Investing in children is key to Europe’s future

European networks, together with UNICEF, urge Employment, Social Affairs and Health Ministers who meet in Luxembourg this week to act now and promote measures which lead to the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion in EU Member States.

One in four children currently live in poverty or social exclusion in the European Union - that is over 25 million children. Approximately 13% of children leave school without a secondary school diploma, and some 11% of children live in jobless households. If we are to realise the Europe 2020 goals and achieve a Europe that is truly based on a smart, sustainable, and inclusive economy and society, this urgently needs to change.

However, on top of high unemployment and precarious working conditions, children and families are facing cuts to income support and crucial services as a result of austerity measures.

On 20 June Ministers from the 27 EU Member States will meet to discuss the European Commission’s Social Investment Package for Growth and Cohesion (SIP) launched in February this year. At a time when macro-economic priorities are still predominantly steering the debate, it is urgent to improve the investment in, and effectiveness of, social inclusion policies and give prominence to measures that could mitigate social imbalances for children and families.

The Social Investment Package includes the European Commission’s Recommendation on Investing in Children – Breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Several European networks whose members are working directly with families and children across the EU have welcomed this policy guidance, highlighting the integrated approach to fighting child poverty and its recognition of children as rights-holders.

The EU’s Structural Funds should be used strategically by Member States to inject much needed resources to reform policies and boost child and family services and integrated strategies. The Europe 2020 Strategy and the Social Investment Package can together set the Recommendation in motion. The annual agenda-setting (in the Annual Growth Survey), the reporting process of National Reform Programmes and the customised guidance given to countries (the Country-Specific Recommendations) should hold Member States accountable to their Europe 2020 commitments to reduce poverty, and to break the poverty cycle.

The implementation of the Recommendation mainly depends on the policy choices of Member States. This requires governments to look holistically at what children need to grow up and reach their full potential. It means ensuring that families have access to adequate resources; that services for children are of high quality, accessible and affordable for all; and that children are given a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

More than ever, this is the time to make important choices for the future and to tackle poverty and exclusion at its heart: equity begins with Europe’s children!
Note to the editors

The press release is issued on behalf of:

ATD Quart Monde www.atd-quartmonde.org

Caritas Europa www.caritas-europa.org

Dynamo International – Street Workers Network www.travailderue.org

European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) www.eapn.eu

Eurochild www.eurochild.org

Eurodiaconia www.eurodiaconia.org

European Social Network (ESN) www.esn-eu.org

Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) www.picum.org

UNICEF www.unbrussels.org/agencies/unicef.html