



## OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

### Joint statement on 2013 Enlargement Package

Yesterday the European Commission adopted its annual Enlargement Package reporting on progress made by pre-accession countries towards possible EU integration.

The EU is currently faced with a historic opportunity to demonstrate its steadfast support for the transition to family-based care in its own Member States through the Structural Funds. As we await the final outcome of the budget 2014 – 2020 negotiations, Eurochild and Hope and Homes for Children emphasise their firm belief that the Union's political and financial support for child welfare reforms must also benefit children in the wider European region. These issues lay at the core of the Eurochild and Hope and Homes for Children campaign "[Opening Doors for Europe's Children](#)" which runs across 12 European countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Serbia.

Deinstitutionalisation in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is ongoing but progress has been slow and the process mainly driven by international organisations and their local non-governmental partners. Despite evidence that reform is possible, limited Government-level action has been undertaken. The [EU](#) stresses that whilst the use of foster care for children has slightly increased, institutionalisation remains the primary response to the needs of children without parental care.

The progress in the **Republic of Serbia** is on the right track, but children with disabilities and those belonging to the Roma community – the groups most at risk of prolonged institutionalisation, poverty and violence – are often excluded from the initiatives. The [EU progress report](#) unequivocally raises it as a concern, all the while complimenting Serbia for further decreasing the number of children in institutions.

With the ratification of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** in 2010, the EU has the obligation to take a firm stance on the promotion of rights of children with disabilities, who are among the most likely victims of institutional care. This extends to the Union's relations with third countries, including pre-accession and neighbourhood.

The importance of **coherence of messages** sent out by the EU cannot be underestimated. Eurochild and Hope and Homes for Children call upon the European Union to systematically evaluate the progress made towards full respect of children's rights and in particular the most vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities.

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Hope & Homes for Children

We urge the EU to capitalise on the **significant track record** of supporting child protection reforms in the context of previous enlargement processes (2004 and 2007). The Union's steady political pressure, financial support and transfer of know-how towards the then candidate countries were paramount to addressing the social emergency caused by institutionalisation of children. The lessons learnt yesterday must apply today.

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