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Policy Recommendations for Let's Talk about Children (LTC)

Context

[LTC method](#) is a short evidence-based child-centred psychosocial intervention to promote the mental health of children and prevent the intergenerational transmission of problems by identifying strengths, resources and everyday solutions for children, parents, teachers, and the network of families. By fostering coordinated, cross-sector action, LTC helps move systems away from fragmentation and siloed responses.

LTC is being implemented across nine European countries with adaptations to local contexts and explains its dual approach, working universally in school settings and in a targeted way with families in vulnerable situations, to strengthen protective factors in children's everyday environments.

This document is designed to provide strategic guidance for scaling and sustaining the Let's Talk about Children (LTC) approach across Europe. It takes a European-level perspective to help EU institutions, Member States, and key stakeholders embed LTC within broader mental health, education, and child-wellbeing frameworks. By situating LTC within current policy developments and system challenges, the brief aims to support long-term, coordinated, and preventive action that strengthens child-centred support across sectors.

Summary of key findings and what it means for policy

The policy recommendations are based on a multi-country comparative analysis conducted within the Let's Talk about Children project, combining desk research across nine EU countries with stakeholder consultations and early insights from LTC pilot activities. This mixed-methods approach examined national strategies, child and family-support systems, and existing coordination between health, education, and social services. By integrating policy review with practitioner perspectives and early implementation data, the analysis identifies common structural gaps and practical enablers, ensuring that the recommendations are evidence-based, context-sensitive, and aligned with real system needs.

Across all countries reviewed, a consistent picture emerges child mental health prevention is recognised as important, yet systems remain largely reactive, fragmented, and under-resourced. Estonia shows promising pilots but lacks national guidance; Italy, Greece, Romania, and Portugal highlight chronic underfunding, insufficient implementation of existing policies, limited teacher training, and persistent stigma. The Czech Republic lacks a national framework for children of parents with mental health challenges, and both Poland and Finland emphasise the need for systemic, cross-sectoral approaches such as LTC.

Implications for Policy

Europe is at a turning point: demographic challenges, rising child mental health needs, digital pressures, and widening inequalities require a shift toward early, preventive, and family-centred support.

LTC offers a scalable, evidence-based solution to prevent intergenerational transmission of mental health problems and promote resilience. The EU and Member States have a unique opportunity to mainstream child-centred approaches through coordinated action across health, education, and social systems. Multi-level engagement by policymakers, professionals, civil society, is essential to embed LTC sustainably and achieve a systemic impact.

The findings of the multi-country analysis make clear that early prevention will not progress without stronger, more coherent systems. Professionals such as teachers and primary care providers are often the first to notice difficulties, yet they lack the training and structured tools to intervene early. Evidence-based approaches like LTC can help fill this gap by giving all sectors a shared, practical framework to support children and families.

The following section consolidates key policy recommendations from the multi-country analysis, combining insights from national systems with broader EU-level opportunities for action. These recommendations address common challenges identified across countries and outline necessary reforms, both locally and at the European level, to strengthen early prevention, enhance cross-sector collaboration, and support the sustainable integration of the LTC approach within child-wellbeing, education, and mental health frameworks.

Policy Recommendations at national level

1. **Strengthen intersectoral coordination and shared responsibility** by enabling schools and healthcare services to follow joint protocols and shared referral pathways, making early prevention a shared responsibility across sectors.
2. **Embed LTC into national and local mental health policies** by establishing national frameworks for preventative, school-based mental health. Governments should formally integrate prevention programmes (such as LTC) into national education and health strategies to ensure consistent delivery and shared objectives across sectors.
3. **Support local implementation in schools and community services** by funding pilots and scale-ups via regional EU funding mechanisms (like ESF+) and the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034.
4. **Invest in early prevention and strengthen social and health workforce** by allocating stable national funding to increase staffing (psychologists, school counsellors, prevention specialists) and support local implementation of evidence-based preventive tools.
5. **Promote equity and inclusion** by prioritising access to LTC for families in vulnerable situations and by providing culturally and linguistically adapted materials and training.

Policy Recommendations at EU level

1. **Leverage existing EU and international frameworks to anchor childhood mental health prevention.** Anchor childhood mental health prevention within existing EU frameworks that guide Member State action, ensuring clarity, coherence and avoiding siloed policies.
 - Integrate childhood mental health prevention into the European Child Guarantee, going beyond early detection and treatment to include proactive, family-centred and school-based prevention measures.

- Embed prevention in EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Education Area, ensuring that mental health is recognised as essential to learning, development and wellbeing.
- Request Member States to report on prevention indicators (family and school collaboration, staffing levels, development of training offers) in their National Action Plans and bi-annual reports for the European Child Guarantee.
- Include mental health literacy as a core component in the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) and Youth Strategy, ensuring that children and young people have the skills to navigate digital environments safely.
- Ensure the rights of the child are respected, protected and upheld as cited in the UNCRC.

2. Strengthen cross-sector collaboration

- Encourage Erasmus+ or EU4Health programme/projects to develop and deliver joint training modules for teachers, psychologists, social workers, and other frontline professionals supporting shared approaches and stronger coordination. Training could include early identification and response to children's mental health needs, or safe and responsible use of digital tools in education and care settings.
- Introduce EU child wellbeing targets that encompass prevention, workforce capacity, mental health literacy, and safe environments both on and offline. Mainstream these targets across all relevant EU programmes (DG SANTE, DG EAC, DG EMPL, DG CNECT) to ensure coherence and sustained commitment.
- Establish a comprehensive mental health strategy that promotes a holistic, life-course approach integrating prevention, care and well-being across all relevant sectors. This strategy would provide a coherent framework to align Member States initiatives, reduce inequality and fragmentation, and ensure mental health is systematically considered and prioritised in all policies.

3. Making prevention systemic, not project-based or crisis-driven

- Fund sustained EU-wide campaigns to address stigma around seeking support, parental mental health, and psychosocial difficulties, ensuring consistent messaging rather than one-off initiatives.
- Monitor progress on the proposed child wellbeing and prevention targets through the European Semester's social recommendations, embedding mental health prevention within long-term economic and social policy coordination.
- Integrate these EU level prevention targets into Eurostat datasets, enabling comparable data collection, better monitoring, and evidence-based policy development across Member States.

4. Ensuring EU funding reaches prevention work in practice

- Direct ESF+, ERDF, Horizon Europe and EU4Health funding towards workforce development and school-based prevention infrastructures, ensuring Member States can make long term investments in early support systems rather than relying on short term or reactive initiatives.
- Prioritise national and EU-level funding for training that equips professionals and stakeholders with the skills needed to deliver high-quality, evidence-based prevention effectively across sectors.

- Ring-fence resources within EU budget: Preparedness and crisis management for child and youth (under 30) mental health and early prevention.

Conclusion: Why Early Prevention Matters

Early prevention is not only a societal priority, it is also a smart investment¹. Evidence consistently shows that supporting families early reduces long-term costs in education, social protection, and healthcare. Embedding LTC into national systems would strengthen Europe's human capital, reduce pressure on already overstretched services, and support more equal life opportunities for all children.

As aligned with Europe's important commitments, a child's right to grow up in nurturing, safe, and supportive environments is at the core of the European Child Guarantee² and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child³. By making early prevention a real priority, the EU can translate these rights into everyday practice.

A Call to Action

If Europe is serious about changing the trajectory of child mental health, it must invest in prevention, empower families, and create systems where professionals collaborate rather than work in silos. LTC provides the bridge between aspiration and implementation. With coordinated action, Europe can ensure that every child grows up supported, resilient, and able to thrive.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/child-and-family-well-being.html>

² https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/social-protection-social-inclusion/addressing-poverty-and-supporting-social-inclusion/investing-children/european-child-guarantee_en

³ <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>