

**HOPE
AND
HOMES
FOR
CHILDREN**



ADVANCING CARE REFORM IN EUROPE: FROM GOOD PRACTICE TO GLOBAL COMMITMENT

Round Table Report



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*Hope and Homes for Children Mobile Team
visiting communities in Ukraine.
Hope and Homes for Children*





Photo 1: **Hope and Homes for Children Mobile Team visiting communities in Ukraine** / Hope and homes for Children

ROUND TABLE REPORT

The measure of a fair society is how it cares for its most vulnerable children: yet an estimated 5.4 million children¹ worldwide still live in institutions, including nearly 280,000² in the EU alone. The majority are not orphans - around 80% have at least one living parent. Institutionalisation is not a legacy issue. It is a present and active child rights challenge, one that is inseparable from poverty, inadequate family support, and the absence of community-based alternatives.

A clear and growing international consensus is building to end institutional care and replace it with family and community-based alternatives. At the UN General Assembly in September 2025, a global alliance of countries launched the Global Charter on Children's Care Reform, initiated by UK Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy. The Charter commits signatory countries to three aims: strengthening families and preventing unnecessary separation; ensuring safe and nurturing family-based alternative care where needed; and progressively ending the use of institutions for children. Over 35 countries, including a number of EU member states, and more than 120 organisations have endorsed the Charter to date.

This global momentum coincides with a critical juncture in EU policy. Negotiations on the post-2027 Multi-Annual Financial Framework are advancing, and decisions taken now on funding architecture, conditionalities, and social expenditure benchmarks will shape the conditions for care reform across Europe - and beyond - for years to come. The European Child Guarantee, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, and the EU enlargement process together constitute a powerful framework for driving reform. The question before policymakers is whether the next programming period will build on and strengthen that framework, or whether critical gains risk being diluted.

¹ Nowak, M. (2019). Report of the Independent Expert leading the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty. UN Doc. A/74/251. New York: United Nations General Assembly. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc/united-nations-global-study-children-deprived-liberty>

² European Commission (2026). Breaking the cycle of child poverty: strengthening the European Child Guarantee. COM(2026) 539. Brussels: European Commission: "More than 700,000 children are in alternative care in the EU, with nearly 40% of these children, notably with disabilities, remaining in residential institutions."

It was against this backdrop that, on 2 June 2026, European Parliament Vice President Victor Negrescu hosted a hybrid round table at the European Parliament in Brussels: *Advancing Care Reform in Europe: From Good Practice to Global Commitment*. The event brought together representatives from the European Commission, the Cyprus and incoming Irish Presidencies of the Council of the EU, EU member states, UNICEF, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Hope and Homes for Children, and civil society organisations. Its objectives were to take stock of progress in care reform across Europe; to share concrete lessons from countries at different stages of transition; to increase awareness of the Global Charter and encourage further endorsements and national commitments; and to identify the tools - legislative, financial, and political - needed to ensure no child is left behind.

This report captures the contributions of all speakers and the discussions that followed. It is offered as a record of the round table and a resource for those working to advance care reform at European and global level.

MEP VICTOR NEGRESCU

Vice President of the European Parliament

VP Negrescu opened the round table by placing care reform at the intersection of two defining European processes: the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the enlargement agenda. He underlined that, once post-2027 MFF resources become available, Member States, local authorities and stakeholders on the ground must be ready with a comprehensive and ambitious set of targets broad enough to reflect the diversity of needs, flexible enough to cover all possible solutions, and concrete enough to support interventions where they matter most: in communities, close to children and families.

He encouraged the Government of the Republic of Moldova to make full use of the funding available under the Growth Plan for Moldova to support the most vulnerable children, stressing that investing in children means investing in the future. He emphasised that European funds must not be limited to infrastructure alone, but must also support services, skills and human-centred interventions. Social intervention, particularly when it concerns children, does not always fit neatly into predefined administrative categories; therefore, programmes must be designed with the capacity to adapt to real needs as they emerge.

In this context, he recalled that some needs, including mental health support, were not sufficiently reflected when the current MFF was designed and later had to be addressed through adaptation and flexibility. This, he argued, shows why the next programming period must be built with a broader understanding of social needs from the outset. He also drew attention to the situation of children left behind when parents migrate for work, describing it as a persistent gap that requires dedicated European and national responses.

VP Negrescu recalled that, globally, 5.4 million children live in institutions, including approximately 300,000 in the European Union, while around 24% of children in Europe were at risk of poverty or social exclusion according to 2024 data. These figures, he noted, show that care reform is not a secondary social issue, but a central test of Europe's capacity to protect its most vulnerable citizens.

He also referred to existing implementation gaps, noting that the European Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee have not yet been fully delivered. In the context of the next MFF, he warned that the proposed 14% social expenditure benchmark under the ESF+ risks being absorbed by broad social projects unless clear safeguards ensure that targeted care programmes receive adequate support. He therefore called for the European Child Guarantee to be continued, strengthened and properly financed in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

OTTO SESTAK

Head of Knowledge and Partnerships, Hope and Homes for Children

Otto Sestak moderated the discussion. He opened by sharing an anonymous testimony of a child abandoned by their mother:

Almost five decades ago, the woman who gave me life took me by the hand and told me we were going for a walk. It was a rainy autumn day, but holding her hand, I went along without knowing I was setting off on the journey of my life. I can still feel the alley covered in rust-coloured leaves whispering beneath my steps.

That day, after hours of walking from my hometown - a mountain village in the country of my birth - we reached our destination, and our path stopped in front of a large, imposing house. There, in the hallway, we were greeted by a few women who took me by the hand, and encouraged by my mother, who told me she would come back later, I went with them. I didn't know that in that very hallway, we would be seeing each other for the last time. She left, not to return later, but forever.

What followed was a long night, with tears streaming down my face as I sobbed that I wanted my mother. That night, I learned what it means to cry in vain. That night, I was struck, to make me be quiet, so I wouldn't wake the other children. I was only five years old, and the Children's Home, as it was called back then, became my home for almost a year. The children around me were my brothers and sisters in suffering. We were all orphans with parents.

And yet, the magical day came - the day I was adopted. From that first meeting to their last embrace before leaving this world, the people who became my parents were the family I had never had. They were simple people from the countryside who raised me with love and care, and taught me the most beautiful lesson of all: to remain human, no matter the circumstances.

I was once a child of the system, and later I came to work within the very system that had once been my home. Now, I try to tell the world how important family is for each of us. Because yes, every child has the right to a family - a home where they truly belong.

My testimony is about chance, love, rebirth, forgiveness, and never giving up on dreams that, one day, will become reality.



OLIVIER BONTOUT

Deputy Head of Unit for Social Policies, Child Guarantee, and SPC, DG EMPL, European Commission

Olivier Bontout outlined the European Commission's policy approach since 2021, centred on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and its two main deliverables: the Commission Recommendation to Strengthen Child Protection Systems, and the Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee. He reminded that the Child Guarantee specifically recommends that member states take into account the best interests of the child as well as the child's overall situation and individual needs when placing the child into alternative care; to ensure the transition of children from institutional care to quality community-based or family-based care; and to support their independent living and social integration. He acknowledged progress with countries setting ambitious targets regarding child institutionalisation and gave the example of Greece aiming to end institutionalisation by 2030 and France adopting a 2022 law requiring that the child's best interests be considered during placement decisions. He noted that, nevertheless, the share of children in residential alternative care across the EU, according to the Child Guarantee monitoring framework, has remained around 40% and has not significantly decreased. He referred to the recent Social Package including the first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, a Strengthened European Child Guarantee communication, a communication to enhance the strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities to 2030 and a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion. Concrete measures include a new Alliance for Independent Living to, among other things, promote exchanges on deinstitutionalisation for children with disabilities, and a toolkit bridging the Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee to improve access to education and employment, including for care leavers. Homelessness prevention and access to housing will also be enhanced for care leavers, with concrete provisions included in the proposed Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion, which is now under discussion in the Council. He highlighted that EU funding and particularly ESF+ can play and has played an important role in supporting alternative care. He encouraged all candidate countries to implement the European Child Guarantee and publish national action plans, noting that regional collaboration is key given the shared challenges across enlargement countries.

DAVID BAILEY

Head of the Global Care Reform Campaign Team, UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

David Bailey presented the Global Charter on Children's Care Reform, launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2025 and now signed by over 35 countries including several EU member states. He was clear that the Charter builds on decades of European leadership rather than replacing it, and called on the EU to consider institutional endorsement. He reiterated the high-level of political will behind the campaign, from UK Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy. The Charter asks signatory countries to commit to three primary aims: strengthening families and preventing unnecessary separation; ensuring safe family-based alternative care where needed; and progressively ending the use of institutions for children. He outlined global actions being developed to sustain the agenda - around social norms, sustainable finance for children's care, data and evidence, accountability, and community and child-centred transformation. The campaign also addresses the orphanage industry directly, including voluntourism and the redirection of finance from the global north that currently sustains it. Ten countries have already made national reform commitments covering prevention, social work workforce development, family-based care, data and accountability, support for care leavers, and the meaningful participation of people with lived experience. The ambition is to grow signatories from 35 to over 80, and Bailey called on all countries represented at the round table that had not yet signed to do so.

OCTAVIAN BIVOL

Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF

Octavian Bivol offered a regional evidence base for the scale of the challenge, noting that Europe and Central Asia has 232 children per 100,000 in residential care — twice the global average — and that 80% of those children have at least one living parent. He stressed that institutionalisation is not simply a legacy issue but a current child rights challenge demanding sustained political commitment and investment. Drawing on UNICEF's multi-country evaluation across Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Tajikistan, he pointed to meaningful progress where political will and sustained investment had been present: Montenegro achieved a 64% reduction in children in residential institutions between 2010 and 2022; Moldova has significantly reduced numbers entering residential care through strengthened gatekeeping and family support; Bulgaria and Romania have also demonstrated important progress through sustained investment in community-based child protection and family support services alongside the gradual closure and transformation of large residential institutions. However, Bivol flagged a critical and worsening gap: in more than half of countries in the region with available data, the proportion of children with disabilities in formal residential care actually increased between 2015 and 2021. Poverty, inadequate family support, underdeveloped community-based services, and stigma continue to drive unnecessary family separation, and in times of crisis — conflict, displacement, economic shocks, pandemics, natural disasters — children in residential care face heightened vulnerability. He was clear that deinstitutionalisation cannot succeed through the closure of institutions alone: sustainable reform requires stronger preventive family support services, sustained investment in family-based alternative care and community services, inclusive education systems especially for children with disabilities, and a stronger social service workforce.

UNICEF acknowledged EU leadership through the Child Guarantee, the Recommendation on Integrated Child Protection Systems, accession processes, and financing supporting deinstitutionalisation and inclusive services. As discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework continue, UNICEF called for sustained EU ambition, coordination, and dedicated funding for child protection, family support, and care reform. He welcomed the Global Charter on Children's Care Reform and the growing coalition supporting it, as an opportunity to translate global commitments into measurable national action and ensure no child is left behind. He also reiterated UNICEF commitment to continued technical assistance, monitoring, and advocacy — particularly for children being left furthest behind.

MARK WADDINGTON

CEO, Hope and Homes for Children

Speaking from Ukraine, Waddington anchored care reform in its most acute real-world consequence: the vulnerability of children in institutions in conflict settings. He noted that an estimated 20,500 to 35,000 Ukrainian children have been unlawfully deported or transferred to Russia since the full-scale invasion, many taken from residential institutions in occupied regions. He presented new longitudinal research showing that children growing up in well-resourced institutions are 50% more likely to die than peers in family care — a risk higher than that associated with smoking — with early relational deprivation identified as the primary cause. In conflict settings, he argued, institutional vulnerabilities are massively amplified: shift-worker burnout, immovable buildings that complicate evacuation, and disrupted access to medicine and food. Against a global figure of 1.2 million children confined in institutions in conflict-affected countries, he framed deinstitutionalisation explicitly as a life-saving intervention. He called on the EU to maintain its global leadership through the next MFF with clearly earmarked funding; to close loopholes including the relabelling of institutions and the reinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities; and on all diplomats present to urge their governments to sign the Global Charter and bring concrete national commitments — so that every child can find their way Back to Family.

ELENA IOANNOU

Social Policy and Equality Attaché, Permanent Representation of Cyprus to the EU (Presidency of the EU Council)

Elena Ioannou spoke on behalf of the Cyprus Presidency, highlighting care reform as a central priority of the semester under the principle that no child should be left behind. She outlined the Presidency's key achievement: the adoption of Council Conclusions on Investing in Children at the June EPSCO Council, affirming investment in children as both a social responsibility and a strategic investment in Europe's future prosperity, resilience, and social cohesion. She also noted the Presidency's support for the Commission's social package in its entirety, including the strengthened Child Guarantee and the anti-poverty strategy. Within this framework, she stressed that placement in alternative care should be a genuine last resort, pursued only after real efforts to support the child within their own family and wider family network, while recognizing that, in certain cases, residential care remains necessary. Cyprus's own approach prioritises prevention and positive parenting support, with foster care as the preferred alternative where family care is not possible. She welcomed the Global Charter as fully consistent with Cyprus's values, and highlighted the Presidency's May conference "No Child is Left Behind," which emphasised integrated policies and children's participation in decisions that concern them. She concluded that the common objective must be to ensure that every child, regardless of background or circumstances, has the opportunity to thrive and enjoy the care, personalised protection, and love that every child deserves.

H.E. GREGOR SCHUSTERSCHITZ

Ambassador, Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU

H.E. Schusterschitz described Austria's care reform journey, which began in earnest in the 1980s and accelerated following the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. As a federal state with shared responsibilities between the national level and nine states, Austria was able to adapt its approach to regional circumstances - a structural advantage he returned to throughout. Austria closed essentially all large residential institutions and the Bundesländer (Austrian Regions) replaced them with decentralised facilities for groups of six to ten children, alongside socio-pedagogical shared living arrangements, crisis centres, and an expanded foster care system. He shared a lesson directly relevant to countries still in transition: deinstitutionalisation cannot succeed without simultaneously building alternatives. Three principles underpin Austria's smaller facilities - the formation of stable attachment relationships; integration into local public schools; and sustained support for children's families of origin so that out-of-home care remains a genuine last resort. His core message was distilled into four lessons:

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- ♥ Care reform needs a clear child rights foundation. The child is not the object of policy – they are the subject.
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- ♥ Reform must be gradual but determined, with a clear direction.
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- ♥ There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Austria's federal structure with 9 Bundesländer allowed states to adapt to regional circumstances, whether mountainous, urban, or rural. Decentralisation works.
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- ♥ Care reform must go hand in hand with investment in people. Qualified professionals are essential, and their shortage remains one of Austria's continuing challenges.
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He acknowledged continuing gaps: external oversight and complaint mechanisms for children, support for children with mental health conditions, and provision for unaccompanied minor refugees all require strengthening.

MIHAELA VASIU

Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Representation of Romania to the EU

Mihaela VasIU contextualised Romania's experience within the EU framework, welcoming the anti-poverty strategy and the strengthened Child Guarantee as instruments of particular importance, and noting that Romania was the first member state to publicly express support for the Commission's recommendations. She stressed that combating child poverty requires an integrated approach encompassing education, health and housing, with a strong emphasis on supporting vulnerable families and ensuring accessible services. She also flagged growing Council attention to children's digital environment, including possible age restrictions on social media and the implementation of the Digital Services Act and the AI Act. Referring to the Council Conclusions on Investing in Children, she underlined that deinstitutionalisation should be understood as an investment in children's rights and development, not merely a social reform. She noted that Romania has made strong use of EU funding - through ESF+, ERDF, and the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism - to advance its deinstitutionalisation process, before handing over to the President of Romania's National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption for specific examples.

HELENA OMNARU-RAICU

President of the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption

Helena Omnaru-Raicu provided the detail on Romania's reform journey. The starting point was severe: by 1989, following decades of communist-era policies that actively encouraged poor families and families of children with disabilities to place children in state institutions, more than 100,000 children were living in residential care, with over 60,000 child deaths per year from treatable or preventable causes. Reform unfolded across three phases. The first, from 1997 to 2001, focused on building alternatives: placement with the extended family, professional foster parenting, and adoption. The second, from 2002 to 2007, was an accelerated phase supported by significant EU political and financial investment - though she noted that small group homes became the preferred option during this period, in effect replacing one form of residential care with another. NGOs were essential partners throughout. The third phase, from 2007 onwards, continued at a slower pace toward the closure of remaining classic residential institutions. As of end-2025, Romania has approximately 34,200 children in its entire care system, with over 70% in family-type services and only 8% - around 8,000 children - remaining in residential services. She highlighted Romania's Child Guarantee reporting as showing a 9-percentage-point reduction in child poverty risk since 2021. She also noted that approximately 50,000 registered children have one or both parents working abroad - with the real figure likely higher - and that the Child Observatory, operating at local level since 2023, is working to improve identification of children at risk of separation. Finally, she described legislation enacted since 2025 requiring every level of public administration to maintain a children's consultation mechanism and convene children at least annually - an achievement recognised at Romania's UN review in Geneva last year.





ANNA RIECKEN

Head of Division Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU

Anna Riecken presented Germany's approach, putting families first as the most important place of education for children, alongside day care centres and schools. Germany has therefore invested in preventive parental guidance. The Federal Ministry for Education financially supports the training of parent mentors using ESF+ funds through the "Opportunities for Parents" programme. Until 2028, €45 million will be spent on 67 model projects, creating family-centred prevention chains based on parental guidance, implementing local education and counselling services and supporting families as children start day care and transition to primary school. The federal government provides €51 million annually to the early childhood intervention fund, helping to secure the nationwide network and psychological support for families. The coalition agreement provides for an increase in this funding and for a pilot project to expand support to older age groups. Germany is implementing the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child comprehensively and nationwide, across all six thematic areas. Current priorities include social participation and tackling child poverty, especially through the National Action Plan (NAP), and systematically promoting child and youth participation through student bodies and new formats. A key challenge remains ensuring better collaboration between federal, state, and local governments. The focus is less on new individual actions and more on structurally integrating children's rights into existing systems. She acknowledged that children's life circumstances are heavily shaped by the socioeconomic status of their families. The federal government therefore pursues a holistic approach integrating financial benefits and structural improvements, while working to simplify access to services and strengthen parents' labour force participation and ability to balance family and work. Investments in early childhood education and care include expanding day care infrastructure, introducing an entitlement to all day care places, and implementing the Startchancen programme, which supports schools with high proportions of socially disadvantaged children. A key coordinating tool is the NAP Committee - the first body to bring together federal, state, and local governments, civil society, researchers, and affected people to discuss how to better align actions for disadvantaged children. The Committee is also working on the second national progress report to the Commission under the European Child Guarantee reporting cycle, with special focus on the participation and educational opportunities of children with a migrant or refugee background.

ANASTASIA GRUZIN

Deputy Head of the Children's Rights Protection and Families, Children Policy Department at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Republic of Moldova

Anastasia Gruzin presented Moldova's deinstitutionalisation trajectory: from over 13,000 children in residential institutions in the early 2000s to approximately 350 today - a reduction of around 97% over fifteen years. This progress has been driven by Moldova's National Child Protection Programme 2022–2026 and is explicitly embedded in its EU accession roadmap. Key priorities now include developing at least 150 new foster care services to complete the transition to family-based care, and expanding the professional workforce - over 200 child rights protection specialists currently work at community level, and more than 4,200 professionals were trained in 2025 alone. Moldova is continuing to develop the Barnahus model: the first centre was established in 2022 in the north of the country and has assisted 270 children to date; a second became operational in April 2026 and a third is planned for the central region by December 2027. The country has undertaken significant legislative reform in 2025 to align child protection standards with EU requirements and is transposing the European Child Guarantee through a new national action plan, with its National Child Rights Programme to be revised accordingly. Further priorities include: developing and expanding new family-based services, including foster care; and new social services - one for the assistance and psychological rehabilitation of children who are victims of violence, neglect, or trafficking, and one for assisted social housing for children and young people leaving the care system and developing services for children with behavioural difficulties.

IRINA PAPANCHEVA

Senior EU Advocacy Lead, Hope and Homes for Children

Irina Papancheva presented Hope and Homes for Children's recommendations. She identified at least three current windows of opportunity for the EU to accelerate care reform and ensure all children are back with their families: the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Enlargement Process, and the Strengthened European Child Guarantee. The organisation's recommendations addressed all three.



On the next MFF

Hope and Homes for Children calls on the European institutions to:

- ♥ **Reintroduce horizontal and thematic enabling conditions** in the internal funding regulations, aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights, and requiring a national strategic framework for social inclusion and poverty reduction, including the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care, and preventative measures to support families at risk. The organisation noted that these are missing from the European Commission's proposals and from the European Parliament's interim report — a significant step back from what has been achieved for the previous and current programming periods.
- ♥ **Restore child poverty earmarking** for children and social inclusion within the National and Regional Partnership Plans, matching the current 5% ESF+ requirement and scaled up to 10% for countries with higher child poverty rates, to safeguard dedicated investment.
- ♥ **Ringfence a dedicated, transparent tranche for family- and community-based care** within both internal (at least 25% of allocations for social inclusion) and external instruments, and establish a labelled line item with public reporting to ensure funds reach prevention, family support, alternative family care, social work capacity and community services — not solely bricks-and-mortar institutions.
- ♥ **Strengthen references to children's rights across all** Regulations and ensure that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are applied with the same weight as rule-of-law conditionality, backed by adequate programmes and funding. The organisation recalled that the legal architecture already exists, at least in part: in 2022, the CRPD and CRC Committees issued a joint urgent statement finding that children with disabilities remaining in Ukrainian institutions face a disproportionate risk of mortality. The legal basis is there, it argued; what is missing is the political will to apply these conventions with the same rigour applied to the rule of law.
- ♥ **Maintain Global Europe commitments** to Ukraine, accession conditionalities, and the SDG framework, while explicitly addressing the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care.
- ♥ **Ensure robust procedures for the implementation of the Partnership Principle**, with inclusive, accessible and transparent participation protocols throughout design, planning, oversight and implementation, including of children and young people with lived experience.

On the Enlargement Process

Hope and Homes for Children calls for care reform to be monitored consistently throughout the accession process for all candidate countries — and particularly for Ukraine and Moldova, where the organisation works. Welcoming the recommendations on deinstitutionalisation included in the Enlargement Reports of recent years, it asked that this monitoring continue, including disaggregated data on children with disabilities in residential institutions, noting that over 50% of children in Ukrainian institutions have disabilities and are systematically excluded from evacuation and reform programmes. The organisation also called on the Commission to ensure that the reform remains a standing agenda item, backed by the necessary funding.

On the European Child Guarantee

The organisation recommends the introduction of a comparable indicator on children in residential institutions across member states. It further called on EU institutions to require clear commitments from enlargement countries to develop national plans for the European Child Guarantee – including on child protection and care reform – as a condition for receiving EU funds and technical support.

On the Global Charter for Children's Care Reform

Irina Papancheva noted that the Global Charter builds on international progress and mobilises governments to commit to reform. Encouraged that the Charter now counts 36 state signatories, the organisation strongly encouraged all countries represented at the round table to endorse it if they had not yet done so and, where they had, to bring forward specific, concrete pledges.

She concluded by expressing HHC commitment to working with all participants to ensure that every child around the world is back in a safe and loving family.

NESSA MCKEVITT

First Secretary (Fundamental Rights), Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU (forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU)

Nessa McKeivitt closed the country contributions by outlining Ireland's plans for its incoming Council Presidency, framed around the values of child rights, competitiveness, and security as mutually reinforcing priorities. Ireland endorsed the Global Charter on the basis of its strong legal framework requiring that the best interests of the child be the primary consideration in alternative care decisions, and is currently developing a new National Policy Framework for Alternative Care through a robust consultation process involving children and young people with care experience. She noted that approximately 86% of Ireland's 5982 children in alternative care reside in foster care — a figure she acknowledged compares favourably with many European neighbours, made possible by sustained investment in foster carer including a dedicated allowance. Ireland's Presidency plans include drafting Council Conclusions on children's participation in decisions affecting their lives, an area where Ireland has strong practice to share; work to progress the regulation on the recognition of parenthood; strengthening online safety for children; advancing legislative measures to combat child sexual abuse; and delivering on the Child Guarantee with a focus on parenting supports and early childhood education and care. Ireland also plans to showcase longitudinal research tracking the experiences of young people leaving the care system and transitioning to adulthood, with findings intended to improve support for future generations of care leavers. She committed to championing the full participation of children with disabilities in family and community settings — a thread that ran through the entire day's discussion.

OTTO SESTAK

Head of Learning and Partnerships, Hope and Homes for Children

Otto Sestak closed the round table by committing to concrete follow-up actions: the wide dissemination of the round table report and bilateral meetings with the countries represented at the event. He concluded by reiterating Hope and Homes for Children's commitment to working with the EU, governments and partners until every child is back in a safe and loving family.



About Hope and Homes for Children

5.4 million children around the world are unnecessarily confined to residential institutions, separated from family and at risk of serious emotional and physical harm, abuse and neglect.

Orphanages and institutions cannot provide children with the quality of care they need – children's care needs reform, family care needs strengthening.

We work to increase local skills and commitment, supporting partners to provide sustainable family-based solutions for all children, and to reform care systems away from institutional care and **Back to Family**.



**BACK TO
FAMILY**

** Names changed to protect identities*

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