

Eurochild: Early years services are a public good ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Summary from Start Strong Ireland ^[2]

Eurochild statement ^[3]

Description:

Three years ago, the European Commission published an important document - the Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care - that gave a major stimulus to early years policy at EU level. A key development was the establishment of an EU working group (including representatives of the Irish Government) to develop a "European Quality Framework" for early care and education.

At an EU conference on the quality of early care and education, held in Athens in June, a report from the EU working group was presented. While the European Quality Framework is yet to be published, and is still a long way from implementation, the conference was a milestone in the process.

Quality

Eurochild, of which Start Strong is a member, has been actively following the process, supporting the development of a robust quality framework at EU level that can drive forward quality improvements at national level.

Eurochild strongly supports the European Commission's new efforts to focus on quality and to put children's interests at the centre, rather than viewing early years services simply as a support to working parents, which was the thrust of past EU policy.

With a new European Commission to be appointed in the autumn, it will be critical that the quality of early care and education remains a policy priority at EU level.

Policy priorities

At the start of the Athens conference in June, Eurochild issued a statement on policy priorities. The statement is an advocacy tool for use at both EU and national levels.

It sets out 5 key principles that should underpin early childhood policies:

- Early childhood must be understood as a public responsibility and a public good.
- A comprehensive early childhood policy requires holistic and integrated policy development.
- Support for parents as primary care givers is critical.
- A competent early childhood workforce requires "competent systems".
- Evaluation and research need to focus on children's real outcomes in the present and the future.

Reflecting Eurochild's focus on children's rights, the statement starts with the assertion that "Young children are citizens and bearers of rights". It stresses that parents carry the primary responsibility for creating the right conditions for children's development, and it also insists that early childhood is a public responsibility.

It argues that wide range of policy areas matter for early childhood development, including parental leave, parenting supports, and high quality early years services.

As an issue of children's rights, Eurochild stresses that early care and education must be understood as an entitlement for all children, and be coupled with targeted support for those at risk of marginalisation.

Related link: Rights of the child and early childhood education and care in Europe ^[4]

Region: Europe ^[5]

Tags: quality ^[6]

children's rights ^[7]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/14/07/eurochild-early-years-services-are-public-good> [2]
http://www.startstrong.ie/contents/514?utm_source=May%202014%20e-newsletter&utm_campaign=July%20Special%20Edition%202014%20enews&utm_medium=archive&utm_source=
[3] <https://www.eurochild.org/policy/library-details/article/eurochild-statement-on-early-childhood-education-and-care/> [4]
<https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/24/01/rights-child-and-early-childhood-education-and-care-europe> [5]
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