



#VOTEFORCHILDREN

Key Messages for Political Groups' Manifestos

26 May 2023

Children's Rights are universal. However, children's rights and well-being are hindered by multiple crises, like the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living, energy and climate crisis.

The EU is a champion of Child Rights. We now call on all decision-makers in the EU to keep up and build on the progress achieved so far. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child must be fully implemented to protect children in the EU and abroad. Child rights must be mainstreamed in the EU's internal and external actions through increased funding and policy coherence. Climate policies must be child-sensitive.

In all asks of this message, we call on EU leaders to pay particular attention to the needs of specific groups of children and those most vulnerable who need protection¹.

Empower children to be active players in democracy

Children must have a seat at the table. Children are experts in their own lives. It is essential that they participate in decisions that affect them, as one of the core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The strengthening of democracy, within and outside the EU, goes hand in hand with the meaningful participation of children. Despite this, children face many challenges when trying to participate in decision-making processes, and their contributions are undervalued, undermined and underestimated.

We call on EU leaders to:

- Strengthen the institutional engagement with children: empower children and adults to build meaningful intergenerational dialogue by adapting existing frameworks and putting in place new systematic mechanisms for children to express their views together with systems that support adults to actively listen, respect children's opinions and act upon them.
- Capitalise on the historic opportunity provided by the establishment of the new EU Child Participation Platform, by ensuring that it truly enables meaningful, safe, inclusive child participation and that it becomes a sounding board for EU policies. Promote the implementation of the Child Participation Platform to include non-EU children's perspectives in the EU external action.

¹ This includes, but is not limited to girls, children in armed conflict, children with disabilities, missing children, children on the move, children deprived of family care, children in precarious family situations, children from a racial or ethnic minority, stateless children, working children, children in or vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour, children who run away.



Create enabling environments for children to reach their full potential and thrive

Every child has the right to grow up safe, happy, and healthy in family or family-like settings, and to reach their full and unique potential throughout their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual lifelong development.

A child's right to education entails the right to learn. Yet over 600 million children and adolescents worldwide do not have the basic skills in reading and mathematics – a global learning crisis is unfolding.

Early childhood, especially the first five years, fundamentally forms the adults that children become. When we give children the best start in life, including through maternal and prenatal care, health care, nutrition, and education, the benefits are tremendous, for every child and for societies.

Every child has the right to a healthy life, including both physical and mental health. Suicide is the second most common cause of death among adolescents aged 15–19, and 9 million adolescents in Europe live with a mental disorder.

We call on EU leaders to:

- Ensure strong financial investment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 3 on "Good Health and Wellbeing", with a focus on primary health care, addressing inequities and building resilient health systems. Increase the focus on the mental health and well-being of children, adolescents, as well as their parents and caregivers.
- Provide safe, equitable and inclusive access to lifelong learning and quality education to all children, including free quality early childhood education and care.
- Ensure that all children can grow up in caring and enabling environments, avoiding as much as possible family separation. This includes family-friendly policies at all levels of societies through a focus on the early formative years; and ensuring the transition from institutional to family and community-based care.



Tackle child poverty

The most recent Eurostat data shows that child poverty is a pan-European issue that affects close to 20 million –one in four– children in the EU.

Poverty affects every aspect of a child's life. Even a temporary experience of deprivation can have devastating consequences for a child's whole life and have a great cost also for the society as a whole.

We call on EU leaders to:

- Fight child poverty and social exclusion ensuring robust and comprehensive child social protection policies, increasing EU and national investments in children, and prioritising children in the establishment of a socially fair just transition.
- Revise the EU target aiming to lift 5 million children out of poverty by 2030 to be more ambitious and align with Member States' commitments under the UN poverty reduction target.
- Prioritise the successful implementation of the Child Guarantee, by making sure all Member States Action Plans are ambitious, properly financed, implemented, monitored and evaluated.

Prevent and combat harm, violence, neglect and abuse against children

Every child has the right to grow up in a safe, loving, family environment, free from violence and fear. The EU must protect children from all forms of violence, regardless of the child's background.

National child protection systems are the gatekeeper to protect the most vulnerable children from harm and are more indispensable than ever. Globally, it is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect.

Despite the fact that detention is known to harm children, it is allowed in EU legislation and its use is on the rise in the EU.

EU leaders must protect children from all forms of violence, abuse (sexually or otherwise, online and offline), trafficking and exploitation, especially girls who are more at risk and adequately support victims.

We call on EU leaders to:

- Champion a strong EU initiative on integrated child protection systems as a crucial EU-wide effort to ensure more efficient and child-centred interventions at the Member State level to prevent and combat violence.
- Strengthen and support the European children's hotlines and helplines and improve cross-border cooperation.



- Support and protect the rights of migrant and displaced children, irrespective of their migration status, including their right to a nationality.
- Support and promote safe, child-friendly, accessible, and inclusive justice systems and guarantee children's voice is heard in all proceedings that might affect them.
- Adopt and support policies that drastically reduce the number of children deprived of their liberty across the EU, prohibit migration-related detention and promote family and community based alternatives.
- Strengthen sustainable corporate governance to make all EU supply chains free of child labour.
- Adopt policies and systems that create a safe digital environment for children and young people in which they can safely grow, learn and play, making the best of the digital transformation.

Champion Children's Rights outside the EU

Globally, the lives of more than 26 million children are at imminent risk, threatened by crises and conflicts such as the war in Ukraine and the global hunger crisis.

Almost three out of four children worldwide are not covered by any form of social protection, leaving them vulnerable to economic hardship and social exclusion. One billion children are at 'extremely high risk' of the impacts of climate change – that is nearly half of the world's children.

We call on EU leaders to:

- Promote the rights of all children across the globe to equal access to essential services including housing, food, health care, and inclusive quality education.
- Ensure that children's specific rights and needs are considered and prioritised across both humanitarian and development EU external action and programming. Track financial expenditure on children through a dedicated indicator.
- Accelerate the EU's climate commitments so that current and future generations can enjoy the benefits of a liveable planet and support an equal and just transition for all children and their families.

For further information: visit childrightsmanifesto.eu



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