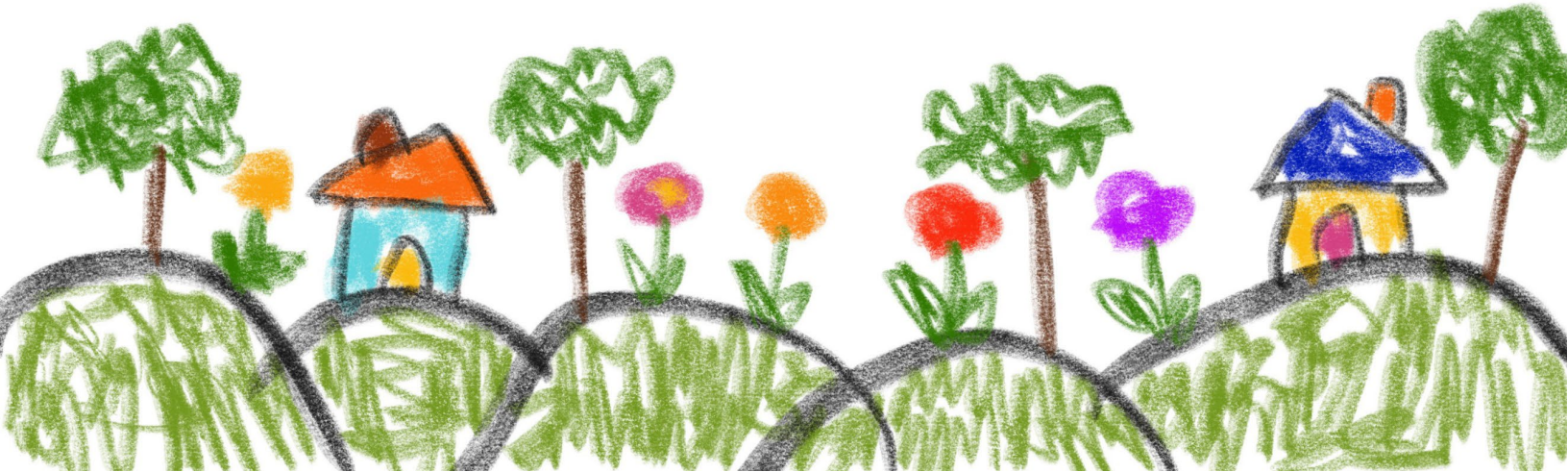
Why is it important for children to have a say in EU policymaking?

BECAUSE children have a right to be heard under Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundament Rights. Child participation is not only their right, but it also leads to better policies that respond to the needs of children and helps strengthen a more inclusive and democratic Europe.

How does the EU Child Participation Platform help turn children's voices into action?

BECAUSE children co-design the Platform and its activities: they propose its topics, review documents, and co-moderate meetings. Their views inform EU policies, from the European Child Guarantee to the Action Plan against Cyberbullying or proposed laws for fairer digital world for children. They get feedback on what happened with their input, have opportunities to interact with decision makers at the EU and national level and are supported in their advocacy efforts.





2. Invest in preventing, responding to and combating violence against children

Exposure to violence has wide-ranging effects on children, affecting cognitive, emotional and societal development, with lifelong consequences. Beyond the grave individual impact, failing to address violence against children also leads to higher costs in healthcare, education, justice, and social welfare services.[3]

Online violence is now a growing part of many children's lives, exposing them to avoidable harm and hindering their ability to freely access their rights to education and play.

THE INITIATIVE: Protecting children from serious harm online - the EU child sexual abuse material regulation



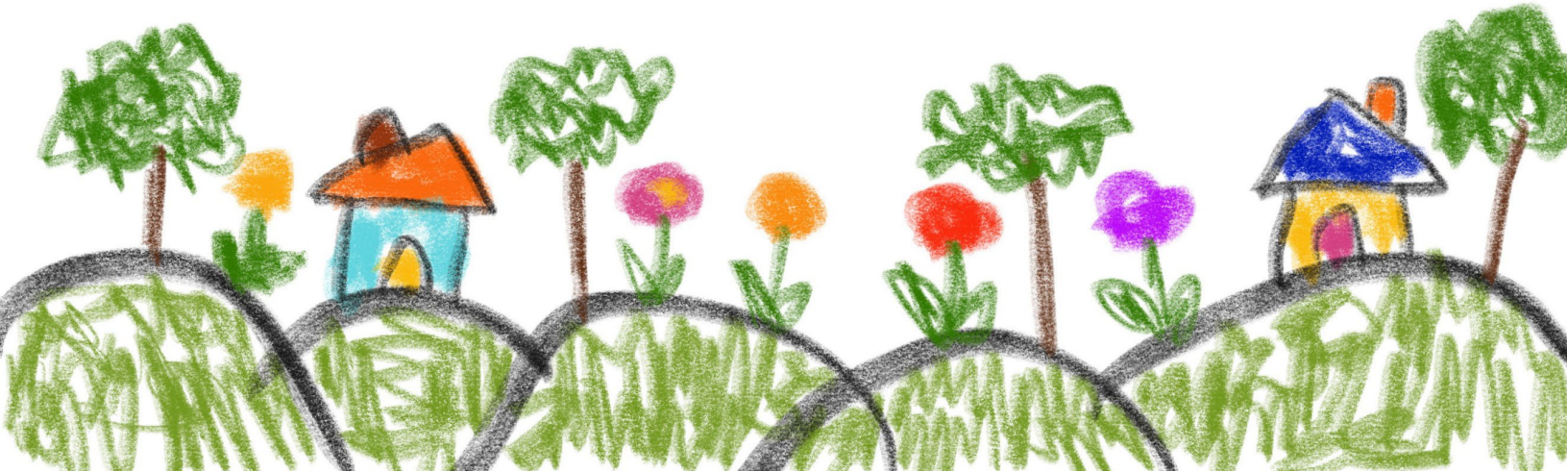
Supported by: Magnus Brunner, European Union Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration

The proposed Regulation has the potential to prevent serious harm and make a tangible difference in children's lives. The EU urgently needs an effective framework to prevent abuse and enable online service providers to detect, report and remove child sexual abuse material, while safeguarding fundamental rights.

Why do you believe this legislation is so important for children?

Every child has the right to a childhood free from violence, including child sexual abuse. If we fail to adopt meaningful rules to combat child sexual abuse in online spaces, the EU will have a lower standard of protection than the rest of the world. This is not acceptable.

[3] UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (2025) Building the investment case for ending violence against children: Toolkit, https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/en/media/348.



Looking ahead, what more needs to be done to turn this ambition into effective protection for children from sexual abuse online?

Child sexual abuse is a hidden crime, often uncovered only because perpetrators share photos and videos that online platforms can identify and report. Still, today we only see the tip of the iceberg. We urgently need to set up the EU Centre to provide analysis, identify new opportunities, and support online spaces in better protecting children.

THE INITIATIVE: Shaping a digital world that is safe for children and young people

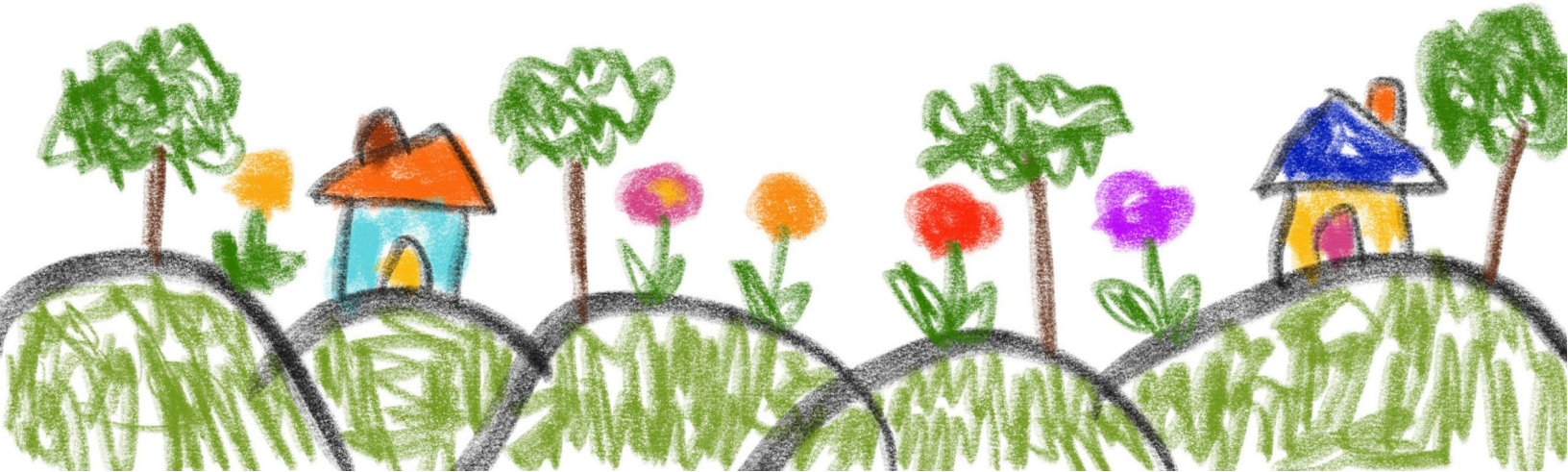


Supported by: Martin Harris-Hess, Head of the minor protection unit, European Commission - Directorate for Communications Networks, Content &. Technology (CONNECT)

The European Union is taking important steps to create a digital world in which children and young people can benefit from technology while being protected from its risks. Through the Digital Services Act, the proposed EU KIDS Act and the Better Internet for Kids (BIK+), the EU combines stronger rules for technology companies with awareness raising, digital literacy, fighting online hate, and the empowerment and participation of children. By setting ambitious rules for everyone, from companies to consumers, the EU efforts help raise standards beyond Europe, contributing to a safer, more responsible digital world for children everywhere.

Why is creating a safe digital environment essential for protecting children's rights, wellbeing, and development?

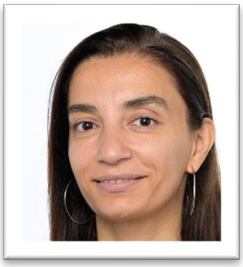
BECAUSE children need a safe digital world to grow, learn and thrive. Digital technologies should empower their curiosity, creativity and social connections – not put their wellbeing or development at risk. A safe digital environment gives every child the freedom to explore, discover and develop their full potential with confidence.



What needs to be done to make the digital world safer for children, while enabling the innovation and competitiveness that current and future generations will depend on?

We must make safety and innovation go hand in hand. This means putting children's rights and wellbeing at the heart of digital design, building in age-appropriate safeguards and promoting responsible innovation. Clear rules, shared responsibility and technological creativity can ensure that children are protected while allowing innovation and competitiveness to flourish.

THE INITIATIVE: Addressing firearms-related crime and its impact on children



Supported by: Evin Incir, Member of the European Parliament, Co-Chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights

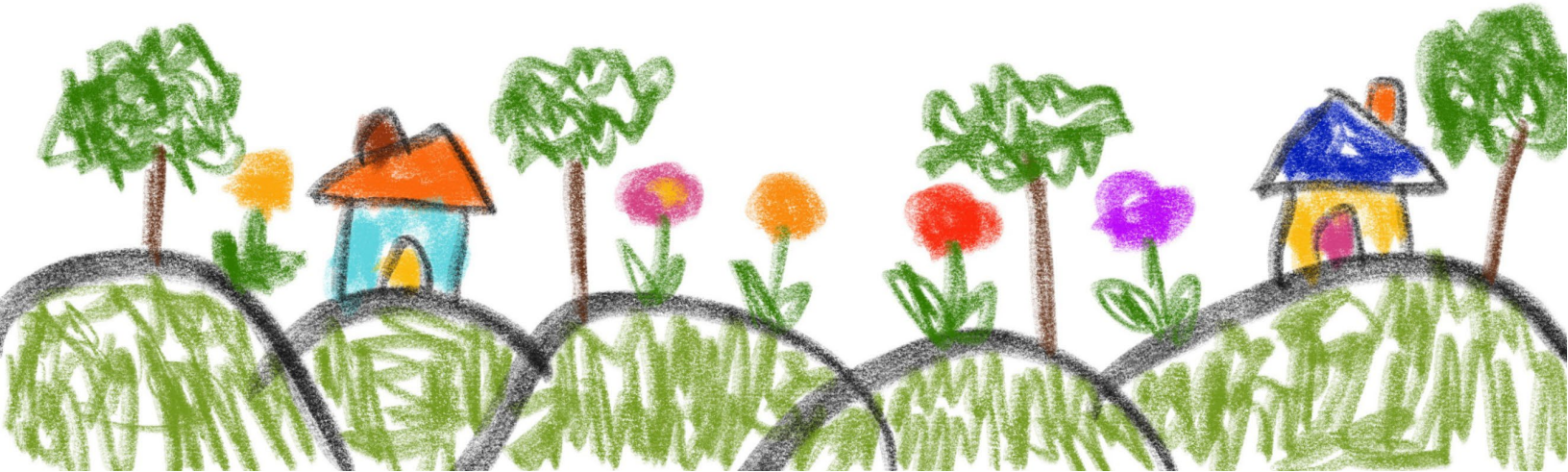
As Rapporteur on the proposed Directive on combating firearms trafficking and other firearms-related offences, MEP Evin Incir is contributing to the EU's legislative response to firearms-related crime. This work provides an opportunity to highlight the impact of gun violence on victims, including children who are directly affected, witness violence or lose loved ones, and the importance of prevention, protection and access to appropriate support.

Why is it important to recognise the impact of firearms-related violence on children, including those who witness violence or lose family members, and not only those directly injured?

BECAUSE every child deserves to grow up in safety, with dignity and a future free from fear. The devastating impact of gun violence extends far beyond those struck by bullets. Children who witness shootings, lose loved ones or are recruited and exploited by criminal networks to commit acts of gun violence carry deep scars that can last a lifetime.

Looking ahead, how can EU action against firearms-related crime better take into account the needs and rights of child victims, particularly regarding prevention, protection and access to support?

We must stop criminal networks from exploiting children and prevent gun violence before it happens. That is why I am working to ensure criminalizing the recruitment of minors and stronger prevention measures in the proposed EU directive on combating firearms trafficking and other firearms related



crimes. Children affected by gun violence must also receive the protection, psychological support and justice they deserve.

THE INITIATIVE: Standing Up for Every Child, Especially When Their Rights Are Under Pressure



Supported by: Marc Angel, Member of the European Parliament, Member of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights

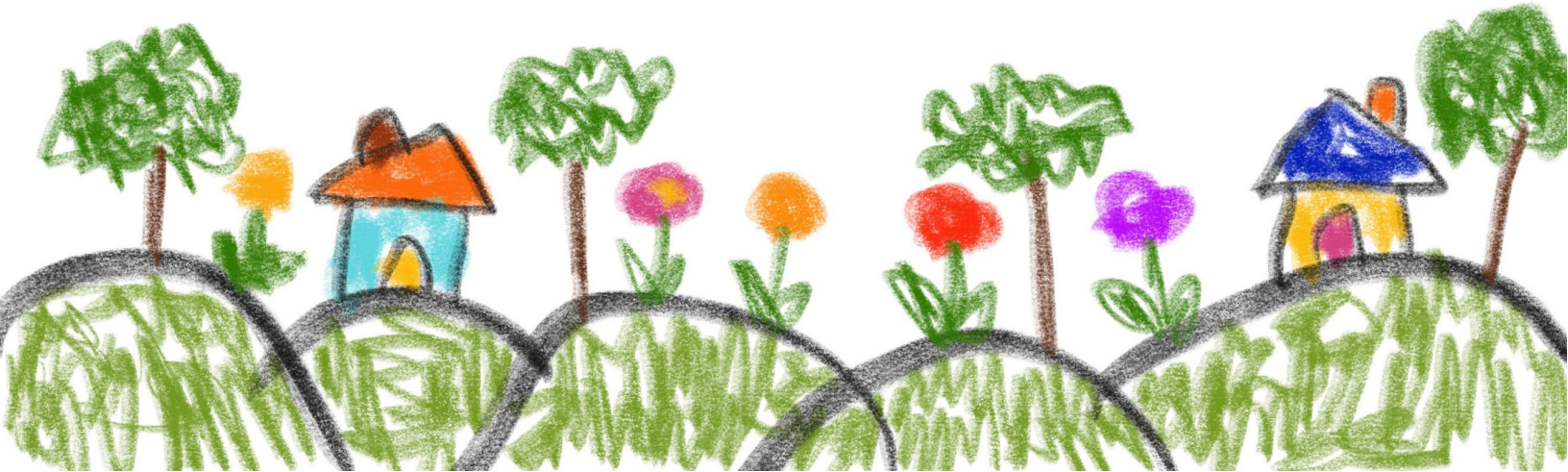
Standing up for the rights of diverse families and gender equality work and advocacy for rainbow families and their right to family life across the EU. This has direct implications for children growing up in rainbow families in the EU, and sends a strong signal for the diversity of children.

At a time when children's rights are increasingly under pressure, why is it more important than ever to stand up for every child, including those growing up in rainbow families?

BECAUSE children's rights cannot be selective. Every child deserves the same protection, recognition and opportunities, regardless of their family structure. When we stand up for children in rainbow families, we affirm that equality and non-discrimination are not privileges granted to some, but fundamental rights belonging to all.

How can we ensure that progress towards equality for children and their families is protected and advanced for generations to come?

We must embed children's rights, non-discrimination and recognition of all families into laws, policies and everyday practice. Lasting progress means ensuring that every generation of children, including those in rainbow families, grows up with equal rights, dignity and protection.



THE INITIATIVE: The 116 006 EU helpline for support to victims across Europe



Supported by: Saskia Bricmont, Member of the European Parliament

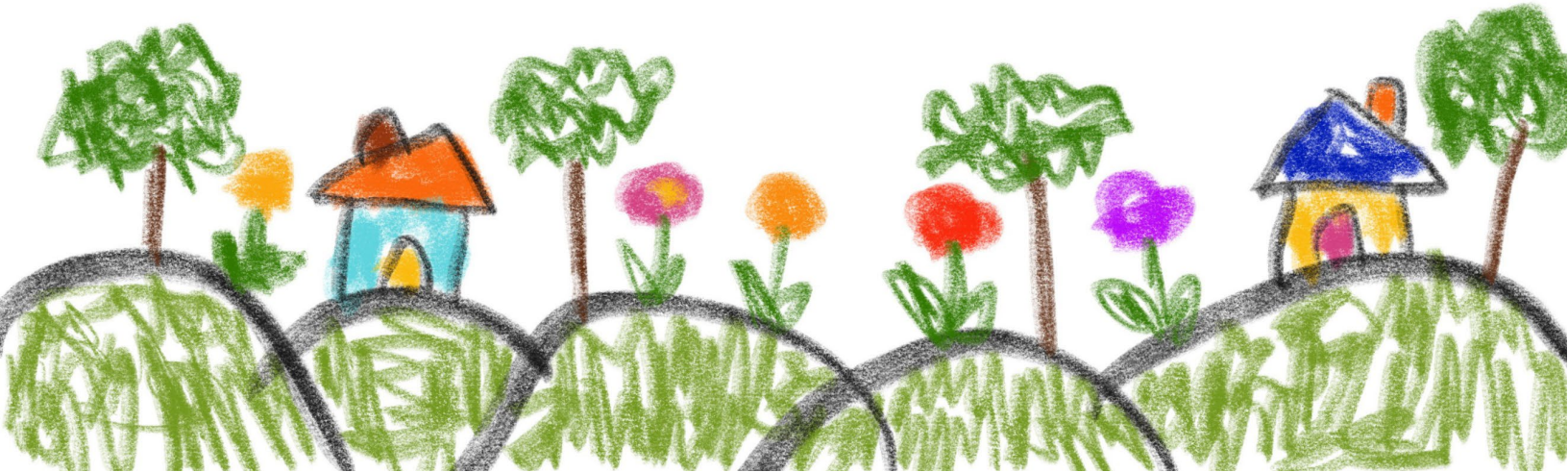
The 116 006 campaign advocates for accessible, free and high-quality victim support across the EU through a harmonised European helpline number. It aims to ensure that all victims, including children affected by crime and violence, can easily access information, emotional support and referrals to appropriate services, regardless of their location or circumstances.

Why do you believe it is essential to ensure that every child affected by crime or violence can easily access information, protection and appropriate support?

BECAUSE... Every child has the right to grow up safe, protected and free from violence. Children must never be left alone to navigate the consequences of crime. Accessible, child-sensitive support is essential to protect their dignity, help them recover and ensure that their rights are upheld, wherever they live, and whatever their nationality is. This was a key priority for me when working on the child sexual abuse and exploitation directive.

Looking ahead, what more can the EU do to ensure that child victims can effectively exercise their rights and access safe, child-sensitive support services across Member States?

The EU must ensure that children's rights are effectively enforced in every Member State, with adequate human and financial resources for specialised support services, child-friendly justice and trained professionals. It should strengthen common standards, improve cross-border cooperation and guarantee accessible information, including through the 116 006 helpline, so no child is left behind. It is essential to make sur that children in vulnerable situation, for example migration, disability or from disadvantage social background, can fully benefit, as every child, of these rights.



3. Ensuring the EU's humanitarian aid reaches the most vulnerable and better protects children who are experiencing conflict

Every child has a right to survive, thrive and shape the world around them. However, globally, inequalities are sharply increasing and children face a convergence of crises - rising conflicts, climate shocks, and funding shortfalls - that are destroying livelihoods, childhoods and futures.

THE INITIATIVE: Strengthening EU approach to protecting children living in conflict and systematically highlighting the plight of children in humanitarian crises

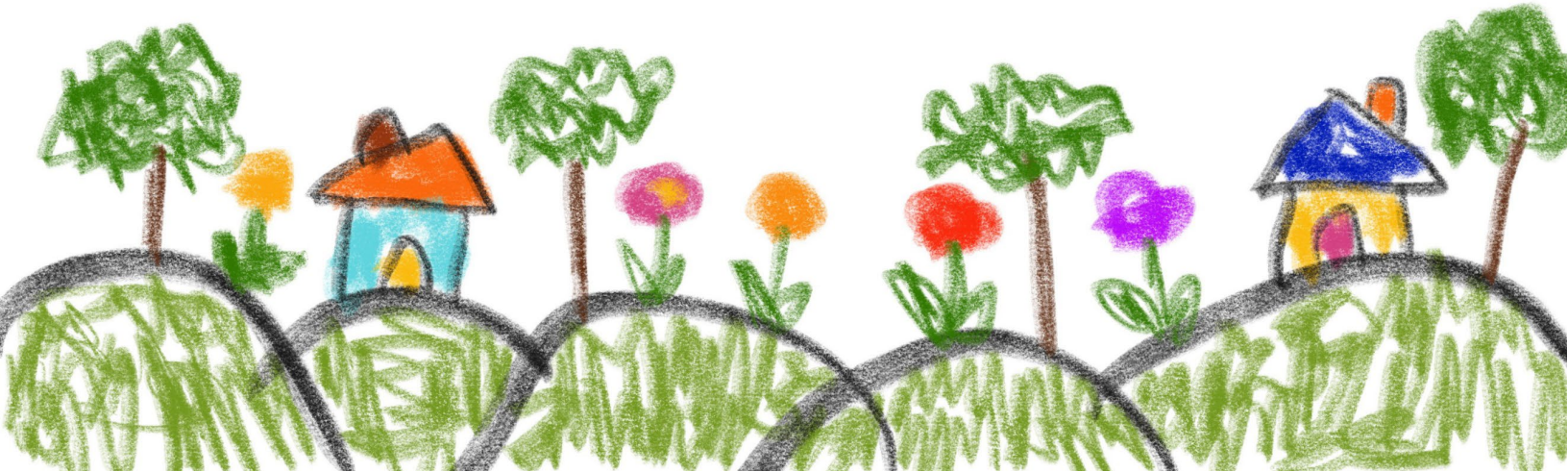


Supported by: Hadja Lahbib, European Union Commissioner for Equality; Preparedness and Crisis Management

The recent Humanitarian Communication reinforces commitments to ensure humanitarian resources reach the most vulnerable, while keeping the protection and specific needs of children at the heart of crisis response, including through Education in Emergencies. It also supports increased humanitarian investment and greater attention to children affected by conflict, displacement, and barriers to accessing lifesaving assistance.

Why is it so important to center children in humanitarian crisis responses?

BECAUSE children are among the most vulnerable in times of crisis, with needs and experiences fundamentally different from adults. The way we respond can shape their development, protect or undermine their rights, and define their future. And even when a crisis ends, its impact on a child can last a lifetime.



What is the most impactful measure to ensure that children are protected, even in the most severe humanitarian emergencies?

We must uphold International Humanitarian Law. It is the strongest shield we have to protect human life in times of crisis. Yet humanitarian aid is increasingly weaponised, with children among those who suffer most. Defending IHL is not a choice; it is a moral duty, a legal obligation and a strategic necessity.

THE INITIATIVE: Keeping the rights of children in armed conflict high on the agenda - for abducted children from Ukraine - and children globally

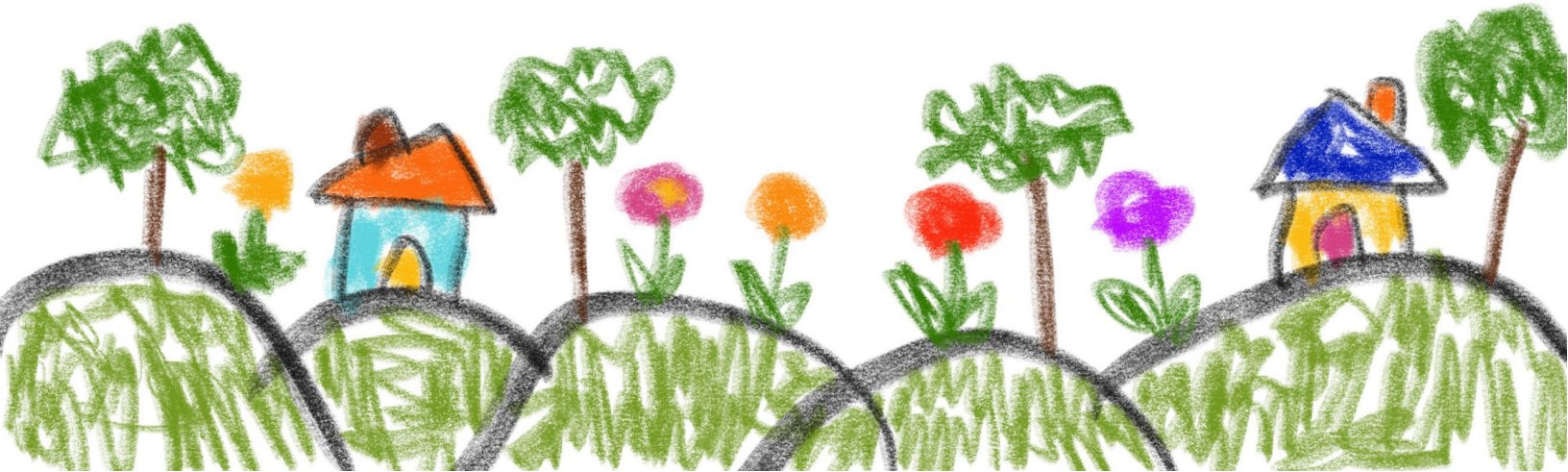


Supported by: Ewa Kopacz, Vice-President of the European Parliament, European Parliament's Coordinator on Children's Rights

The rights of children experiencing war require specific protection. Recent research indicates that in conflict-affected countries, children in residential institutions and orphanages face a mortality risk at least 2.02 times higher than children cared for in families in the same settings. Keeping the situation of abducted and forcibly deported Ukrainian children high on the European Parliament's agenda, including through cross-party action on the protection of children fleeing the war, the risks of illegal adoption, particularly for children in institutional care – were key initiatives when the European Parliament stood up for children's rights. They also highlighted the right for children's safe and unconditional return. These initiatives have helped maintain the protection of children affected by armed conflict not only as a parliamentary priority - but upholding global human rights standards.

Why is it important to keep the focus on children's rights in armed conflicts?

Children always pay the highest price for conflicts created by adults, and we cannot allow their voices to be silenced by bombs and guns or their stories to be forgotten. Armed conflicts do not erase or suspend children's rights. We must fight fearlessly to ensure that these rights are protected and speak out against war crimes committed against children.



How to ensure that those child rights violations are prevented, including children in institutional care, who are most at risk?

BECAUSE those children are already in an extremely vulnerable situation, they must be afforded even greater protection in times of crisis. It is indeed one of the cruellest crimes to exploit this vulnerability and disguise forcible deportations as rescue efforts. Given that legal mechanisms are already in place, it is the responsibility of the entire international community to ensure that all perpetrators involved in this process are brought to justice and to send a clear message that violations of children's rights will not go unpunished.

THE INITIATIVE: Making sure the EU's external funding upholds children's rights, strengthens child protection and care systems, and supports the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care

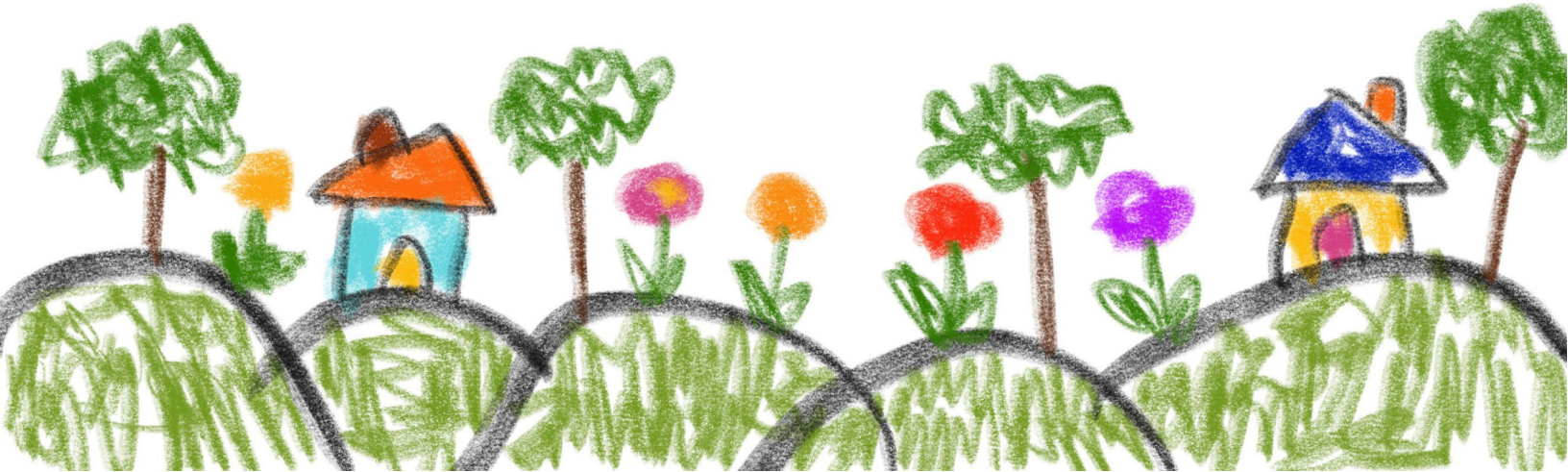


Supported by: Dan Barna, Member of the European Parliament, Member of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights

As shadow rapporteur on the Global Europe Instrument 2028-2034, Dan Barna, secured a significant commitment to children's rights in Parliament's position, including support for stronger child protection and care systems and the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care. Adopted by the joint Foreign Affairs and Development committees, the text recognizes children and young people as agents of change and anchors EU external funding in key international and EU child rights frameworks, helping ensure that children in partner and candidate countries can grow up in safe and loving families.

Why did you put forward this recital?

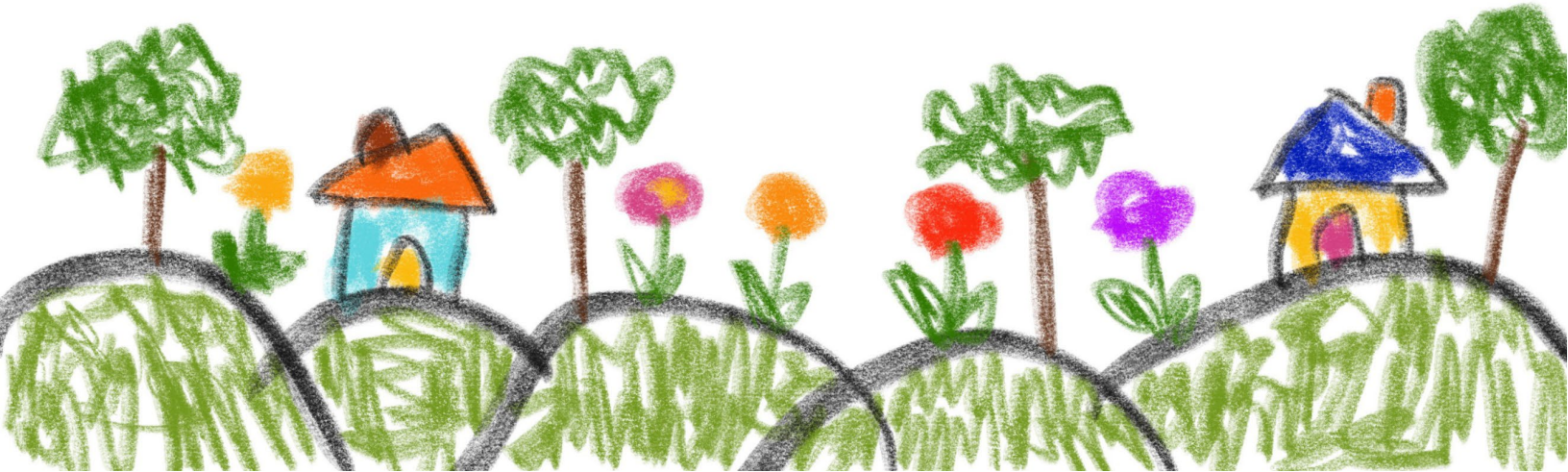
BECAUSE it brought me back to the days when I was working with Save the Children Romania and it immediately conjured feelings about Romania's past problems with children's care reform. The fact that all parliamentary groups regardless of their politics supported the introduction shows that this institution has the best interest of children close to its collective heart.



How can we ensure that EU external funding upholds children's rights and supports the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care?

Through continuously upheld political and public pressure on the EU Commission and on partner countries. The role of civil society must never be downplayed or discarded. Close cooperation between us and close scrutiny from your part is the key to achieving great things together.





4. Investing in social objectives and eradicating child and family poverty

Child poverty and socio-economic disadvantage of children have a high cost for societies, amounting on average to 3.4% of annual gross domestic product (GDP) in the OECD countries.[4] Social investment should be recognised as essential infrastructure for Europe's future. It is not only a matter of justice, but also a fiscal and strategic necessity.

THE INITIATIVE: Bringing the European Child Guarantee to life: ensuring every child have access to key services and equal opportunities

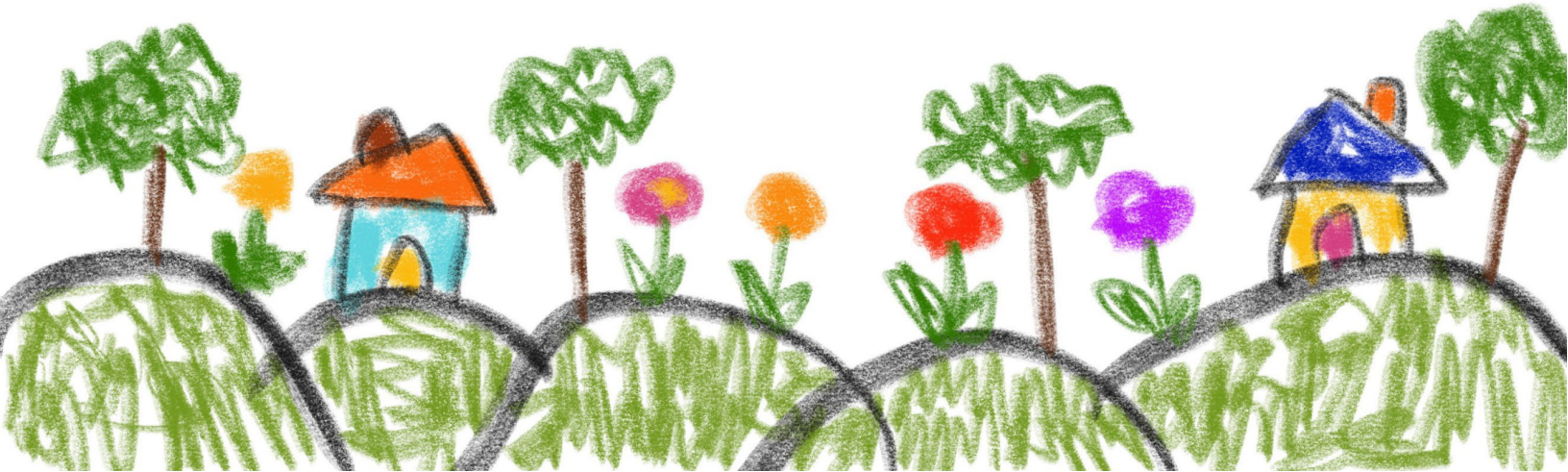
Supported by: Jiri Svarc, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), European Commission

The European Child Guarantee aims to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion by ensuring effective access to a set of key services such as free early childhood education and care, free education and school-based activities, free healthcare, and healthy nutrition and adequate housing. The European Commission plays an important role in supporting its implementation of the European Child Guarantee by providing guidance to Member States, making EU funding available, monitoring progress and facilitating the exchange of good practice between countries.

Why do you believe it is important to bring the European Child Guarantee to life for children in need?

It is important **BECAUSE** every child in the EU deserves a fair start in life, regardless of their family's circumstances or where they are born and grow up. Poverty and social exclusion during childhood can have profound and lasting consequences, affecting not only children's health, education and well-being today, but also their opportunities and prospects throughout their lives. The European Child Guarantee is an important instrument to turn our commitment to children's rights into concrete actions. It aims to ensure that children in need have effective access to key services, including early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

[4] OECD, What are the economic costs of childhood socio-economic disadvantage?



Ultimately, investing in children is investing in Europe's future. It is both a matter of social justice and a prerequisite for building a more inclusive, cohesive and resilient Europe.

Looking ahead, what are the next steps the European Commission envisages, together with Member States, to ensure the Child Guarantee delivers real results for children and their families?

In May this year, the European Commission presented its Communication Breaking the cycle of child poverty - strengthening the European Child Guarantee. It sets out a number of priorities to make the Guarantee more effective and ensure that it delivers tangible results for children and their families. I would highlight three key areas:

First, strengthening support for families, because tackling child poverty requires addressing not only children's needs, but also the wider circumstances in which they grow up. This means supporting parents through quality employment opportunities, adequate social protection and accessible family services.

Second, improving access to key services, by reaching the most vulnerable children, removing barriers to access and ensuring that services are inclusive, affordable and of good quality.

Third, reinforcing ownership and investment, through stronger national action plans, better coordination, clear objectives and adequate funding, including through EU instruments.

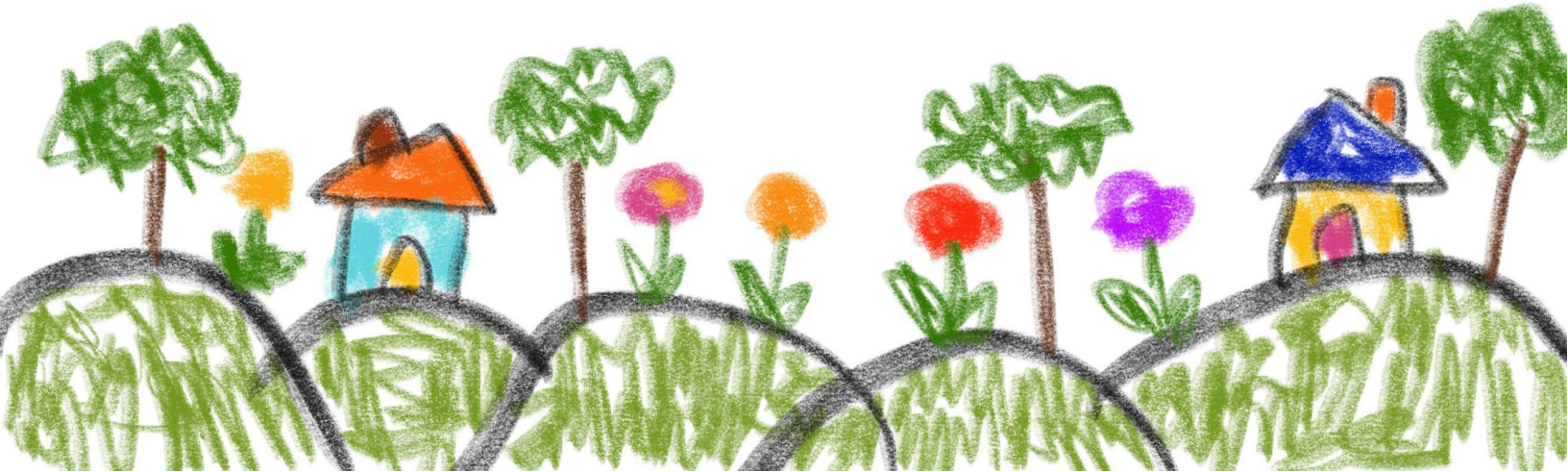
The Commission already started delivering a number of initiatives, including a new toolkit for child and adolescent health and mental wellbeing promotion and will continue to support Member States through guidance, funding, monitoring and the exchange of good practices.

THE INITIATIVE: Campaign "Make one exception" to fund the European Child Guarantee under the next EU budget



Supported by: Hristo Petrov, Member of the European Parliament

Child poverty affects children’s health, education and opportunities, with consequences that can last a lifetime and across generations. The European Child Guarantee helps break this cycle by improving access to essential services, but further investment is needed to reach every child in need. Through the campaign “Make one exception: Fund the Child Guarantee,” MEP Petrov is calling for at least



EUR 20 billion in dedicated funding in the next EU long-term budget, putting children at the heart of Europe's future.

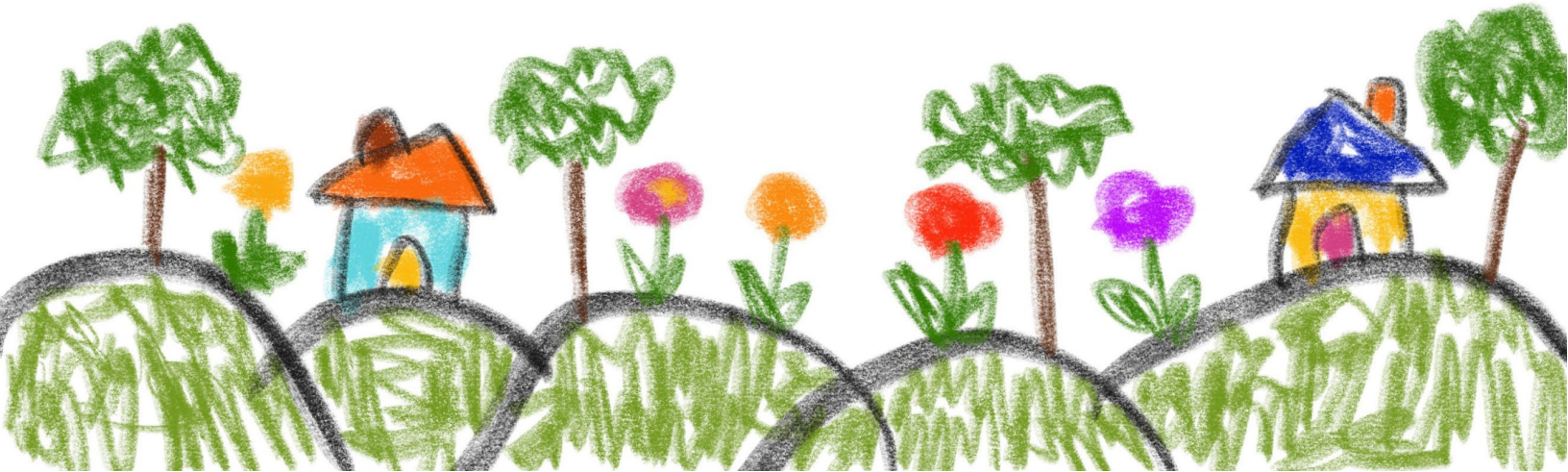
Why is it important to invest in children and to have a dedicated budget for the Child Guarantee in the next Multiannual Financial Framework?

BECAUSE this is the smartest investment, both morally and economically justified: instead of paying many times more in a few years for prisons, social benefits, and healthcare costs, we should invest now in human potential that Europe can fully harness.

Why should children grow up in families and not institutions?

BECAUSE nothing can replace a family. Even if we turned these institutions into palaces, even if we provided the children with the best social workers, they could never substitute their parents.

































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