



PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

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Language of your contribution: *English*

Type of organisation:

- Member State*
- Public authority*
- Registered organisation*
- Registered company*
- Individual citizen*
- Non-registered organisation/company*

Other, please specify: *The EU Alliance for Investing in Children brings together European networks who share a commitment to end child poverty and to promote child well-being across Europe.*

Main area(s) covered by your contribution:

- Economic and financial affairs*
- Competitiveness*

- Industry*
- Single market*
- Employment*
- Research, development and innovation*
- Digital economy*
- Climate, energy and resource efficiency*
- Education*
- Poverty/social exclusion*
- Other, please specify:*

Register ID number (if you/your organisation is registered in the Transparency register):

Your reply:

- can be published with your personal information*
- can be published in an anonymous way*
- cannot be published*

A) Background for the public consultation:

The Europe 2020 strategy was launched in [March 2010](#) as the EU's strategy for promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It aims to achieve a knowledge-based, competitive European economy while preserving the EU's social market economy model and improving resource efficiency. It was thus conceived as a partnership between the EU and its Member States driven by the promotion of growth and jobs.

The Europe 2020 strategy is built around five [headline targets](#) in the areas of employment, research and development, climate and energy¹, education and the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The strategy also set out a series of action programmes, called "[flagship initiatives](#)", in seven fields considered to be key drivers for growth, namely innovation, the digital economy, employment and youth, industrial policy, poverty and resource efficiency.

¹ In January 2014 the Commission launched a [framework](#) for energy and climate policies up to 2030. A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 40% below the 1990 level, an EU-wide binding target for renewable energy of at least 27% and renewed ambitions for energy efficiency policies are among the main objectives of the new framework.

The objectives of the strategy are also supported by action at EU level in areas such as the single market, the EU budget and the EU external agenda.

The Europe 2020 strategy is implemented and monitored in the context of the [European Semester](#), the yearly cycle of coordination of economic and budgetary policies at EU level. The European Semester involves discussion among EU institutions on broad priorities, annual commitments by the Member States and country-specific recommendations prepared by the Commission and endorsed at the highest level by leaders in the European Council. These recommendations should then be taken on board in the Member States' policies and budgets. As such, together with the EU budget, the country-specific recommendations are key instruments for the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy.

After four years, the Commission has proposed, and the European Council of 20-21 March 2014 has agreed, to initiate a review of the Europe 2020 strategy. On 5 March 2014, the Commission adopted a Communication "Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" ([Communication](#)  and [Annexes](#) ) drawing preliminary lessons on the first years of implementation of the strategy. Building on these first outcomes and in a context of a gradual recovery of the European economies, it is time to reflect on the design of the strategy for the coming years.

Through these questions, we are seeking your views on the lessons learned from the early years of the Europe 2020 strategy and on the elements to be taken into account in its further development, in order to build the post-crisis growth strategy of the EU.

B) Questions:

1) Taking stock: the Europe 2020 strategy over 2010-2014

Content and implementation

- For you, what does the Europe 2020 strategy mean? What are the main elements that you associate with the strategy?

In February 2013 the European Commission adopted the Recommendation *Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*,² which called for concerted efforts across Europe to end child poverty and promote child well-being.

The European Commission's approach, which places children's rights, the best interests of the child, equal opportunities and support for the most disadvantaged at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty was particularly welcome.

However, the situation for children across Europe is getting worse. Latest Eurostat figures estimate more than one in four children are experiencing poverty and social exclusion, while 2012 reports highlight an increase in homeless families. Organisations working with children and families are witnessing escalating demand at a time when governments at all levels are cutting public investment in services and welfare support.

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>

The Recommendation stresses the importance of preventative measures aimed at breaking the cycle of disadvantage in a child's early years, and proposes a comprehensive strategy based on three interconnected pillars: access to adequate resources for children and their families, access to affordable, quality services and children's participation. It also promotes a universal approach benefiting and involving all children, coupled with targeted measures to the most vulnerable.

For the EU Alliance the Europe 2020 strategy is the main tool to realise integrated child poverty strategies in each EU Member State. It can do so by making best use of its key elements including the targets, the monitoring cycle, and stakeholders cooperation – both at EU and national level.

- Overall, do you think that the Europe 2020 strategy has made a difference? Please explain.

From the perspective of the EU Alliance, which brings together over 20 European networks sharing a commitment to end child poverty and to promote children's rights and child well-being across Europe, Europe 2020 has been helpful. Child poverty and well-being is clearly on the policy agenda of the EU. The poverty reduction headline target and national poverty targets are particularly useful in that sense. There has been an improvement in the sense of sharing the agenda, experience and knowledge with and among stakeholder such as EU Alliance partners.

However in reality the priorities pursued by the strategy are not balanced, making it a significant obstacle to realise the cross-cutting priorities of providing material security to families, to ensuring access to quality services (early childhood, education, health, housing etc), and to involving children and young people in decision-making. The Social Investment Package of 2013, and in particular the EC Recommendation Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage in particular provides such a holistic rights-based approach to tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being in Europe. Furthermore, the Recommendation is still lacking a roadmap for implementation, which is necessary to ensure its real impact on policy reforms and outcomes for children and young people in Europe.

- Has the knowledge of what other EU countries are doing in Europe 2020 areas impacted on the approach followed in your country? Please give examples.

Over the last decade Member States made some progress under the Social Open Method of Coordination (Social OMC). They agreed common objectives and indicators; increased the knowledge base on poverty and social exclusion in the EU and new thematic priorities such as child poverty emerged. Valuable research data and expertise was collected through peer reviews. The Recommendation Investing in Children was a result of exchanges of best practice between Member States and the willingness of the Social Protection Committee to take the agenda forward.

Even with the shortcomings of the Social OMC there are opportunities to make the best of both processes, and integrating the results of the OMC better into Europe 2020.

- Has there been sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the Europe 2020 strategy? Are you involved in the Europe 2020 strategy? Would you like to be more involved? If yes, how?

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children joins forces of EU networks - building on their respective areas of expertise - to support the implementation of the Recommendation at national, regional and local levels. The networks' members are uniquely placed to influence their respective governments on decision-making and resource allocation that is in the best interest of children. Yet stakeholder

engagement at national level is at extremely disappointing levels, with national members gradually losing the motivation to engage.

The role civil society, including children's rights organisations, play in promoting and supporting the necessary reform at national, regional and local level, and in ensuring EU policy coherence across the Member States must be recognised. The European Commission should develop, as it has committed, a set of guidelines for the engagement of stakeholders in Europe 2020. The guidelines should be drawn up in cooperation with the Social Protection Committee and should be monitored regularly in a specific section of the NRPs and reported on by the Commission in the CSRs and AGS. In particular these should emphasise the involvement of organisations working with children and children themselves in the Europe 2020 process.

In the Member States European Semester Officers should promote meaningful stakeholder engagement on the country's Europe 2020 performance. The development and implementation of the National Reform Programmes must include civil society. The Recommendation Investing in Children in particular should be promoted among policy-makers drafting the National Reform Programmes.

Tools

- Do the current targets for 2020 respond to the strategy's objectives of fostering growth and jobs? [Targets: *to have at least 75% of people aged 20-64 in employment; to invest 3% of GDP in research and development; to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20%, increase the share of renewables to 20% and improve energy efficiency by 20%; to reduce school drop-out rates to below 10% and increase the share of young people with a third-level degree or diploma to at least 40%; to ensure at least 20 million fewer people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion*].

The ambition to lift 20 million people out of poverty or social exclusion by 2020 is the right one and should be kept. The national targets are clearly necessary and member states should increase their ambition to ensure the collective target is taken seriously. The three indicators to measure the risk of poverty and social exclusion should also be retained, and used consistently by all EU Member States' to ensure comparability.

- Among current targets, do you consider that some are more important than others? Please explain.

As a principle all targets of Europe 2020 are equally important and the targets set should be kept. This is fundamental since for children the negative effects of living in poverty or social exclusion can last for life – making it even more urgent to act now. However, Europe is currently moving away from achieving its 2020 poverty reduction target. The EU needs to ensure Member States take the target seriously.

- Do you find it useful that EU-level targets are broken down into national targets? If so, what is, in your view, the best way to set national targets? So far, have the national targets been set appropriately/too ambitiously/not ambitiously enough?

We find it useful that EU-level targets are broken down into national targets, especially in the case of poverty reduction. Several Member States have set sub-targets to reduce child poverty specifically as part of their Europe 2020 objectives, which is welcomed and should be the case for all Member States

as an integral part of Europe 2020. It would help if the European Commission would disaggregate the European poverty reduction headline target by age.

Data collection and analysis of the poverty headline target should be based on the same joint assessment of all three indicators of at risk of poverty and social exclusion across all Member States, and expressed in percentages.

- What has been the added value of the seven action programmes for growth? Do you have concrete examples of the impact of such programmes? [*"Flagship initiatives": "Digital agenda for Europe", "Innovation Union", "Youth on the move", "Resource efficient Europe", "An industrial policy for the globalisation era", "Agenda for new skills and jobs", "European platform against poverty"*].

The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion has the added value of summarising proposals and instruments that should be implemented within ten years to help achieve the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target. It has the potential to drive a comprehensive EU approach to tackling child poverty and addressing child well-being.

To make full use of its potential and make it more dynamic we suggest to make it more meaningful by giving it a clear vision with a set of actions and their expected impact. The Platform should be closely linked to other policies and programmes that are the main drivers of the European Semester.

The Platform should continue to involve stakeholders, including European and national/regional civil society organisations that could directly contribute to the delivery of Europe 2020 both at EU and national level.

2) Adapting the Europe 2020 strategy: the growth strategy for a post-crisis Europe

Content and implementation

- Does the EU need a comprehensive and overarching medium-term strategy for growth and jobs for the coming years?

Children's rights and well-being needs to be an integral part of the narrative of Europe's future. A comprehensive and overarching medium-term strategy is needed that gives visible attention to the perspectives of the children, the youngest in society.

This year, seven countries received Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) calling explicitly for increased efforts to reduce child poverty.¹ More received CSRs on inclusive education and increasing early childhood education and care service provision. This is to be welcomed. However, the Alliance for Investing in Children is concerned by the overall lack of coherence and the increasingly narrow focus on employability – particularly with respect to young people. A sustainable and inclusive exit from the crisis requires that economic and employment measures reinforce, rather than undermine, efforts towards poverty reduction and social inclusion.

- What are the most important and relevant areas to be addressed in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

Although more attention has been given to the social consequences of the crisis in the Annual Growth Survey for 2014,ⁱⁱ the reference to child poverty is still limited and framed in the context of labour market reform and Active Inclusion policies. It seems very distant from the proposals put forward by the European Commission last year in the Recommendation *Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*. The Recommendation takes a much needed rights-based approach that puts the best interests of the child, equal opportunities and support for the most disadvantaged at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty and promote child well-being across Europe.

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children calls in particular to:

- Prioritise **implementation of the European Commission Recommendation Investing in Children** by ensuring National Reform Programmes reflect its priorities. More needs to be done to systematically monitor the situation of children in Member States by using the indicators based on the Recommendation. More should also be done to compare outcomes for children across the EU as a result of Member States different policy choices.
- Strengthen **the governance and reporting mechanisms of Europe 2020** particularly by ensuring more transparent and direct involvement of stakeholders including children and young people. More stakeholder engagement will help to bring greater coherence between and within CSRs so that children's well-being becomes a core priority of the EU rather than an add-on. Hence, the Europe 2020 strategy should include a specific sub-target on the reduction of child poverty and inequality.
- Include the **indicator of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion** in the scoreboard of social and employment indicators; and urge the scoreboard to become binding in order to deepen the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union.

- What new challenges should be taken into account in the future?

There are 26,5 million children across the European Union at risk of poverty or social exclusion - half a million more than a year agoⁱⁱⁱ - and the economic, financial and social crisis is only putting even more children at risk. Macroeconomic measures will not be enough to turn around the vicious circle of exclusion and disadvantage. Actions towards achieving more sustainable development, competitive economy, better social cohesion and sound public finance management can no longer be seen separately but as interlinkages of the same reality. In such an equation the same political weight has to be given to children's present as their future.

- How could the strategy best be linked to other EU policies?

By incorporating the implementation of the Recommendation *Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* into Europe 2020 there would already be stronger links between employment, financial, social services, education, health, housing and fundamental rights departments both at EU and national administrative levels. The Recommendation promotes policy coordination through a rights-based approach that puts equal opportunities for all and support for the most disadvantaged at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty and promote child well-being across Europe.

- What would improve stakeholder involvement in a post-crisis growth strategy for Europe? What could be done to increase awareness, support and better implementation of this strategy in your country?

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children is the proof that stakeholders are able to work closely at national level across sectors and get engaged in a meaningful exchange with authorities on Europe

2020. The EU Alliance promotes national alliances to advocate in their countries for investments in children using EU leverages such as Europe 2020 and the Structural Funds. Cross-sectoral cooperation among national organisations, as well as their European network counterparts needs to be supported in their capacity to get involved in planning, implementation and monitoring of Europe 2020.

Tools

- What type of instruments do you think would be more appropriate to use to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

Please see above

- What would best be done at EU level to ensure that the strategy delivers results? What would best be done at Member State level?

An integrated strategy to support people across the life-cycle, as stipulated by the Social Investment Package has been developed at EU level in the form of the Recommendation Investing in Children. For implementing it, complementarity between Europe 2020 and the Social OMC could be a useful setting to coordinate development, implementation and monitoring of specific national strategies for tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being developed by each Member State as a part of national policy making processes.

- How can the strategy encourage Member States to put a stronger policy focus on growth?

More needs to be done to systematically monitor the situation of children in Member States by using the indicators based on the Recommendation, and developing more and better indicators. More should also be done to compare outcomes for children across the EU as a result of Member States different policy choices.

- Are targets useful? Please explain.

Please see above

- Would you recommend adding or removing certain targets, or the targets in general? Please explain.

The Europe 2020 headline target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty by 2020 should be kept the same until the strategy comes to an end.

To facilitate meeting the targets, Member States should be required to either set a specific national (sub-) target for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion - or to indicate what proportion of their overall Europe 2020 poverty and social exclusion is expected to lift children out of poverty.

- What are the most fruitful areas for joint EU-Member State action? What would be the added value?

Please see above

3) Do you have any other comment or suggestion on the Europe 2020 strategy that you would like to share?

Press Statements of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children on Europe 2020:

- <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/will-europe-2020-deliver-for-children/>
- <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/no-inclusive-growth-with-increasing-child-poverty/>

For more information please see: www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Please send your contribution, along with any other documents, to SG-EUROPE2020-CONSULTATION@ec.europa.eu.

ⁱ The Country-Specific Recommendations were adopted by the European Commission on 2 June 2014, as a reaction to Member States' National Reform Programmes and Stability/Convergence Programmes. Of the 28 EU Member States the following countries received a specific recommendation on tackling child poverty: Bulgaria, Hungary, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Romania and United Kingdom. Recommendations were also issued to various countries regarding early childhood education and care; inclusive education and early-school leaving; and de-institutionalisation. The 2014 CSRs can be found here: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm

ⁱⁱ Communication from the Commission Annual Growth Survey 2014, COM(2013) 800 final

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistical office of the European Union, EU-SILC 2013
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/database