



Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-24)

EuroHealthNet's contribution to the European Commission's consultation (a roadmap)

August 2020

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the political, economic, social and cultural rights that every child is entitled to, including the “*right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health*” (Art. 24); the “*right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development*” (Art. 27). Ensuring them is not only in line with our European values, it is essential for strong societal foundations. There is a myriad of data on how the 'First 1,000 days' are a critical period for health and cognitive progress, while problems in early life are compounded across the life-course. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child is therefore integral to all of the EU's political priorities of guidelines, and in line with efforts to meet the UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

EU-funded research projects coordinated by EuroHealthNet ([GRADIENT, 2010-2013](#) & [DRIVERS, 2011-2014](#)) highlighted that **for every step down the socio-economic ladder (social gradient), children and young people all across Europe experience a higher level of physical and mental health problems that will affect their future health and life opportunities.** This reflects how not all children and adolescents have equal access to the opportunities to lead healthy, happy and prosperous lives. Such avoidable inequities are likely to grow in the context of the COVID-19 crisis; a more **substantial and ambitious focus and investments in children and their living conditions is urgently needed.** Our research projects showed that improving in particular mothers' educational levels and employment status, as well as targeted programmes offering intensive support to develop parenting skills have led to the best outcomes for children. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), its implementation Action Plan, and this Child Right's Strategy are therefore key vehicles to ensuring the rights of the child to health, freedom from poverty and inequality.

Specifically, but not exhaustively, we urge the EU's Strategy on the Rights of the Child to address the following issues:

- A focus on **reducing child poverty** (25% of the EU's children) and health inequalities, by investing in family support policies, early interventions, and prevention and health-promoting services. Such approach should be guided by the EPSR, the Council Recommendation on Investing in Children (2013), on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (2019), the EC proposal for Child Guarantee (2019), and the Council Conclusions on the Economy of Well-being (2019).
- **Ensuring environments that encourage and easily enable children and adolescents to adopt healthy lifestyles and behaviours**, by putting a firm focus on the implementation of Art. 168 of TFEU on 'health in all policies'. Physical activity levels in children and adolescents are persistently declining, while consumption of highly processed foods and sugary drinks is high, contributing to growing levels of overweight and obesity in the EU. In addition, increasing numbers of adolescents are reporting issues that affect their mental health (sleep difficulties, stress and anxiety). Such issues are linked to societal trends and pressures, incl. digital and technological, and can only be addressed through comprehensive, integrated approaches, supported by regulatory action, to create environments that support children and adolescent's health and well-being.
- **Tackling persistent inequalities in childhood vaccination and immunisation**: like other medical interventions, vaccination is subject to the social gradient. Wealth distribution, maternal education, place of residence, the sex of the child, and poverty are linked to access to, and levels of vaccination coverage;
- **Improving the collection of disaggregated data on child health, well-being and social inclusion** to help monitor and assess progress towards reducing child health inequalities, child poverty and vulnerability.