



## COVID-19 POSITION STATEMENT

*This joint statement on COVID-19 is co-owned by Eurochild, International Step by Step Association, Roma Education Fund and the European Public Health Alliance.*

### Time to re-think our societies and economies - Why we need to prioritise early childhood

The current crisis offers almost limitless opportunities to reimagine the future of our societies and economies by learning the lessons of the past. We believe our long-term prosperity and resilience will depend on how much we prioritise the needs of the youngest generations and those who care for them.

The COVID-19 outbreak has revealed the true impact of a decade of austerity that has pared back health and social-care systems to their bare minimum across many parts of Europe. In so doing the crisis has highlighted **several truths that have been either forgotten or neglected**:

- the protection of the most vulnerable in society indicates the level of protection for the society as a whole;
- the level of a government's political commitment to ensuring the wellbeing, healthy development and learning of all young children is a sound indicator of the forward-looking leadership for a generative society;
- the demands of caring and supporting children are high and all services around families, from early childhood education and care, social and health services, to schools, and the wider community are vital for a well-functioning society;
- health, social and education professionals play a vital role in social protection and contribute to the integrity and functioning of key social sectors and the society;
- public expenditure to protect and support the most vulnerable is a necessary investment to ensure protection reaches all. It improves social integration and saves on health and social expenditure later down the line.
- a core foundation of society is the health of the population where social determinants of health and equality are key.

Health and social support for all families with children is a critical motor for sustainable economic development and social cohesion. Recognising 'it takes a village to raise a child', public support for families and communities must be viewed not as a cost, but as an essential investment.

The science of early childhood development stresses that the **first years are vital for a child's development and well-being and throughout their entire life**. Healthy growth and development require adequate nutrition, housing, access to healthcare, physical activity, early stimulation, and responsive caregiving to ensure the best start in life and prevent inequalities. Solid foundations early in life provide the basis for growth and development for all individuals and for societies.

Ensuring **children's healthy and rounded development in their early years represents a fundamental condition** for the well-being of the whole society.

## Public early childhood services represent a pillar in the development of societies and economies

All children deserve the best start, and all families need to be supported to ensure it. Access to quality healthcare, affordable medicines, vaccination, adequate nutrition, safe environment, parent and children support services and opportunities for early learning (home-based programs, formal and informal services) all contribute to children's optimal physical and mental development. **All early childhood services are key ingredients in the solid foundation of a society.** They must be accessible and affordable to all. And they need to be supported to cooperate together across sectors to ensure ALL young citizens and their caregivers and parents are reached.

By prioritising investment in early childhood services, governments are contributing to increasing collective well-being, instead of focusing solely on GDP. We will all be better served by such a re-orientation placing children's and families' well-being, social responsibility, and cohesion as the first priority.

***There is no better future in our societies if we do not focus NOW on the well-being of all young children and their families!***

*Read [Eurochild's statement on COVID19](#), its compiled [COVID19 resources](#), the [EU Alliance for investing in children's joint statement](#) on COVID19, and all that Eurochild Members are doing to respond to the crisis.*

*Read [ISSA's Romani Early Years Network action statement on COVID19](#) supported by 11 national networks, the [Message from the ISSA Secretariat](#), the [COVID19 Resources page](#), and a [global Call to Action](#) to which ISSA contributed.*

*Read [EPHA's statement on COVID19](#), the need for a [common European approach to the pandemic](#), and more on the [EPHA portal on COVID19](#).*

*Read [REF's comprehensive COVID19 statement](#) supported by 21 organisations.*

Contact: Agata D'Addato, Senior Project Manager, Eurochild (agata.daddato@eurochild.org).

