

Children's Rights and Economic Growth in Times of Austerity

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The Position of Children after the Global Financial/Economic Crises in Europe: A Consistent Message

- ‘Poverty, including child deprivation, is deepening ... In many countries child poverty has increased even more sharply than poverty rates among the general population. Austerity measures related to child and family benefits, generalised unemployment and rising food prices are central issues affecting the well-being of children’. ([COE Commissioner HR, 2013](#))
- The current financial and economic crisis is having a serious impact on children and families, with a rise in the proportion of those living in poverty and social exclusion in a number of countries ([European Commission, 2013](#))

Key Points

- The position of children in Europe after the global financial/economic crises
- The key features of 'austerity'
- What do children's rights require in terms of economic policymaking?
- Outlining alternatives
- What should the Council of Europe do?

The Key Features of 'Austerity'

- (Fiscal) austerity measures are actions taken by a state directed towards reducing its budget deficit. In post-crisis Europe, these have included
 - Public sector wage bills cuts or caps
 - Old-age pension reform
 - Limiting subsidises
 - Cuts to social protection programmes
- All of these measures have impacted on children**

What Do Children's Rights Require in terms of Economic Policymaking?

- CRC doesn't prescribe a particular economic model. But child rights have a lot to say about economic decision-making processes and outcomes
- Key provisions: Article 4 CRC and economic and social rights
 - States must 'progressively realise' rights – states must show that they are **moving as 'expeditiously and effectively' as possible** to full realisation of rights
 - States must use the 'maximum' of the resources available to them – this means **real** resources, not just current allocations
 - States must ensure children enjoy **minimum** essential level of rights ('minimum core obligations')
 - **Prohibition** on deliberate retrogressive measures (i.e., **backwards steps**) except in very limited circumstances
 - The **most vulnerable** children must be **prioritised** in economic policymaking
 - Economic policies must not have a **discriminatory** impact

There Are Alternatives to Austerity

- Moving from expenditure contraction to developing fiscal space by e.g.,
 - Re-allocating current public expenditures
 - Increasing tax revenue through progressive taxation
 - (Re)thinking about monetary policy
 - Borrowing or restructuring existing debt
 - Adopting a more accommodating macroeconomic framework ([Ortiz et al, 2011](#); [Ortiz & Cummins, 2012](#); [CWGL, 2011](#))
- **Challenge claims re the resources available to states for the realisation of children's rights**
- Establishing mechanisms requiring lenders (e.g., IMF, 'troika') to only lend to crisis-hit states that give significant guarantees to ensure child rights ([Eurochild 2009](#))

What Must the Council of Europe Do?

- COE bodies must start asking the 'children's rights' question when dealing with issues around economic policy; there is a need to use rights language to challenge the prevalent 'austerity'/'budget consolidation' approach
- COE actors must work with economists to integrate child rights concerns with economic analysis so as to provide rights-focused economic models
- Encourage member states to carry out child rights-based analyses of budget and economic decision-making processes and outcomes – both ex ante and post facto
- COE actors and member states must engage with (and challenge) EU actors' post-crisis policies /actions that threaten children's rights
- Post-2015 child rights strategy must engage with child poverty and economic decision-making in a meaningful way

Signs of a New Dawn?

- Draft Resolution on [‘Ending Child Poverty in Europe’](#) by PA Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, (adopted 14 March 2014):
 - ‘ensure that the aim of ending child poverty is given sufficient political weight and priority, including in dedicating adequate budgetary resources to social protection systems to make them effective, and that clear objectives and targets are set at the national level’

A good start but much left to do!