

Message from Nele Stapelfeld from Hamburg to the European network:

“I had already introduced the child guarantee agreement at the last European meetings. Each country is now called upon to develop an implementation plan. Biggi, Rebecca, Agnes and I wrote and sent a statement on behalf of Netko e.V. at the end of last year. In order to place the procedure of network conferences in general and family councils in particular there. This was listened to and we were invited to a first impact meeting in spring this year and now also for another strategic planning meeting in Berlin.”

This is the letter / document:

European Guarantee for Children Cycle of Poverty and Social Exclusion

- EXIT Strategy FGC -

In order to break the vicious circle of transgenerational reproduction of poverty and social exclusion, it is necessary not only to invest in and qualitatively develop education and social systems, but also to encourage and (self-)empower the people concerned.

An excellent instrument for this is the "Family-Group-Conference" (FGC), also known as Family Council, Family Network Conference in Germany. Developed at the end of the 1980s in New Zealand and anchored since 1989 in the "Children, Young People, and Their Families Act" (CYPF 1989)¹, it has spread all over the world. Although it has been implemented sporadically in various communities, its effectiveness has been proven by numerous studies and experiences.

The family council is used where families find themselves in problematic life situations that they cannot cope with on their own (the nuclear family). A neutral coordinator supports the people concerned to gather their network (relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, etc.) and to jointly develop a plan to overcome the problems. Professionals who may be involved support the families with necessary information, but are not involved in finding a solution.

Fig. "EXIT Strategy FGC, Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Social Exclusion with the Help of the Family-Group-Conference (FGC)

1 www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0024/latest/DLM147088.html

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If the family defines a need for professional support within the framework of their plan, this is processed and granted according to the rules of the respective systems.

Experience and studies show

- Every family is able to develop a helpful plan if it wants to, because every family and its network has many resources at its disposal, some of which only come to light through the Family Council and can thus be used

- People with all kinds of biographical backgrounds are able and willing to support other people in their environment if they are invited to do so.

- The family council brings movement and positive energy into family systems that are often highly divided or have not been in contact for years. The resulting "social added value" is hardly measurable, but it is very effective in breaking traditional vicious circles.

- Affected families often have little or no confidence in their own ability to find and implement solutions. The effect of empowerment is all the greater if, with the help of their own network, they succeed in developing a good plan and putting it into practice.

FGC was developed as an instrument of child protection in youth welfare, the child/children are at the centre of the procedure, the responsibility of the family group for the well-being and healthy upbringing of the children is recognised and demanded, professional help supports the families in implementing their plans where they themselves consider this necessary. FGC is suitable for all target groups and fields of action of the European Child Guarantee Agreement if concrete problem situations exist.

In various municipalities in Germany, there are already well-functioning structures for the Family Council that could be transferred to other regions.²

The association Netzwerkkonferenzen e.V.³ is the mouthpiece of the German-speaking Family Council Network, which has been working together informally for over 15 years. The aim of the association is to make FGC and other conferencing methods better known and to contribute to structures that achieve a systematic use of conferencing methods and thus a strengthening of self-help forces and self-efficacy. We are convinced that this is a contribution to social cohesion, to strengthening civil society and thus also to promoting democracy.

2 Stuttgart: <https://www.stuttgart.de/buergerinnen-und-buerger/familie/familienberatung/familienrat.php> Berlin: <https://www.jakus.org/familienrat.html>

Hamburg: <https://www.hamburg.de/sozialraeumliche-angebote/7147328/familienrat/>

3 www.netzwerkkonferenzen.org

Netzwerkkonferenzen e.V. - Forum for the Promotion of Conferencing Methods

Hagenbeckallee 20, 22527 Hamburg

netkofgc@web.de

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Infographic - European Child Guarantee: how the EU protects children

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/european-child-guarantee/>

European Child Guarantee: how the EU protects children

The EU wants to break the cycles of poverty and disadvantage across generations, so that all children can thrive in life.

Protecting children in need

The European Child Guarantee provides guidance and tools for EU countries to ensure every child in Europe at risk of poverty has access to essential services.

1 in 5 children (under 18) in the EU are living in households at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

That amounts to nearly **18 million** children in need.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion

(% of population aged less than 18 years, 2019)

Data source: Eurostat, 2019

To protect children EU countries should guarantee every child in need access to:

- free early education and care
- free education
- free healthcare
- at least 1 healthy meal each school day for free

Children should also have access to

- healthy nutrition
- adequate housing

Breaking the cycle

Disadvantage and exclusion at an early age have an impact on children's ability to succeed later. To ensure a more equal future for all children, it's essential to break the cycles of poverty and disadvantage across generations.

1. Children grow up in poverty and social exclusion
2. This leads to disadvantages in education, development and skills
3. They might drop out of school or struggle to get a job
4. They end up in long-term unemployment or low paid jobs
5. Leading them and their families back to poverty and exclusion

Targeted support: making a difference in each child's life

EU countries should establish targeted **child guarantee national action plans**.

When identifying children in need, they should take into account the needs in particular of:

- homeless children
- children with disabilities or mental health issues
- children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin (particularly Roma)
- children in alternative (especially institutional) care
- children in precarious family situations

Investing in children's future

To ensure no child is left behind, EU countries should:

- allocate adequate resources from national and EU funds, in particular **European Social Fund Plus** and **European Regional Development Fund**
- make use of the **REACT-EU**, **InvestEU** and the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** where appropriate

For countries most affected: reserve at least **5% of European Social Fund Plus budgets** to fight child poverty and social exclusion.

Contributing to the EU social targets

European Pillar of Social Rights

Principle 11: Childcare and support to children

Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality.

Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.

EU target

Poverty reduction

At least 15 million less people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030, including at least **5 million** less children.

EU strategy for the rights of the child

Every child in Europe and across the world should enjoy the same rights and live free from discrimination and intimidation of any kind.

The European Child Guarantee is an integral part of the EU strategy for the rights of the child.