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Subject: Preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting  
children's well-being  
- Council Conclusions

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Delegations will find attached the final version of the Council conclusions as adopted by EPSCO on 4 October 2012.

## **Preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting children's well-being**

### **Council conclusions**

Out of the 100 million people under the age of 18 in the EU, around 27% are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including 20.5% at risk of poverty, 9.6% severely materially deprived and 9.1% living in households with very low or zero work intensity<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the percentage of children living in poverty or social exclusion is on the rise in a number of Member States as a result of the impact of the economic crisis.

Tackling and preventing child poverty as well as promoting child well-being is essential in its own right. The Rights of the Child are enshrined in the Treaty on European Union, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is also a crucial investment in Europe's future and a direct contribution to the Europe 2020 objectives, as Europe's social and economic future depends on its capacity to break the transmission of poverty across generations and reduce inequalities. Child poverty and social exclusion can lead to a waste of potential that Europe's ageing societies cannot afford. Children growing up in poverty and social exclusion are less likely than their better-off peers to do well at school, enjoy good health and realise their full potential later in life, as the risk of becoming unemployed and poor and socially excluded is higher for them.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat, EU-SILC 2010

Low risk of poverty among children does not automatically safeguard their well-being. Regardless of income, children's well-being may be compromised if they are deprived of choices and opportunities for healthy development and inclusion in society due to the inadequacy, unsuitability or geographical inaccessibility of policies and services for, inter alia, their protection, health, education, empowerment and participation.

EU cooperation on social issues (in particular through the Social OMC) has for the last decade provided a useful framework for addressing child poverty and child well-being, helping to develop a common understanding of the determinants of child poverty, of the approaches that work best and supporting political momentum on the issue. Other key policies, such as education and training policies, the EU Agenda on the Rights of the Child, the reconciliation of work and family life, health policy and cohesion policy, have also played an essential role.

The Europe 2020 Strategy gives new impetus to efforts aimed at addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the EU, as a number of Member States have set specific targets or sub-targets relating to child poverty/social exclusion as their contribution to the headline European target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020, and the issue has been highlighted in a number of National Reform Programmes. Addressing child poverty is important if the Union is to achieve its objective of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as reflected in some of the Country Specific Recommendations adopted in July 2012.

The priority given to the fight against poverty and social exclusion within the Europe 2020 Strategy calls for a multidimensional and integrated approach incorporating actions for the purposes of guaranteeing equal opportunities for all children and involving all the services which support children and their families.

This approach calls for actions that go beyond providing employment opportunities for parents and income support, encompassing key aspects of child well-being, such as reconciliation of work and family life, early childhood education and care, healthcare, education, culture and housing, as well as enabling children to realise their full potential and make their voices heard. Actions should be based on both prevention and remediation, with a view to minimising social and financial costs.

It should also be rooted in a children's rights approach, through a greater recognition of children as independent rights holders and in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In this context, the objective of fighting child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being should be mainstreamed across all relevant policy areas at EU and national levels.

In the light of the above considerations,

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

WELCOMES

The Social Protection Committee's Main Messages on Tackling and Preventing Child Poverty, Promoting Child Well-Being, as resulting from its Advisory Report to the Commission, and annexed to these conclusions;

INVITES THE COMMISSION, THE MEMBER STATES AND THE SOCIAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE in accordance with their respective competences, and taking into account the specific situation in each Member State, to take action along the following lines

- measures should be taken to avoid losing the existing political momentum to address child poverty and social exclusion in the EU in the context of the current economic crisis and fiscal consolidation measures, thus resulting in the rise of relative and absolute forms of child poverty and social exclusion across the Union. This should involve using existing and where relevant, further developing monitoring mechanisms at European and national level relating to child poverty, social exclusion and child well-being on the basis of appropriate indicators;
- consider tackling child poverty and social exclusion, as well as promoting child well-being, as one of the key issues of the social dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the reinvigorated Social OMC;
- make full use of existing tools to improve the monitoring of and reporting on child poverty, social exclusion and child well-being, as well as the evaluation of policies;

#### INVITES THE COMMISSION

bearing in mind the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and taking account of the Member States' institutional structures, to

- take into account the work completed by the Social Protection Committee when drawing up the Recommendation on child poverty, as announced in the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, and adopt the Recommendation as soon as possible;
- sustain momentum and focus on preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion and on promoting children's wellbeing through an approach based on existing instruments, and by enhancing the availability of EU data to support the development of agreed indicators in cooperation with the Social Protection Committee;

- take action to further develop synergies between social inclusion and other policy areas (such as education, employment and gender equality, health, housing and living environment) and with other instruments (such as EU funding programmes), in order to better address child poverty and social exclusion, endorsing a holistic approach and making the well-being of children a priority;
- explore how the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion could further contribute to this issue, whilst strengthening participation and partnerships with stakeholders;

#### INVITES THE SOCIAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE TO

- continue the work on improving agreed EU indicators as regards, in particular, child deprivation, child well-being, quality and affordable childcare for all income groups, children's health, as well as the situation of the most vulnerable children;
- further deepen its cooperation and joint work with the relevant EU Committees and High-Level Groups;

#### INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO

- consider, when designing, implementing and monitoring policies at central, regional and local levels, that investing in children is a long-term investment;
- aim to ensure adequate and sustainable investment in child and family support, mitigating negative impacts on the most vulnerable whilst maintaining an adequate balance between universal and targeted policies;

- make full use of financial opportunities provided in an EU context for this purpose, including the EU structural funds, without prejudice to on-going negotiations on the next multi-annual financial framework;
  - promote the engagement of all key actors, including regional and local authorities and non-governmental organisations, by using the existing instruments in a more comprehensive and more strategic way, thus promoting more visibility and a shared awareness and learning of policies and programmes.
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**References****Council conclusions and other documents**

- Responding to Demographic Challenges through enhanced participation in the labour market and society by all - Council conclusions adopted on 21 June 2012 (doc. 11639/12).
- Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving adopted on 28 June 2011 (OJ C191, 1.07.2011, P.1).
- Tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being - Council Conclusions adopted on 17 June 2011 (doc. 11844/11).
- Reconciliation of work and family life in the context of demographic change: Council conclusions adopted on 17 June 2011 (doc. 11841/11).
- Early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow- Council conclusions adopted on 19 May 2011 (OJEU C 175, 15.06.2011, p.8).
- Council conclusions on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, adopted on 7 March 2011 (doc. 6917/11).
- The Europe 2020 social dimension: delivering on the EU commitment to poverty reduction and inclusion (2011): Opinion of the Social Protection Committee as endorsed by the Council on 1 December 2011 (Doc 17050/11).
- Council Declaration on the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion: working together to fight poverty in 2010 and beyond as adopted on 6 December 2010 (doc. 16435/10).

**Presidency's conferences**

- The Copenhagen Conference on Children's rights and the prevention of child poverty ("Europe de l'Enfance"), 19 March 2012.
- The Child Poverty Conference held on 2-3 September 2010 in Marche en Famenne, the joint Declaration of the Trio Presidency (Spain, Belgium and Hungary) and the Roadmap for a Recommendation to Child Poverty (Report on Belgian EU Presidency Conference).
- Seminar on Child Poverty and Well-being (Brussels, 26 November 2009).

### European Parliament's Resolutions and Reports

- The EP Resolution of 15 November 2011 on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- The EP Report on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, including child poverty in the EU. Rapporteur Gabriele Zimmer. 2008.

### Opinion of the Committee of the Regions

- Opinion on child poverty, as adopted on 18.04.2012, OJEU 2012/C 113/07.

### Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

- Opinion on Child Poverty and children well-being, as adopted on 14 July 2010, OJEU 2011/C44/06.

### Social Protection Committee's work

- Main Messages on tackling and preventing child poverty, promoting child well-being, as adopted on 4 July 2012.
- Advisory Report to the European Commission on tackling and preventing child poverty, promoting child well-being, as adopted on 27 June 2012.
- The Europe 2020 social dimension: delivering on the EU commitment to poverty reduction and inclusion (2011): Opinion of the Social Protection Committee as endorsed by the Council on 1 December 2011 (Doc 17050/11).
- SPC 2008 Report on Child Poverty and Child Well-being in the EU.

### Commission communications

- Communication on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: a European framework for social and territorial cohesion (COM(2010) 0758).

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**The Social Protection Committee**  
*The Secretariat*

**MAIN MESSAGES ON:**

TACKLING AND PREVENTING CHILD POVERTY, PROMOTING CHILD WELL-BEING

The European Commission has announced in 2010 its intention to adopt a Recommendation on Child Poverty in 2012. The initiative was endorsed by Member States through the June 2011 EPSCO Council conclusion on "Tackling Child Poverty and promoting Child Well-being", which called on the Social Protection Committee (SPC) to "actively contribute to the preparation of the Recommendation". To respond to this call, the Social Protection Committee prepared an advisory report for the European Commission. The main messages from this report are presented below.

## **Background**

### **25 million children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU**

- In a large majority of EU countries children are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion than the overall population, with a rate of 27.1% as against 23.5% on average in the EU.
- The economic crisis has had a very serious impact on children, with shares of those living in poverty or social exclusion having risen in a number of countries often largely due to the rise in unemployment of their parents. Their living standards have especially deteriorated, with significant increases in the share of children in severe material deprivation, as well as in households with very low work intensity or in jobless households.

### **Measures taken in response to the economic crisis altered child and family policies**

Key services and policies supporting families and children have started to be affected by budget cuts in a number of EU countries. On-going reforms raise significant challenges as to how to maintain an appropriate balance between universal and targeted forms of support, combining effectiveness, efficiency and equity in the long run.

## **A meaningful social investment and direct contribution to the Europe 2020 objectives**

- Europe's social and economic future depends also on its capacity to break the transmission of poverty across generations: child poverty results in a wasted potential that Europe's ageing societies cannot afford. Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth depends on ensuring that all our children grow up in a secure environment and reach their full potential.
- Preventing of child poverty and mitigating the adverse effects of poverty and social exclusion at an early age should be recognised as a long-term investment in the future with benefits to the society and the economy as a whole, thus reducing inequality and contributing to cost-effective public policies based on values.
- The upcoming Commission Recommendation should, while supporting the activities of Member States, aim to translate the existing political commitment into a framework for action, driving policy changes, strengthening the evidence-base of policy development and enhancing cooperation between and synergies with key actors.

### **1. Key areas for future work by Member States:**

Most of the policy actions that can be mobilised to reduce child poverty are primarily a Member State competence. EU co-operation and co-ordination add value by facilitating the exchange and dissemination of good practices and by galvanising efforts to achieve common objectives. EU structural funds could also support the efforts of Member States to tackle and prevent child poverty and promote child-wellbeing.

## **1.1 Developing holistic approaches, combining prevention and remediation**

Reducing child poverty and breaking the transmission of poverty across generations is best achieved through holistic, integrated strategies that go beyond pure material support, including by promoting universal well-being of all children as well as complementary targeted policies designed to improve the situation of those in vulnerable situations.

## **1.2 Access to adequate income through supporting parents' participation in the labour market and providing adequate income support through a combination of benefits**

Member States should continue to or undertake policy action to:

- *Support all parents participation in the labour market* by supporting job search as an important safeguard against poverty and exclusion, making work pay through adequate design and integration of tax and benefit systems as well as by enhancing access to quality, affordable childcare and early education services for all families, with services adapted to the needs of different working patterns and children with specific needs or living in vulnerable situations.
- *Provide adequate income support to families through a coherent and efficient combination of benefits* whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between cash benefits (including tax reliefs or credit) and in-kind benefits in key areas including health, education, housing and childcare as well as between universal and targeted benefits. Ensure that targeted benefits, where provided, minimise disincentives for parents to take up employment and do not lead to social stigmatisation of families that receive them.

### 1.3 Access to quality services in education, health, housing and child protection

Member States should continue to or undertake policy action to:

- *Ensure that all children can receive early childhood education and care, and attend high quality and inclusive education that reduce inequalities from the start, eliminate discrimination, reduce the challenges faced by children in vulnerable positions and promote the emotional, social, psychological, physical and cognitive development of all children.*
- *Seek to provide universal access to health care for children (including mental health support services) and take preventive measures to improve lifestyles choices and eating habits, addressing obstacles such as cost, lack of access or information in order to reduce health inequalities.*
- *Provide support for adequate housing and suitable living environments in order to ensure comprehensive development of children and prevent ghettoization.*
- *Support children and their families through high quality child protection and social services and preventive measures based on the child's best interest. Where alternative care is necessary, ensure quality care, access to mainstream services and support transition to adulthood through specific services.*

### 1.4 Children's participation

Member States should continue to or undertake policy action to:

- *Support the participation of all children in culture, sports, youth, recreational and social activities by actively seeking to remove barriers such as costs, access and cultural differences.*

- *Develop instruments and infrastructures to ensure empowerment of children, including children in vulnerable positions so that their voices are reflected in key policies affecting them.*

## **2. Implementation and monitoring: making full use of existing instruments and strengthening synergies with key actors**

Member States and the European Commission, where appropriate, need to make full use of existing instruments and indicators to give a new impetus to the EU's efforts to address child poverty and social exclusion and to promote child well-being. This implies fully using relevant strands and reports within the Europe 2020 strategy as well as the existing tools provided by the reinvigorated Social OMC to improve the monitoring and evaluation of, and the reporting on, child poverty and well-being. Target setting, where deemed relevant and appropriate from a national perspective, can be an effective tool to define policy objective and hence in designing policies for reducing child poverty and social exclusion and for building public support and awareness. As regards further data development, priority should be given to the development and consolidation of child poverty and child-well-being indicators particularly related to health and to the situation of the most vulnerable children, as well as tools assessing the impact of policies on children.