

Brussels, 16 June 2015

Press Release of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children¹ ahead of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) 18-19 June 2015 and in view of their expected approval of the Country-Specific Recommendations, as a reaction to the 2015 National Reform Programmes

**Country-Specific Recommendations fail children.
Urgent call to Action**

On 13 May, the European Commission published its proposals for Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs). The partners in the EU Alliance for Investing in Children are deeply concerned that the Commission's fewer, but targeted, priorities **fail to address the needs of children in the EU**, in particular over 26 million children¹ who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

A lack of investment in children, especially the most disadvantaged and those who are left behind by the crisis, is putting at risk not only the rights of children today but also their future, and the future of their communities and the EU as a whole.

The 2015 CSRs comprise a **return to the old 'jobs and growth' paradigm** and put the EU even further off-track to deliver an inclusive, sustainable and equal Europe. The number of CSRs addressing **child poverty** decreased dramatically from six and seven in 2013 and 2014 to only one (Ireland) in 2015. There are no CSRs this year on the **transition from institutional to community-based care**, although significant progress is still to be done across Europe. We welcome the references to education for **disadvantaged groups**, including Roma, and as well the development of skills. However, we are concerned that in many cases the recommendations take a narrow approach by only focusing on employability and do not acknowledge the critical importance of education in developing non-cognitive "life" skills. We are also concerned that these proposals only take a reactive and not a preventative approach. Tackling disadvantage in early years, for instance through **early childhood education and care**, is often the most effective way to ensure employability and full inclusion in society at later stages in life.

The CSRs' narrow focus on jobs and the labour market does not tackle the staggering rate of child poverty and social exclusion in the EU. Evidence shows that **investing in integrated strategies**, which promote access to adequate resources and affordable quality services for all children and ensure children's consultation and participation, are the most effective way to enable children and young people to reach their full potential. The European Commission Recommendation "*Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*"² provides useful policy guidance to put these principles into practice. The EU Alliance for Investing in Children and its partners are willing to contribute to the implementation of this Recommendation by providing the expertise of their members at national level, both in the annual country review processes and the implementation of the CSRs.

Therefore, the EU Alliance for Investing in Children requests Ministers to:

- **Ensure that Member States commit to achieve their goals to tackle (child) poverty and social exclusion.** Member States are obliged to meet their targets and commitments under Europe 2020, even if these are not explicitly mentioned in the CSRs.

¹ Source : EUROSTAT, SILC, available at ILC_peps01 (Accessed 12 June 2015)

² European Commission Recommendation of 20 February 2013 Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage (2013/112/EU) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:059:0005:0016:EN:PDF>

- **Give priority and urgency to the implementation of the Investing in Children Recommendation** by ensuring National Reform Programmes reflect its priorities. There should be a systematic monitoring process of the situation of children in Member States by using and further developing the indicators based on the Recommendation. It would be advisable to compare the outcomes for children across the EU as a result of Member States' policy choices. We call on Member States to collect data on child-specific deprivation in the annual EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions and to approve an official child deprivation indicator. We also call for the inclusion of the indicator of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the scoreboard of social and employment indicators; and request that the scoreboard becomes binding in order to deepen the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union.
- **Strengthen the governance and reporting mechanism of Europe 2020** by ensuring more transparent and direct involvement of stakeholders including children, young people and those working with or for them. More meaningful stakeholder engagement will bring greater coherence between and within CSRs so that children's well-being becomes a core priority of the EU, which would be enhanced by including a specific sub-target on the reduction of child poverty and inequality in the Europe 2020 strategy.

Europe needs investments in jobs and growth, but also in children, families and communities. There is no more effective and sustainable way of overcoming economic and social inequalities in the long-term.

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Further information on the **EU Alliance for Investing in Children**: <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/>

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ⁱ The EU Alliance for Investing in Children brings together over 20 European networks sharing a commitment to end child poverty and to promote child well-being across Europe. At a time when over a quarter of children in the EU face poverty and social exclusion, the added-value of this Alliance is to remind of the importance of the full implementation of the European Commission Recommendation "**Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage**". The Alliance partners believe the EU policy framework and funding opportunities can catalyse political commitment and policy reform within Member States, thereby improving the quality of life of children and young people in Europe.

Partners of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children include:

- Alliance for Childhood
- ATD Quart Monde
- Caritas - Europa
- COFACE – Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union
- Don Bosco International
- Dynamo International – Street Workers Network
- EAPN – European Anti-Poverty Network
- EASPD – European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities
- ECSA - European Child Safety Alliance
- ELIANT Network
- ENSA – European Network of Social Authorities
- EPA - The European Parents Association
- EPHA - European Public Health Alliance
- ESN – European Social Network
- Eurochild
- Eurodiaconia
- EuroHealthNet
- FEANTSA – European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless
- ISSA - The International Step by Step Association
- Mental Health Europe
- PICUM – Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
- Save the Children EU Office
- SOS Children's Villages International
- UNICEF EU Office