

Bulgaria - Germany - Greece - Ireland - Italy - Spain

Country Reports



**Ensuring the European Child
Guarantee helps end child
poverty: Eurochild Taskforce
Recommendations**



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Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working with and for children in Europe.

We are striving for a society where all children and young people grow up happy, healthy, confident and respected as individuals in their own right. We aim to bring about positive changes in the lives of children, in particular those affected by poverty and disadvantage. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

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The Taskforce Teams were led by:

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- Germany - The German Children's Fund;
- Greece - The Smile of the Child;
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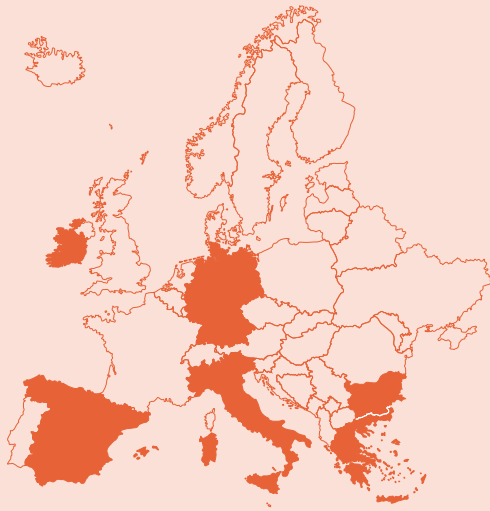
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Introduction



There are over 81 million children in the European Union. Children make up 18.2% of the total population. 24.2% of children in the European Union are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Child Poverty in the European Union

According to Eurostat:

- 24.2 % of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020, more than the other age groups of working-aged adults and older people;
- In 2020, households composed of a single person with dependent children recorded the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU (42.1 %);
- In 2020, 71.9 % of very low work intensity households with dependent children were at risk of poverty in the EU.

No child should experience poverty or social exclusion. These figures are indefensible and unacceptable. It is evident that the pandemic has worsened the situation but it has also made the situation and lived experiences of children living in poverty and social exclusion more visible. Living in poverty creates both immediate and long-term adverse and harmful effects on children and this lived experience has a clear negative impact on their development, as outlined in the First Years First Priority report, *'Snapshot of Early Childhood Development Data and Policies in Nine Countries: A Cross Country Analysis'*.

The ongoing COVID pandemic has further exacerbated inequalities throughout the EU, including a lack of access to quality education, both in school and online. Poverty in childhood prevents the realisation of children's rights and has long-term negative economic impact.

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Children who grow up in poverty not only have limited opportunities to fulfil their potential; they also have a much higher risk of raising their own children in poverty.

Frazer et al, 2021

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More and better quantitative and qualitative data are needed to inform policies and evaluate progress. Such data helps identify the children most in need, and can support monitoring implementation of the European Child Guarantee. For example, joint research from Eurochild and UNICEF proves that comparability on children in alternative care is possible across Europe. The [DataCare project](#) demonstrates the need for better data for better child protection systems in Europe and maps out how data on children in alternative care are collected and analysed. It contains a huge breadth of findings and information on 28 countries in Europe - EU27 and UK. It builds a compelling case for monitoring progress on deinstitutionalisation across the European Union as part of the implementation of the Child Guarantee. Several of the Taskforce Country Reports support this effort.

The Eurochild Taskforce Teams were invited to consider, from their knowledge and experience, what the National Action Plans for their countries need to contain to have the greatest impact on the lives of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The recent [progress and country reports from UNICEF](#), in partnership with the European Commission, on the implementation of Phase III of Child Guarantee in: Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and Spain, clearly demonstrate the potential of the Child Guarantee framework.

Recent Country Reports align to the Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce Country Reports. Both indicate the need for national governments to work in partnership with relevant stakeholders, including children, and for the National Action Plans to:

- Identify who are the children most in need, the key services that are not meeting their needs and the barriers these children are facing in accessing these services;
- Identify the current policies and activities that are providing accessible key services;
- Propose additional policies and initiatives, that will fill the gaps in services for the children most in need and set targets and timelines;
- Develop a framework for data collection, and to develop and monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

Every Member State has children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. While every country is different, all should be ambitious and demonstrate strong political will.

Factors influencing the risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU in 2020 included:

- Type of household — households composed of a single person with dependent children (42.1 %), single persons (33.2 %) and two adults with three or more dependent children (29.6 %) had the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion;
- Work intensity — 71.9 % of the population aged less than 60 years living in very low work intensity households with dependent children were at risk of poverty;
- Level of education — 50.5 % of children whose parents' level of education was low were at risk of poverty compared with 7.7 % of children whose parents' level of education was high;
- Migrant background — children with at least one parent with a migrant background were at a greater risk of poverty than children whose parents were both native born (32.9 % compared with 15.3 %);
- Living conditions — 14.1 % of households composed of a single person with dependent children were severely materially deprived compared with 7.5 % of all households with dependent children.



The Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

On 14 June 2021, Member States unanimously adopted the Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee. This initiative guarantees children in need access to a set of key services to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion. It focuses in particular on access to free healthcare, early childhood education and care, education, at least one healthy meal each school day, and effective access to healthy nutrition and housing.

Member States are expected to submit their National Action Plans in mid-March 2022. These action plans should outline how they will implement this Recommendation up to 2030. This means that civil society have had a narrow, but pivotal window of opportunity to influence measures and policies that will characterise the national fight against child poverty and social exclusion.

To seize this unprecedented opportunity, Eurochild created a Child Guarantee Taskforce, with 9 member organisations who have expertise in advocating towards national governments and are focusing on influencing the implementation of the Child Guarantee in their country. Over the past three months, Taskforce members have exchanged relevant knowledge and good practices,



reflected on more effective tactics and strategic communication to better influence the development of the Child Guarantee National Actions Plans.

At this time, we share six country reports, based on an assessment of criteria, as set out in the Child Guarantee, and the needs of their respective country. Taskforce Country Reports from: Bulgaria; Germany; Greece; Ireland; Italy; and Spain.



Key Recommendations for Child Guarantee National Action Plans

The following recommendations are collated from the six Taskforce County Reports and are applicable to all EU Member States in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the European Child Guarantee National Action Plans.



Governance

- National Coordinators must be provided with the mandate and resources necessary to carry out and accomplish their role, as set out in the Child Guarantee;
- They must work in collaboration or at least in partnership with all relevant stakeholders, including meaningful consultation with children;
- Governance must be transparent, participatory and collaborative, including the sustainable design and implementation of budget.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

- The identification of the children in need in each country must be wide-ranging and in-depth, and priority must be given to those children most in need. (AROPE is a statistical concept, and does not always relate to the actual 'children at risk of poverty of social exclusion' but can be used as a baseline).

Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

- The current provision of key services outlined in the Child Guarantee must be stated in the National Action Plans. Only by identifying what is currently available, can gaps in the provision and accessibility be identified.

Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a 'whole of government approach'

- A national integrated and enabling policy framework must be established, that encourages and supports collaboration across ministries to ensure consistency and address the intersectional and intergenerational cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

- The development and establishment of a national framework is essential for data collection and monitoring and evaluation. This should be developed and implemented with stakeholders, and aligns to EU level, which will support better targeting of children in need and the creation of impactful policy design;
- Targets should be quantitative (numbers of targeted children in need) and qualitative (indicators on the quality of key services provided);
- All financial aspects of implementing the National Action Plan (budgets) should be transparent and stipulate: the policy measure; geographic/territorial location of implementation; timeline; and the number of, and targeted group of children in need who will benefit from the program;
- All aspects of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plan must involve the participation of stakeholders: children and relevant civil society and regional, local and other relevant authorities.

Country Report Bulgaria

Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child
Guarantee National Action Plan
in Bulgaria



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Taskforce Lead

National Network for Children Bulgaria

Taskforce Team Members

Hope and Homes for Children - Bulgaria



There are 1,189,680 children in Bulgaria. Children make up 17.1% of the total population. 36.2% of children in Bulgaria are at risk of poverty or social exclusion

Governance

National actors and their functions

At the time of publishing this report, it was not possible to name the National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee in Bulgaria. The European Commission publishes [a list of National Coordinators](#) as provided by the national governments. It is not necessarily up-to-date.

In Bulgaria, three Ministries have a major commitment to the European Child Guarantee, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health. Cross-sectoral policies are not well developed in Bulgaria and in many cases are completely absent.

Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

To date, there has not been an open campaign to promote the European Child Guarantee and to involve all stakeholders in Bulgaria due to the current political situation. However, in the last quarter of 2021, more than 40 experts from various fields were

invited by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy to join an Interdepartmental Working Group for the Development of the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee. The group included representatives from almost all ministries, government agencies, as well as representatives of the non-governmental sector, business, trade unions, UNICEF Bulgaria, academics and researchers. The consultation was conducted online and each organisation had the opportunity to provide proposals on the structure of the National Action Plan and identify opportunities for contributing to its future implementation based on their activities in the field of access to services for children. However, the group has not met again, since November 2021.

According to the draft National Action Plan, the Bulgarian government is considering setting up consultations with children on the Child Guarantee. We strongly recommend that the consultation should involve the widest possible range of stakeholders, especially those working in the field who know the profile of different groups of children, as well as the barriers and reasons why change to children are at risk of poverty and who can provide working solutions.

Main Recommendations by Taskforce Bulgaria

- The government needs to clearly and concretely state the commitments, goals and powers of the National Coordinator and needs to instil accountability and commitment from across relevant national institutions and government agencies involved in implementing the Child Guarantee;
- The National Coordinator needs to be able to effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Child Guarantee. This can only be done through a comprehensive and robust data monitoring process at national level that also aligns to an EU level monitoring framework;
- The Child Guarantee must be adequately and transparently funded, with EU Funds and a national budget. The National Coordinator needs to be able to monitor and evaluate the budget to be able to effectively implement the Child Guarantee;
- Children's policies deserve special attention and a targeted approach that outlines problems and places a real focus on child poverty and possible solutions in the short and long term.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

One in three children in Bulgaria lives at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Poverty implies not only material deprivation, but also diverse challenges to access basic services. The dimensions of child poverty and social exclusion in Bulgaria can be seen from the following data:

- Poverty line: BGN 451.00 (EU 225.00) / month per household member;
- Persons below the poverty line: 23.8% (1,659,900 people);
- Proportion of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion: 33.3%;
- Proportion of children living in poverty: 28.3%;
- Share of children living in material deprivation: 38.5%;
- Large families at risk of poverty: 59.2%;
- Single-parent families at risk of poverty: 39.5%;
- Students at risk of dropping out of school: 25% (180,000).

There are significant regional differences in the numbers of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion. However, from the data, the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion is for large families

(nearly 67% of families, with two adults and three or more dependent children). The next risk group is single parents (nearly 49% of single-parent families with dependent children).

The educational status of the parents is also important; children are ten times more likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion when their parents have primary level/lower education compared to children whose parents have higher education.

The employment status of parents and the intensity of economic activity of households are essential with 90.3% of children in households with an intensity of economic activity of less than 20% are at risk of poverty, and this figure decreases with the increasing intensity of economic activity of parents.

Stepping up efforts – reaching more children in need

There is much to be done in Bulgaria to achieve the outcomes of the Child Guarantee. A starting point should be to create a comprehensive approach to the planning, implementation and monitoring of policies addressing child poverty and social exclusion. This could be done by:

- Defining child poverty as a separate problem for which specific goals and specific indicators should be formulated;
- Establishing mechanisms for intersectional exchange of information and cooperation across government ministries, municipalities, social services providers and NGOs, working with children and families;
- Supporting a comprehensive reform of human resource policy and the provision of human resources in the childcare sectors. In particular, the social sector and the child protection system, creating effective working mechanisms of interaction between institutions working with children and families, with a special focus on children in need.

Reducing child poverty and increasing child welfare in Bulgaria is impossible without breaking the cycle of generational poverty. A new policy approach is urgently needed. This process must involve parents and families by:



- Supporting parents to be active participants in the labour market through different services which are connected to the support of the family and the child;
- Ensuring inclusion and active involvement in the services and activities that support the child, having a family-oriented approach, as well as rethinking the system of social assistance.

Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

Current national policies and strategies

The most recent and complete review and analysis of the legislation in the field of children's rights are included in the UNICEF, A Deep Dive into the European Child Guarantee in Bulgaria, (UNICEF ECARO and UNICEF Bulgaria, 2022), [forthcoming](#). The following analysis of key services and policy reform are based on this report.

As the Deep Dive into the European Child Guarantee in Bulgaria report states, the current legislative framework relating to social assistance, the [Family Benefits for Children Act](#) in Bulgaria does not create a favourable environment for overcoming poverty due to an inadequate coverage of the guaranteed minimum income. There are one-time and monthly childcare allowances, as well as tax relief, but these measures fail to adequately compensate for inequalities, are not linked to social support, and some of them are discriminatory. For example, disproportionate

suspensions of monthly allowances for unexcused absences from school.

The [Child Protection Act](#) does not explicitly address the topic of child poverty, but formulates principles for action such as ensuring the best interest of the child are respected, identifies the categories of children at risk and determines the protection measures and their sequence and family support.

The [National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2021-2030](#) is the main national instrument that the government uses regarding the reduction of child poverty. The strategy proposes an integrated approach to activities based on children's rights. The strategy focuses on several target groups of children, but unfortunately there is very little data available on these children and it does not include all the mentioned groups. There is a lack of in-depth analysis of the factors that determine child poverty and the intersectionality of children in the

target groups. The strategy pays special attention to the parents of dependent children, for example by including measures to encourage employers to hire unemployed parents with children and organising training to update the knowledge and skills of parents after parental leave.

Gaps and omissions in current national policies

The legislative framework relating to social assistance does not create a favourable environment for overcoming poverty due to inadequate coverage of the guaranteed minimum income. Social assistance in Bulgaria is designed so that it does not lead to a real 'lifting out of poverty' for most of its beneficiaries, as the conditions for receiving benefits are limited to a very small group of families, and does not achieve the goal of leading to real change in the quality of life. At the same time, there are forms of assistance that are very minimum but are aimed at a very wide range of families, some of whom do not need benefits, but do need other forms of support. There is still no support system in place for energy poverty and utilities, which is one of the factors leading to very poor housing conditions for many children.

There are one-off benefits for pregnancy and child-rearing (including those not linked to family income) and monthly benefits that are linked to income and school attendance. For the upbringing of children with permanent disabilities in a family environment, as well as for children raised by a single parent, family benefits are provided regardless of the family's income. While total public spending on social assistance in the period of 2015-2019 has increased by more than 25%, childbirth and parental benefits have witnessed little to no increase.



Other significant relevant frameworks include the National Development Programme of Bulgaria 2030 and the Draft National Plan for Reconstruction and Sustainability of the Republic of Bulgaria. These documents set out priorities, target groups and areas of intervention aimed at reducing inequalities and social exclusion. However, as stated in the forthcoming UNICEF Deep Dive into the European Child Guarantee in Bulgaria report, they do not present child poverty as a separate sub-objective and, consequently, do not prioritise it.

At the moment we do not have detailed information on specific measures for the implementation of the Child Guarantee and combating child poverty. The only developed part of the National Plan contains only general positions and areas of impact without mentioning any specific measures. Furthermore, the available part of the plan completely omits considerations on the regional and local level.

A Strategic Framework for the Quality of Early Education and Care is currently being finalised. This should be available in January 2022. This instrument will also fill a regulatory gap with regard to early childhood development and early education and care services for children aged 0-7. Its upcoming adoption should launch serious reforms in this sector. A large-scale legal framework for the new Social Services Act is currently being developed. This framework will become the basis for reform in services provision and support, including services for children. The adoption of secondary legislation on the implementation of the Social Services Act is expected to facilitate access to the provision of services, create quality and financial standards.

Social workers in Bulgaria are critically understaffed and underpaid. This poses a great risk on the quality of the provided services due to constant personnel changes. In addition, people who went through the qualification process tend to leave the system very soon. There is a need not only for better wages for social workers, but also for supervision, intervention, support and further training, qualifications and professional development.

We believe there is a need for a comprehensive review of legislation affecting children. Currently, legislation is not well synchronised, some of it is outdated.

Real reform requires the complete removal of barriers to access for all vulnerable groups of children to all services. This requires an approach aimed at active engagement with parents, which is inclusive and supportive. There is also a need to change attitudes within society, that will lead to the removal of stigma and restrictions that create and enforce the marginalization of these children. Attention should be given to: removing barriers to the access of all children to health, education, social and other public services; creating an approach that involves and supports parents and carers; promoting systematic and consistent work to eliminate stigma and discriminatory practices.

An Updated Action Plan with a horizon to 2025 for the implementation of the National Strategy Vision for Deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria (2010 - 2025), should be elaborated in line with the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee. The closure of old-type institutions is not an end goal of the reform process but a means for achieving what is best for every individual child in the context of social inclusion and a family environment.

A National Paediatric Strategy is also needed, as child healthcare services suffer from staff shortages; do not ensure quality services to eliminate regional disparities; and there is a predominance of hospital care over early intervention such as pre-hospital care and prevention.

Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a ‘whole of government approach’

Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

Children are not adequately recognised in the general measures to reduce poverty and support families, as there is insufficient recognition and understanding in government that child poverty is a problem in itself. This has resulted in national institutions working in isolation from each other and matters being addressed only as ad hoc problems. There has not been the creation of long-term plans and policies that structure a comprehensive approach, a clear vision, transparent financial plans, secure and sustainable resources, and the recognition of human capital.

Since the beginning of 2021, Bulgaria is both in a crisis caused by the COVID pandemic and a political crisis, which includes elections being held three times in one calendar year, as well as presidential elections. The new government, consisting of a coalition of 4 parties, was elected on December 13, 2021 with Prime Minister Kiril Petkov. Due to this, it is impossible to predict what will be the policies and principles of the new government.

Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

The Child Guarantee must be adequately funded, and that funding must be transparent. The EU Funds include ESF+ funding, which must be at least 5% of the ESF+ allocation. This means that the Government of Bulgaria must financially support the Child Guarantee with EU Funds and a national budget. There are high hopes that the new government and new political players will bring a new style of work more in line with European standards and trends. A key factor in building an enabling and effective framework for child-centred policies is the general understanding of the importance of the issue. Children's policies deserve special attention and a targeted approach that outlines problems and places a real focus on child poverty and possible solutions in the short and long term, include financial securities to a much greater extent (change of socio-cultural and economic models, behaviour, attitudes, life prospects). They should benefit from the creation of comprehensive support through services and qualified professionals.

Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Existing checks and balances

There is a lack of sufficient and systematically collected data to build a comprehensive profile for specific groups of children. For many groups of children there are no data, including the number of sub-groups, for example, the education children with disabilities are receiving, which is partly a problem of defining the boundaries of the group. It is necessary to create a framework and collect quantitative and qualitative data on the number, profile and factors influencing the lives of children living in each of the groups. To effectively monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee nationally and across EU countries, national specificities must be taken into account.

Suggested steps towards a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework

In Bulgaria, the monitoring process should include specific data on: the number of children in residential care (institutions and residential social services); the number of children in alternative care; the number of children in formal family-based care; the percentage of children in residential care as a proportion of the total number of children in alternative care; children with disabilities (in all forms of care, including family care); child labour; school dropouts; children of single parents; orphans; migrant children; child victims of trafficking, exploitation, and domestic violence (or other forms of abuse).

There is no dedicated Children's Ombudsperson in Bulgaria. However, there is a large amount of support for an Ombudsperson and the vast circle of non-government organisations (NGOs) currently working for the benefit of children and in the field of children's policies can provide much knowledge and expertise. However, the capacity of NGOs in Bulgaria is limited by financial instability. They are also negatively affected by the attacks on the NGO sector in recent years, coming from far-right movements, traditional and religious formations and the spread of misinformation and fake news. In this sense, NGOs are in great need of external and internal support for their work and for

the establishment of civil society as a working and meaningful corrective aid to the state, especially with regard to holding the government accountable.

NGOs in Bulgaria will continue to participate in all the working groups, consultations and formations that are relevant to the application of the Child Guarantee, as well as initiating our own activities to influence the government institutions. The Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce in Bulgaria is planning to develop a communication strategy that aims to reach the maximum number of people - not only professionals but also citizens, to inform them of the European Child Guarantee, and to understand the goals, benefits and the opportunities it provides. However, the National Coordinator should organise a series of events on the topics of the Child Guarantee, with the aim to educate the representatives of the involved institutions about the national context and about possible solutions. The National Network for Children are keen to discuss these ideas further with the National Coordinator, when nominated.

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The Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce in Bulgaria has extensive experience in working with different governments and institutional partners over the years and in the dynamically changing environment of NGOs. We are able to create the necessary prerequisites and relationships with the responsible institutions and politicians to closely monitor and influence the implementation of the Child Guarantee while protecting the best interests of the child and high standards practices.

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Country Report Germany

Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child
Guarantee National Action Plan
in Germany



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There are 13,677,902 children in Germany. Children make up 16.4% of the total population. 25.1% of children in Germany are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Governance

National actors and their functions

At the time of publishing this report, it was not possible to name the National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee in Germany. The European Commission publishes a list of National Coordinators as provided by the national governments. It is not necessarily up-to-date. The Department for International Family Policy has done some preliminary work on the issue, but there is no draft of the National Action Plan available at this time.

Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

As part of a pilot project in cooperation with the European Commission, UNICEF published a “policy deep dive” country report which lays the foundation of the German National Action Plan.

This report analyses existing policies and legislation to identify gaps and barriers to children to access the key services of the Child Guarantee.

It is encouraging that the new government has set its sights on working towards equal opportunities for all children and young people and fighting child poverty, also in the framework of a more social Europe. The new governing coalition made up of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) announced in their coalition agreement that, among other things, it aims to lift more children out of poverty, to provide better chances for children and young people by means of a Kindergrundsicherung (Child Basic Income) and to concentrate on those who need the most support.

The Department for International Family Politics has attended recent events organised by civil society on the Child Guarantee. However, at this time, there has been no official information from the government. Since the new government was only sworn in on 8 December 2021, and the lack of information can put down to the government transition period, it has yet to be seen if and how it will keep its promises.

Main Recommendations by Taskforce Germany

For the National Action Plan to successfully contribute to the proclaimed aims of the new government and to fulfil its child rights obligations, the following key issues should be taken into account:

- The German National Action Plan should focus on children and families who are at an increased risk of the effects of living in poverty. Focusing on addressing precarious life situations is a more appropriate way to help children and families experiencing poverty and allows us to better grasp the intersectional disadvantages;
- Both the drafting and the implementation of the German National Action Plan should be guided by the real participation of children and young people. This includes focus group discussions to obtain targeted perspectives from children and young people in need, which are often not (adequately) represented in current data and surveys, as well as a broader, constant form of participation covering the entire timeframe until 2030;
- The National Coordinator must therefore work closely with the relevant actors on the Länder (Federal State) level. Furthermore, the National Coordinator particularly needs to involve communal administrative actors to ensure that the measures reach families on the ground;
- The National Action Plan must be viewed as one part of a comprehensive strategy to fight child poverty, which combines infrastructure and financial measures;
- Sustainable solutions must be sought when it comes to creating and/or maintaining high-quality social services; the shortage of skilled workers in the social sector is a major problem;
- It is crucial to develop the National Action Plan with an inter-agency approach and ensure that all relevant actors are on board from the start i.e. children, families, civil society organisations, political decision-makers, administrative actors;
- The National Coordinator should be able to work independently and should have the necessary resources and competencies to involve all relevant agencies. We recommend to place the Co-ordination Office in the Federal Chancellery in order to ensure this.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

Focusing on life situations with an increased risk of poverty, the European Child Guarantee recommends Member States to identify children in need while considering the specific disadvantages experienced by different groups of children. This includes, among others, homeless children, children with disabilities, children with mental health issues, children in alternative care - of which there are almost 150,000 in Germany, children with a migrant background and children in precarious family situations.

We want to emphasise that the Child Guarantee must live up to its name and its aspirations by working towards guaranteeing equal access to important services for all children. The German National Action Plan should focus on real life situations where children

and families are at an increased risk of the effects of living in poverty. Focusing on addressing precarious life situations is a more appropriate way to meet the individual needs and lived experiences of children and families experiencing poverty and allows us to better grasp the intersectional disadvantages.

Stepping up efforts – reaching more children in need

Enabling real participation of children and young people

We are convinced that only through the real participation of children and young people can we gain a comprehensive assessment of factors in their life situation that lead to an increased risk of poverty. Through genuine participation, we can also better understand how preventive approaches can mitigate the consequences of poverty. Existing structures, like schools, childcare facilities and youth work

institutions, should be used to facilitate participation. Insights from earlier child participation processes should also be considered.

Both the drafting and the implementation of the German National Action Plan should be guided by the real participation of children and young people. This includes focus group discussions to obtain targeted perspectives from children and young people in need, which are often not (adequately) represented in current data and surveys, as well as a broader, constant form of participation covering the entire timeframe until 2030. Again, existing structures and participation forums on both the Länder and the communal level should be made use of, like child and youth parliaments and their umbrella organisations. The (field-tested) qualitative guidelines for successful participation of children and young people which were initiated by the German Ministry of Family Affairs as a part of the “Action Plan for a Child-Friendly Germany 2005-2010” should be followed. The guidelines have been developed by an independent research institute – the German Youth Institute (DJI) - involving a working group of main stakeholders, experts and professionals from the field. The guidelines for participation of children and young people are being revised by the Deutscher Bundesjugendring, the German Federal Youth Council (DBJR). Since 2010, they have found broad acceptance as well as practical implementation in Germany.

Including civil society and the communal administration

Given Germany’s complex federal political system, not only is inter-agency coordination required to achieve the Child Guarantee, but also cooperation among all political levels must be ensured. Most of the areas covered by the Child Guarantee – first and foremost education and health – are governed at a Länder level. However, the Federal State can and must shape the legal and financial framework. The National Coordinator must therefore work closely with the relevant actors on the Länder level. Furthermore, the National Coordinator particularly needs to involve communal administrative actors to ensure that the measures reach families on the ground. A feasibility study in cooperation with the communes can help to identify and reduce challenges when working beyond the different political levels.

As a vital stakeholder, civil society must effectively be included both in the planning and the implementation of the Child Guarantee Action Plan. Here, too, existing structures and platforms should be used, e.g., the Nationale Armutskonferenz (German Anti-Poverty Conference, member of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN)) and the Ratschlag Kinderarmut (network of 69 German organisations committed to fighting child poverty).



Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

Current national policies and strategies, and gaps and omissions

Combining infrastructure and financial instruments

The National Action Plan must be viewed and conceptualised as one part of a comprehensive strategy to fight child poverty which combines infrastructure and financial measures. The introduction of a Kindergrundsicherung (Child Basic Income) and the new calculation of the subsistence level are important components of such a comprehensive strategy regarding the material support of children and their families. In addition, the digital Kinderchancenportal für Bildungs- und

Teilhabeleistungen (digital platform for children's equal chances), the legal right to full-day care in primary school education which gradually comes into force from 2026, the needs-based expansion of mental health services, more school social work and other relevant measures planned by the government need to be factored in. Furthermore, all measures by the government should be assessed in terms of their affect on the situation of children and young people at risk of poverty.

Enhancing social infrastructure and training professionals

The comprehensive strategy must also include measures to expand and improve the social infrastructure required for the Child Guarantee. Only where health services, schools, leisure facilities and sports clubs are available can access to services be guaranteed as foreseen in the Child Guarantee. Here in particular, the urban-rural divide must be considered. When it comes to creating and/or maintaining high-quality social services, the shortage of skilled workers in the social sector is a major problem, which requires sustainable solutions. Studies predict that Germany will experience a lack of 230,000 professionals in early childhood education and care in the coming years. But the general shortage also applies to school teachers and professionals in the Child and Youth Welfare Services. The quality of the services included in the Child Guarantee depends highly on the professionals' qualifications. In rural areas especially, there is often a lack of teachers, childcare workers, social workers, and other professionals. The impacts of the COVID pandemic must be critically considered in this regard.



Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a ‘whole of government approach’

Current national policies and strategies on children and young people, and suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

Establishing inter-agency coordination

The comprehensive fight against child poverty is a challenge that requires joint action of all relevant actors: political and administrative stakeholders, civil society, professionals, as well as each and every individual. It is all the more important to develop the National Action Plan with an inter-agency approach from the start and to make sure early on to have all relevant actors on board.

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We welcome that the German federal government and the other Member States of the European Union have decided to adopt and implement the European Child Guarantee. Child poverty is a far-reaching problem in Germany too: Every fifth child in Germany lives in poverty. Despite the country’s good economic development, child poverty has stagnated at this high level for almost two decades.

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At a national level Germany so far lacks an integrated approach to preventing child poverty. However, several municipalities, often supported by the Länder, have successfully linked different policy areas as well as support services to children and families in so-called “local prevention chains”. One example is the project “Leave No Child Behind!”, a joint initiative by the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Bertelsmann Foundation.

It is of central importance to acknowledge the multidimensionality of the causes and consequences of child poverty. In practice, this means that not only the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth must be involved, but also the Federal Ministry of Health, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the new Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Building. The National Coordinator should therefore be able to work independently instead of being attached to a single ministry and should have the necessary resources and competencies to involve all relevant agencies.

Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Existing checks and balances

For the National Action Plan to have a real impact on the living conditions of poor children and families, concrete targets and indicators need to be defined. This is a prerequisite for the further development of the policy. Existing monitoring and reporting systems, like the State Report Cycles for the UN Convention on the rights of the child and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), can be a fruitful basis.

Suggested steps towards a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework

Civil society should play a part in the process of defining and assessing indicators and targets. There continues to be a lack in many areas of the data needed to assess the implementation of measures to fight and prevent poverty. Vulnerable groups of children and young people are often not adequately represented in the existing data. [Eurochild's DataCare findings released in Dec 2021](#) provides an example for greater representation of children in alternative care. A further example, is the lack of data on the impact on children and young people of measures taken to manage the COVID pandemic in Germany. Vulnerable groups of children were hit especially hard by the various lockdown restrictions, and to adequately meet their needs in the catch-up measures taken by government it is crucial to include specific sets of research criteria when collecting data. Another important instrument in the assessment of the action plan's success should be the participation of children and young people. Here, again, a variety of surveys and consultations is already available, for example the [World Vision Children Study](#), the [Child Rights Index by the German Children's Fund \(summary in English\)](#) or the [consultations](#) in the framework of the State Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. As the target group of the measures, the views of children and young people should play a central role in the evaluation of the measures and should guide their further development.

Further Information from the Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce in Germany

The German Children's Fund, as the Eurochild Taskforce lead in Germany, in cooperation with Kindermitte e.V., has invited civil society actors working on child poverty and children's rights to jointly publish a key issues paper on the Child Guarantee in Germany. In this paper we provide recommendations for implementation from a child rights perspective and we use the paper as a basis to participate in the (public) debate. You can find the key issue paper (in German) and the participating organisations under the following link [here](#).

This Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce Country Report is a preliminary summary of the issues discussed in the key issues paper.



Country Report Greece

Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child
Guarantee National Action Plan
in Greece



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Taskforce Lead

The Smile of the Child

Taskforce Team Members

Roots Research Center NGO, Greece;

Iliachtida-Hospitality Centre for Sick Children and Family, Greece.



There are 1,854,378 children in Greece. Children make up 17.3% of the total population. 31.5% of children in Greece are at risk of poverty or social exclusion

Governance

National actors and their functions

National Coordinator Mrs. Artemis Anagnostou-Dedouli, Honorary Director-General of Social Security and Welfare, at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and Chairman of the Board at the National Center for Social Solidarity.

The National Center for Social Solidarity is under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which is the Ministry responsible for the thematic areas of (a) child protection (b) poverty alleviation (c) social security and (d) employment. The Ministry oversees, among other things, basic welfare programmes for child protection, such as foster care and adoption, children's access to day-care centres, as well as child protection benefits such as child benefit, birth allowance, and allowance for disadvantaged areas. In the context of anti-poverty programs, it is responsible for the minimum guaranteed income, social structures fighting poverty such as services and accommodation for the homeless, free meals, social groceries, social pharmacies, housing benefits and the social integration of minorities, etc. It also cooperates with

other Ministries such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry works closely with Eurochild members as it is also in charge of the Certification of our Organisations who are providers of primary, secondary and tertiary social care services.

Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

UNICEF (November, 2020), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Greece, launched the two-year program "Child Guarantee" in Greece that consists of six actions/pillars focusing on deinstitutionalisation, reinforcement of foster care, support for autonomous living for care leavers, work readiness for vulnerable youth, inclusive education and research on child poverty and social inclusion.

Most child rights organisations active in the field attended the meeting and have regularly been informed about the outcomes of this 2-year programme. Many of the above are regulated by the provisions of the new Law 4837/2021 on social protection.

At present, the National Coordinator for the European Guarantee for Children has requested from civil society organisations active in the field of child protection (such as The Smile of the Child, SOS Children's Villages, Metadrasi, the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities etc.),

State bodies such as the Regional Social Welfare Centres, the Institute of Child Health but also the Child Counsel, to nominate representatives to participate in the procedures for the preparation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee.

Main Recommendations by Taskforce Greece

- To expand the programme of support for the family services in the communities aiming at the detection and prevention of violence, abuse, substance abuse and child neglect. The support of families of low socio-economic background should include:
 - legal/expert advice regarding the legal documents and access to allowances.
 - educational programmes including learning languages & strengthening parenting skills.
 - provision of mental-health services.
 - jobs advice as well as more programmes are needed to help unemployed parents enter the labour market (for example employers in large companies could be required to ensure at least 10% of their employees are parents who have been unemployed).
 - provide temporary housing to families experiencing poverty (for example by renovating unused publicly-owned property);
- To expand the provision of all types of social services aimed at supporting children whose families are struggling, including Day Care Homes offered by The Smile of the Child. These services must be aimed at preventing separation of children from their parents whilst ensuring children receive the necessary care, education and stimulation needed for their holistic development;
- To check and enforce compliance with the basic standards of child care in residential settings, it is necessary to establish a robust mechanism that would provide: a) regular monitoring and reporting of data on operation of residential settings according to agreed indicators. Reported data/ indicators should be provided online in harmonised format to allow transparency and accountability. b) a compliance checking mechanism allowing for risk based inspections that would verify the data and conditions in situ;
- To develop a network of specialised mental-health structures (hospitals, medical centres, etc.) and services at community level to be accessible for all children to prevent hospitalisation and provide adequate care for children with psychiatric diagnosis. (Psychiatric clinics in hospitals also need increased capacity to cope with demand).
 - Public mental health services should be adequately staffed to respond to the part of psychiatric assessments as well as to a regular psychiatric monitoring and/or therapeutic support.
 - Hospitals should not be the only option available to children with psycho-communication problems (and not psychiatric) and mental health problems. There is a need to enable children and their families to access individualised and community-based services. Long stay of children in hospitals is particularly concerning. More effort should be invested in ensuring their speedy transition into foster families or other facilities providing the necessary quality of care;
- To improve the nutrition of children, in particular those living in families facing serious financial difficulties, schools should teach and implement (promote) a healthy lifestyle (exercise, healthy diet and sports). Through funded programmes, schools should provide at least one free meal during the school program. For example, contribution to the lunch for all children could help avoid the stigma of the poor students;
- To ensure children's right to education it is important to remove additional costs for families facing financial difficulties, for example tutoring, stationery costs, etc.. Schools should provide remedial teaching, foreign languages learning and computer learning.
 - The strengthening and increase of social tutorials is also a factor that will contribute to the children's free access to education. For example, the Social Tutoring Centres work with volunteer teachers and provide free additional teaching support to

students from needy or financially weak families in the respective Municipality.

- All children including the most vulnerable must be equipped and trained to be able to access online education.
- Social workers and psychologists need to be placed in all schools, in order to better address the needs of children and connect with other services and support for the children;
- Deinstitutionalisation should continue by prioritising and development of family-based care for children in alternative care. In Greece, there are still 1,600 children with and without disabilities who grow up in residential settings. The UNICEF

pilot project on deinstitutionalisation should be expanded to all regions;

- The cross-sector cooperation among local authorities, the juvenile prosecutors, the District Attorney, as well as social and health services needs to be improved. Children taken from the families should be primarily placed to foster care and their families received adequate support and therapy. Enforce the implementation of the regulation regarding placement of social workers in every District Attorney's Office;
- Municipalities should invest in ensuring all children have free access to sports activities (e.g. more suitably equipped sports centres), as well as expanding activities with schools.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

- Child victims of abuse who need protection from the state, hospitality in child protection areas or directly to adoptive/foster families. Children Victims of Sexual Abuse highlight the need for the implementation of Child-friendly Justice;
- Children with psychiatric problems who need hospitality and general support in specialised structures. Childhood and adolescent mental disorders are a complex problem due to the serious consequences that can lead to mental pain and dysfunction (disturbed relationships with peers and family, low school performance, etc.) that often accompany them, and/or financial burden of the family and society;

In Greece, anxiety disorders (the most common, affecting about 13% of young people aged 9-17 years), include panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, and phobias. (5%). Eating Disorders (psychogenic anorexia and bulimia, 1%). Psychotic Disorders (schizophrenia, bipolar or manic-depressive disorder, up to 1% in older adolescents. Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder 0.6% (5-7%). Autism Spectrum Disorders (0.6%).



- Children with disabilities;
- Children experiencing substance abuse and/or neglect and abuse within their family. These children very often are left without family on the streets;
- Children (0-18 years) living in institutions – closed child protection structures. Enforcement of implementation of the approved legislation to ban placing of all children including young children 0-5 years old in particular, in institutions;
- Uninsured children, especially those in need of rehabilitation such as speech therapy, for example, minors who are placed in institutions due to the removal from their biological parents who fall into the welfare of the State;
- The unaccompanied minors;
- Adolescents at risk of offending;
- Roma children.

Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

Current national policies and strategies

- Existing policy frameworks such as Law 4538/2018 on adoptions and fostering aim to more accurately record children in child protection services and support deinstitutionalisation with a) control of adopters or foster parents, b) registration of children and renewal of Individual Family Rehabilitation Plans) and substantive procedures (drafting of the Individual Family Rehabilitation Plan, nationwide matching between parents and children, parent education, etc.), and c) return of children to their biological families. In addition, according to the new law 4837/2021 for the strengthening of child protection systems, the creation of Semi-Autonomous Living Hostels for young people over 15 years old is envisaged in order to integrate them more easily into society. For Persons with Disabilities, the Institution of Personal Assistants was introduced;
- Regarding child abuse within the child protection system, in each unit of the Child Protection Institutions a Juvenile Protection Officer is appointed and a National System for Recording and Monitoring Reports of incidents of child abuse has been established;

- Regarding the early childhood education and care, the programme “Kypseli” aims to: a) develop and enhance the capabilities and skills of infants and toddlers mainly through play and with respect to the uniqueness and individual growth rate of each infant and toddler, as well as the strengthening of the relationship between family and station; and (b) regularly monitor and evaluate the development and progress of infants and toddlers, in order to achieve early detection of abilities and needs and referral for further investigation of any learning difficulties, disabilities or other disorders. Creation of the “National Council for Preschool Education and Training” has been proposed as an advisory and consultative body;
- The framework has been established for the provision of home care services for infants and toddlers by a Curator and for the implementation of the Action “Neighbourhood Nannies”, with the aim of promoting equality between men and women in employment, through the harmonisation of professional and family life of working parents, and supporting women’s access to and position in the labour market;
- Municipalities and their legal entities, Social Welfare Centres, natural persons, as well as legal entities under private law, for-profit or non-profit, may provide hospitalisation and run rehabilitation centres for the provision of health services.

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To accomplish an ambitious, comprehensive and effective action plan of the European Child Guarantee the Child Guarantee National Coordinator should continuously collaborate with the civil society organisations as well as with the government agencies such as the social welfare centres and the Deputy Ombudsman for Children’s Rights.

- Roots Research Center NGO, Greece

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Gaps and omissions in current national policies

In anticipation of the Ministerial Decision that will clarify the basic parameters of the professional fosterage and the amount of financial support for the correct implementation, the professional and specialised foster care should be adopted as soon as possible including adequate funding in order to serve children with disabilities and adolescents at risk of offending. Public awareness campaigns are needed to recruit new foster carers and increase the public understanding of fostering and challenge the common perception that fostering is a step towards adoption.

In regards to implementation of procedures and protocol for the implementation of the institution of kinship foster care at an earlier stage of the request for hospitality and the removal of the child from the wider family environment, there is a need for: a) training for First Instance Prosecutors who do not specialise in juvenile matters and b) implementation of

a protocol for the process of removal of children from the biological family when it is deemed inappropriate or unable to care for the minor child.

As far as Child Friendly Justice is concerned, the procedure for the abused child in Greece is exhaustive; as it includes repeated testimonies of children-victims in different services and makes it particularly traumatic for minors, who are re-victimised. The opening of the Independent Offices of Minor Victims or “Children’s Homes” (Barnahus model), adopted by Law 4478/2017, should be implemented. Houses were rented in five cities; many psychologists were trained in the US National Child Advocacy Center (NCAC), but proceedings “were frozen”.

There is also a need to establish long-stay hostels and provide meals for needy families on a daily basis in all municipalities and cities of the country.

Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a ‘whole of government approach’

Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

A range of relevant policies and organisations have been established in Greece:

- A Special Roma Secretariat has been set up at the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, with responsibilities for coordinating Roma social inclusion actions. The “Roma Advocacy and Human Rights Observatory” is also an essential bridge to human rights, connecting the relevant bodies with the community;
- The Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity Organisation was created for the functional sectors of family benefits, the uninsured elderly and the Rural Home Account, and reflects the priorities for combating social exclusion;
- A National Register of Social Care Institutions has been created.

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Each child is a unique newcomer to this world, guaranteeing the link from the past and the present to the future. And each child is therefore entitled to be given proper chances to deploy its full potential, for its own sake but also for the sake of our society’s continuum.

- The Smile of the Child

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- A law on the rights of people with disabilities has been adopted and the operation of the Disability Certification Centres have been simplified;
- Recent Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Health to open new treatment centres for children;
- Establishment of a National Mechanism for the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of integration and cohesion policies.

Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

- There must be adequate staffing of social services including within child psychiatric departments in hospitals;
- Support structures for children with psychiatric problems and structures with drug rehabilitation programs especially for children must be created;
- Better support for juvenile delinquency is needed. Staffing of the juvenile prosecutors' offices with social workers. Provision of foster care treatment for adolescents at risk of offending;
- Reinforcement of the social services in regional and local level and the reinforcement of the community centres and the creation of new structures and partnerships between government agencies and civil society actors is needed.



Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Existing checks and balances

Poverty indicators are important. The relevance of EUROSTAT's SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) in pinpointing and monitoring challenges and their depth. Maybe even more important are other EUROSTAT SILC data, which go into more detail about housing, access to education and health services.

31.5% of children in Greece are in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty, and this gap is deepening. This

clearly demonstrates that child poverty is persistent in Greek society and that there is thus an absolute and urgent necessity that the objective of combating poverty be present in all societal policy-making, across the board.

Therefore, it's important to monitor not only how widespread poverty is, but also its depth. Extreme poverty is a problem in Greece. The European Child Guarantee framework offers an opportunity not to be missed to address the matter properly and with urgency.

Country Report Ireland



Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child
Guarantee National Action Plan
in Ireland



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Taskforce Team Lead
The Children's Rights Alliance

Taskforce Team Members
The Children's Rights Alliance unites more than 130 members.



There are 1,201,635 children in Ireland. Children make up 24.2% of the total population. 23.8% of children in Ireland are at risk of poverty of social exclusion.

Governance

National actors and their functions

The National Coordinator for Ireland is Mr. Albert O'Donoghue. He is the Principal Officer, EU and International Unit, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Department of Children or DCEDIY).

Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

The DCEDIY has established an EU/International Unit to coordinate the Child Guarantee in Ireland. It is working with an interdepartmental group on priorities for the national action plan. The Minister for CEDiy has also appointed an attaché in Brussels who will link work at national and European levels.

The CEO of the Children's Rights Alliance, Tanya Ward, is chair of the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures National Advisory Council. The Council includes representatives from community and voluntary organisations and academia along with independent experts who have expertise on issues impacting

children and young people. The Council provides expert advice and its view have already been sought in relation to the European Child Guarantee. Overall responsibility for managing ESF+ Funding lies with the Department of Further and Higher Education.

Main Recommendations by Taskforce Ireland

- The National Coordinator of the European Child Guarantee should be a central component of a fully resourced child poverty office established jointly between the Department of Children and the Department of Social Protection;
- The DCEDIY should draw on the resources of the participation unit and the guidance in the child participation framework document to ensure that meaningful consultation involving children and young people takes place before, during and in monitoring the National Action Plan. A youth panel could feed into the development and monitoring of the plan at key stages.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

The most recent data from the [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\)](#) relates to 2020. It shows that children are most vulnerable to poverty, with 8.0% of children living in consistent poverty, while 16.9% of children were at risk of poverty. Lone parents are also significantly more vulnerable. Recent [analysis of the Growing up in Ireland survey data](#) identifies a number of drivers of child poverty, including lone parenthood, ethnicity, disability and family size.

In January 2020, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) published its [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#), which reaffirms the government's commitment to reducing the number of children in consistent poverty by 70,000 from its 2011 level. It also commits to setting a new child poverty target, following a mid-term review in 2022, to improve Ireland's ranking in the EU SILC from 20th to 5th place by 2025.

SILC data provides some insights about the profile of children living in poverty, but it only collects information at the household and personal level. It does not cover children experiencing the most fundamental material deprivation. Research has identified three distinct groups, asylum seekers in Direct Provision centres, children in emergency accommodation and domestic violence refuges and children on unofficial Traveller sites.



Research has identified three distinct groups of children, as well as children in single parent households, at high risk of poverty and social exclusion:

- [Children living in Direct Provision centres](#) (seeking asylum/ international protection);
- Children living with their families in emergency homeless accommodation;
- [Children from Traveller and Roma communities](#).

While one parent families comprise 17% of all family units in the State, there tends to be a disproportionate number of these families in both [emergency accommodation](#) and [Direct Provision accommodation](#) and in the [Traveller community](#). The fact that not all of these children are captured in official measures of poverty or that disaggregated data is not available makes it more challenging to monitor progress on a national child poverty target. Furthermore; [2018 data](#) suggests that 4.8% of children of children under five were living in extreme poverty. As stated in the Ireland Country Report for the [First Years First Priority campaign](#), data available indicates that lone parents and their children are particularly exposed to a higher risk of poverty and need targeted support.

Previous or ongoing outreach activities by the government as well as other relevant actors

A [public consultation](#) on the European Child Guarantee was launched on 1 December 2021 by the Minister for Children. Written submissions were to be completed online by 14 January 2022. Guidance on submissions includes questions such as: What is working well for children to effectively access these services? What key processes achieve the desired outcomes? What is not working well? What could improve efficiency?

The DCEDIY plans to build on existing consultations with children and young people and hopes to hold focus groups with children and young people to inform the national action plan, but this is time dependent. The Department has a participation unit to enable children to voice their views on the development and delivery of policies and services. The [National](#)

Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making provides practical guidance and examples on how children can be supported to have their voices heard.

Stepping up efforts – reaching more children in need

Involvement of Young People in LGBTI+ Youth Strategy

Children and Young People's participation was central to the development of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020. A Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was set up by the Department and two leading national youth organisations and YAG representatives were included in the committee to oversee the Strategy. A Youth Forum was also established with representatives from a range of backgrounds to support the implementation of key actions under the Strategy.

Comhairle na nÓg and the Youth Travel Card

Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Councils) comprises child and youth councils from all 31 local authorities in Ireland. It enables children's voices to be heard in the development of local services and policies. Since 2019 the Comhairle has been working on sustainable transport solutions resulting in the Government committing to a Youth Travel Card which will provide a 50% discount on public transport for people under 24.

Other best practice examples include the establishment of a youth assembly as part of Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 and a consultation with children on After School Care.



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To influence the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Ireland, we plan to conduct an annual child poverty monitor and publish the findings.

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The National Advisory Council has a child poverty subgroup which has made evidence-based recommendations to the Minister for Children on priorities for the national child poverty action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee.

Points to Note

At the time of developing this report, the Children's Rights Alliance was not aware of planned outreach activities by the Department. We recommend that the Department ensures that meaningful consultation with children, including seldom-heard children, is a central feature of the National Action Plan.

To date there has been limited participation in the development of the National Action Plan. The public consultation was completed in January 2022 and the National Advisory Council on Better Outcomes Brighter Futures has been 'invited to give input and collaborate with government on the implementation'. The DCEDIY will be responsible for the overall implementation of the Child Guarantee in Ireland and is therefore our main target. The Department has convened an interdepartmental working group of key officials from relevant government departments to progress the commitments in the Child Guarantee. We will use other levers to influence implementation including building on existing relationships with the Departments of Social Protection, of Education and of Health.

Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

Current national policies and strategies

The National Childcare Scheme provides financial support for childcare to parents, and policy objectives include poverty reduction and a narrowing of the disadvantage gap. A review showed the benefits of the scheme were higher for low-income families and those living in disadvantaged areas.

The DSP funds the School Meals Programme. A pilot was launched in September 2019 to provide hot food to children in receipt of the cold food option under the School Meals Programme was launched. This was expanded further in Budgets 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Gaps and omissions in current national policies

In September 2021, the Department of Housing launched a new Housing for All strategy which had the potential to address the underlying causes of homelessness. However, there is little focus on children except for emphasising the importance of early intervention initiatives and the role of Family Support services. There is a lack of a dedicated plan or specific actions to tackle family homelessness.

The National Childcare Scheme aims to address poverty reduction. However, in the review of the

scheme 14% of very disadvantaged families said they had less money to spend under the scheme, partly due to the scheme's higher threshold rates for subsidies.

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme has brought together several initiatives tackling educational disadvantage. Schools in this programme tend to be in disadvantaged communities. There is a relatively sharp distinction between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, which means that accurately classifying a school's socio-economic/demographic profile is crucial for the delivery of appropriate services. Half of children experiencing poverty attend non-DEIS schools. Currently only children attending DEIS schools can access the hot school meals scheme.

The underfunding of schools means that the financial burden has fallen to parents. An estimated shortfall of €46m in funding, for basic overhead costs, is made up each year through the support of parents and local communities. Measures have been taken to restore approximately 40% of the capitation grant to 2010 levels with increases provided for in the 2019 and 2020 budgets. Households still face financial strain due to the cost of education.

Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a 'whole of government approach'

Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

Existing policy framework documents such as First Five and the Roadmap for Social Inclusion provide examples of a whole of government approach in two adjacent policy areas.

It is positive that the Roadmap of Social Inclusion review in 2022 will include a review of the child poverty target in line with commitments under the

European Child Guarantee. The DCEDIY and the DSP are in discussions about how this review will align with the national child poverty action plan.

An Advisory Council for the National Policy Framework on Children and Young People harnesses expertise from the community and voluntary sector, academia and independent experts and individuals working with and for children. It brings into one forum a diverse range of interests from sectorial stakeholders in the domains of children and young people's policy and

provision. The Council aims to: advise the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and the Minister for Children on the implementation of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF); support the implementation of BOBF in and across the community and voluntary sector, and in wider society and ensure that the specific expertise and perspectives from respective areas of children and young people's services inform the work of the Council.

The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium was established in 2014 as part of the implementation structures outlined in BOBF. It comprises senior officials from government departments and agencies and representatives from advisory and local operational fora. The Consortium has oversight of the implementation of BOBF and reports annually to government on progress.

A child poverty subgroup was established in October 2015. Comprising of both statutory and non-governmental (NGO) representatives it was co-convened by the DSP and the Children's Rights Alliance. The subgroup developed a paper based on the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children to inform the whole of government approach to tackling child poverty in Ireland and its recommendations were reflected in the 2017 and 2018 Budgets. A further paper detailing the whole of government approach to tackling child poverty, based on the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children, was published in October 2017. It welcomed the government's three pillar approach as demonstrably effective in reducing child poverty and urged the government to continue to use it in the national child poverty action plan. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy is also an important vehicle for implementation and accountability.

In our [submission](#) to the Department on the European Child Guarantee recommended the following:

- A dedicated child poverty office established by the Departments of Children and Social Protection;
- Reporting structures for the next children and young people's policy framework should incorporate oversight of the European Child Guarantee;
- Meaningful participation of children and young people particularly seldom heard groups;
- Development of indicators to track progress on child poverty;
- Pilot Local Child Poverty Action Plans.

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“The establishment of a child poverty office will drive change across government and will be the most important change to bring about an enabling policy framework.”

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Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

Creating a Child Poverty Office

The National Coordinator of the European Child Guarantee should be a central component of a dedicated and fully resourced child poverty office. The attaché in Brussels will provide an important link between the national and European / international levels.

In Ireland, the Alliance recommends that this child poverty office should be established jointly between the Departments of Children and of Social Protection. The remit of this office should include the implementation of the European Child Guarantee but it should also drive a broader child poverty strategy with goals and objectives beyond those outlined in the Guarantee.

The 2022 mid-term review of the [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#) would be an opportune time to establish this office, which could co-ordinate and monitor a whole of government approach delegating specific actions to relevant government departments. It is critical that the office is adequately staffed and resourced with a team of officials to work on policy, strategic engagement, communications and operations.

Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Existing checks and balances

The primary data collection tool on child poverty in Ireland is the Survey on Income and Living Conditions. The latest available data is from 2020. Valuable data and information on a wide range of related issues is also available from the longitudinal study [Growing up in Ireland](#).

Our annual flagship publication, the [Report Card](#) series, holds the government to account on its own Programme for Government commitments. Report Card examines commitments related to a child's right to early childhood care and education, housing, education, adequate nutrition including hot school meals and health. Report Card will include references to the State's obligations under the Child Guarantee and monitor progress in relation to that.

Suggested steps towards a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework

The development of a broader National Child Poverty Action Plan, under which the European Child Guarantee sits, provides an opportunity to develop a dashboard of indicators which are related to the causes and consequences of child poverty and which will capture the impact of policy measures on children's and young people's lives.

Data needs be collected on engagement (e.g. participation in arts and cultural events, participation in sport), rates of early school leaving, access to safe places to play, rates of childhood obesity, housing affordability, levels of overcrowding, number of children living in emergency accommodation, length of time spent in direct provision, number of children on waiting lists for speech therapy, mental health services, occupational therapy etc., to give an insight into the experience of child poverty and child well-being more broadly and to focus policy action. Thematic reporting on this data should take place on a regular basis throughout the lifetime of the plan.

Indicators such as vulnerability to consistent poverty, [persistent risk of poverty](#) and deep income poverty (income below 50% of median income), can be used to help identify trends, patterns and vulnerable groups.

Specific cohorts of children should be targeted in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. This includes children experiencing homelessness, children in alternative care and Traveller and Roma children. Existing data sources, such as SILC, fail to adequately capture these groups and therefore a specific programme of research should be undertaken to bridge the gap in data.

The [EU-SILC](#) provides a comparable data set of information and indicators that could be included in an EU common monitoring framework. Data using this survey approach is being captured in most European countries and provides a standardised approach to capturing poverty levels.



Country Report Italy

Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child
Guarantee National Action Plan
in Italy



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Taskforce Lead

Fondazione L'Albero della Vita

Taskforce Team Members

CIFA, SOS Villaggi dei bambini, Telefono Azzurro, Learning for Wellbeing Foundation.



There are 9,433,159 children in Italy. Children make up 15.8% of the total population. 27.1% of children in Italy are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Governance

National actors and their functions

At the time of publishing this report, it was not possible to name the National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee in Italy.

The European Commission publishes a [list of National Coordinators](#) as provided by the national governments. It is not necessarily up-to-date.

There has also been no strategic communication between the government and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). However, in October 2021, the Italian Government created a Commission to focus on the Child Guarantee. The Commission consists of representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Family Policies, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, The Italian Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents, and other public and private stakeholders.

Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

It is encouraging that the Italian government has created a Child Guarantee Commission. However, at this time, no information has been shared with the public about designing the National Action Plan. Selected members of CSOs and related ministries are part of the Commission and are expected to draft the Action Plan. The current arrangement does not allow for a fruitful exchange with stakeholders or for integrating the multiple perspectives of the very active Italian non-profit sector. Nor is there provision for children's participation in the public debate on the Child Guarantee. There is a concern that a last-minute call to involve children in the process might replicate negative habits of involving children only to support decisions already taken. There must be a meaningful process of child participation for all policy matters impacting children.

The Child Guarantee and the impact on children's well-being is even absent from public debate in the media, which is why we are calling for more visibility for the government's next steps.

Main Recommendations by Taskforce Italy

- We need a framework of policies to fill the legislative gaps and enable effective implementation of the Child Guarantee to reinforce prevention and meet the needs of the most vulnerable children;
- The education and digital divide, that existed before the pandemic, has increased over the past two years. This must be one of the priorities in the National Action Plan;
- With EU funding, we must trigger more national investment in children and make the programmes sustainable. As local authorities play a decisive role in the management of the resources, it is important to ensure a technical support mechanism for the efficient management of the funds. Equally, the complex bureaucracy hampering the administrative process at multiple levels must be overcome to facilitate access to funds by small municipalities and the non-profit sector;
- Make child well-being a priority when child poverty is discussed and policies are developed;
- Activate the national database to overcome the lack of data on children living outside the family;
- Take a whole of government approach, to not only implement the Child Guarantee National Action Plan and funding mechanisms, but also to monitor these effectively and transparently;
- Italian policies must be 'person centred'. The child must be considered as the subject of their own rights. Child participation must be consistent at all levels of political and public life. Promoting participation means both creating opportunities and developing the skills needed to guarantee meaningful participation. The rights of the child should be heard in all policies that affect them;
- Cooperation between civil society organisations and the public sector should be guaranteed through a memorandum of understanding.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

Children living in poverty

According to ISTAT (2020), there were 1,346,000, (13.5%) children in Italy living in absolute poverty, the highest percentage since 2005. In addition, 27.1% of children are at risk of poverty and social exclusion (from 0 to 17 years). The COVID pandemic has underlined new aspects of education poverty. Children suffered from existing links between material poverty and educational poverty. There has been, and will continue to be, a profound impact on children's education due to: on-line teaching; the lack of availability of dedicated space in homes; lack of digital devices and insufficient internet connection. All of which are essential to access online education. Data on youth (15-29 years old) shows the percentage of those not in education nor employment (NEET) has risen from 22.1% in 2019, to 22.3% in 2020, high above the European average of 13.7% of NEET youth.

Children in alternative (especially institutional) care and children in precarious family situation

Italy urgently needs to set up a national system of data recording with common indicators for all the Regions, for children living outside family care. Information about care-leavers also needs to be standardised urgently. Foster care it is still not a priority and not considered a preventive measure, despite positive developments in the last 20 years.

Unaccompanied and separated children

Unaccompanied migrant minors arrive in Italy after harrowing journeys and are often witnesses to or victims of violence. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs monitoring report, the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy has put the Italian reception system under stress for years. The latest challenge is to prepare unaccompanied children, mainly 16 (23.2%) and 17 year olds (64%), for independent living and build solid networks. Although the law gives priority to foster care and family-based care, only 3% of

unaccompanied and separated migrant children benefit from it.

Children with disabilities

Disability must be considered as a cross-cutting policy issue to enable children with a disability to fully access their rights, no matter what their economic background. More must be done to ensure child participation in accordance with Article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child: The right to be heard and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Italian policies are not ‘person centred’. The child is considered as external to policy measures, therefore the needs of the child are not prioritised.

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To have the impact needed to reduce the number of children living in poverty or social exclusion in Italy, we must have coherent approaches to policy development, the Child Guarantee National Action Plan must be complementary with the Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR), and ‘puts the best interest of the child as a primary consideration’.

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Targeting the needs of children 0-6 years

Children under 6 years of age should be given special attention. Services (especially educational) for the 0-6 age group are poorly implemented in Italy and must be strengthened. This will allow children to develop cognitively and socially, and could also break the cycle of gender imbalances rooted in Italian society.

Previous or ongoing outreach activities by the government as well as other relevant actors

Italy has been part of a ‘test run’ for the implementation of the Child Guarantee. The European Commission is working with the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO) to pilot projects across seven Member States, including Italy. These pilot projects are expected to end in July 2022. The most recent programmatic update, *The European Child Guarantee - Phase III of the Preparation Action: Testing the EU Child Guarantee in the EU Member States*, aims to focus on the needs of: children affected by migration; without parental care; in precarious family situations; with disabilities; and with mental health issues.

Stepping up efforts - reaching more children in need

We have been in contact with key stakeholders, including UNICEF Italy, who provided us with an update on the current status of their work. The Taskforce plans to share the recommendations in this report with UNICEF Italy. UNICEF will soon publish an in-depth analysis, that we expect will form the starting point for drafting the National Action Plan.



Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

Current national policies and strategies

In Italy, policies on children are the responsibility of the Department of Family Policies. The National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence is representative of different institutions and sectors involved in the design of children's policies. The Observatory produces a bi-annual action plan which aims to set goals and prioritise policies for childhood and to respect international agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the EU Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2021-2024). The fifth action plan was adopted in May 2021, and is shaped around three areas:

- **Education:** specific action to fill the gaps in the education system for 0-3 years. The new plan includes: the promotion of extracurricular activities in schools; of healthy life styles; skills training for professionals working with children;
- **Equity:** poverty reduction, the promotion of educational activities to enhance social inclusion, closing the digital divide and reducing the number of children who leave school early, better protection for vulnerable children, improve the reception of unaccompanied minors;
- **Empowerment:** focusing on participation, not only as a recognised right but as common practice at all levels. The specific needs of children with disabilities, or children from vulnerable families or with migrant backgrounds, must be considered. Community education should be reinforced, involving different local actors in an educative path beyond school itself.

Italy has a *Children's Ombudsperson (Autorità Garante per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza, AGIA)* who expresses non-binding opinions on the National Children Plan and on any law concerning children. AGIA also monitors the unaccompanied migrant children guardians' system.

In June 2020, the Family Act was adopted. It reinforces family welfare through a universal and comprehensive allowance, and has revised parental leave to mainstream the sharing of family care between parents.

Other poverty reduction measures include the basic income adopted in 2019 and distributed on the basis of citizenship and economic need, which may be reviewed to facilitate access by large families. The emergency income was also established in 2020 for those who do not benefit from other subsidies.

Gaps and omissions in current national policies

The 2001 reform of the Italian Constitution, which decentralised certain sectors towards regional authorities, exacerbates pre-existing inequalities in the provision of services among the Italian regions, by omitting to set quality standards on civil and social rights. Furthermore, the lack of a stable national fund for the protection of children does not make the situation any easier, not to mention the lack of stable cooperation between the State, regions, local authorities and the Third Sector.



Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a ‘whole of government approach’

Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

The latest data shows severe poverty in Italy, and considers the different aspects of poverty from basic needs to access to rights and opportunities. This data suggests there will not be a positive future for children in Italy, unless there is a whole of government approach.

Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

European and national policies must imperatively break the cycles of disadvantage. A large amount of EU resources has been allocated to recover from the economic impact of the COVID pandemic. This includes the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the ESF+. Italy is one of the Member States in which the rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion is above the EU average. Such funding could change the lived experiences of children in need in Italy. However, the Child Guarantee and the ESF+ should not be seen as the only mechanisms to lift children out of poverty. We need policies that fill the gaps at legislative level and enable effective implementation of the Child Guarantee to reinforce prevention and reach out to the most vulnerable children. This can be implemented through EU funding but must trigger more national investment in children.

Children are directly affected by health, education, social protection and gender equality policies, the



key components of well-being. Well-being is the pivotal new narrative, characterised by numerous and complex indicators describing different interconnected fields. Consequently, a multi-dimensional understanding of children's well-being is necessary to improve the assessment strategies, monitoring and effectiveness of policies. In 2016, Italy adopted a pioneering law (163/2016) which foresees the implementations of a number of indicators of fair and sustainable wellbeing. It is important to follow up with these indicators and include them in the National Action Plan.

NextGenerationEU has allocated €235.6 billion to Italy to recover from the crisis caused by the COVID pandemic. To access to the funds, Italy is obliged to put in place reforms in public administration and justice, and simplify the legislation and anti-trust promotion and ensuring transparency of business competition.

In April 2021 Italy presented its national recovery and resilience plan (*Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*, PNRR). The CRC Working Group, – a network composed of more than 100 civil society organisations, coordinated by Save The Children Italy, analysed the inclusion of a child rights perspective. The Resources dedicated to childhood and adolescences in Italy report was published in May 2021.

The Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is organised in six missions. All seven European flagships areas are covered by the six missions. Childhood is the main topic of mission 4 on the rights of education and inclusive schools from early ages; in addition, Mission 5 embraces social inclusion and cohesion reforms. An impact on children's well-being is indirectly foreseen in all the missions. Youth is included within the transversal priorities applying to all the missions, with the perspective of increasing skills and labour opportunities. However, the PNRR was drafted during a period of emergency with no contribution from civil society. It is important to stress that while generational rebalancing is one of the cross-cutting priorities, children and adolescents are only directly included in one of the six ‘missions’ within this recovery plan.

Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Existing checks and balances

At present, ISTAT provides the main tool to track the situation of children at the institutional level. However, the report on poverty in Italy sees families as the main target of observation, thus treating children as a dependent variable. The ISTAT statistical basket is divided into three categories: food, housing and a “residual” part, which includes clothing, health, leisure time, and other. The methodology used to calculate the basket was defined in 2005.

The key services (categories) outlined in the Child Guarantee, namely: free healthcare, early childhood education and care, education, at least one healthy meal each school day, effective access to healthy nutrition and housing, cannot be seen clearly from the ISTAT reports - most need to be disaggregated first. The indicators used by ISTAT are useful for tracking the situation of children, even though the ones related to health, clothing, leisure time and education are collected all together in the “residual” category. As the family is the main target, there is no focus on children’s rights. For example, leisure time can be considered a plus for an adult, but shall be considered a right when talking about children.

Suggested steps towards a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework

When considering which indicators should be included in the national plan, we must also ask **why children are not considered a specific target when talking about poverty in Italy?** As children are not a specific target, data about children are scattered among countless pieces of research on other issues, making it difficult to create a complete picture of children and poverty in Italy.

In-depth work can be shared during the following months among the EU Institutions and civil society regarding the common comparable EU data that a monitoring framework of the child guarantee should include: free healthcare, early childhood education

and care, education, at least one healthy meal each school day, effective access to healthy nutrition and housing; but also:

- Dropping out;
- Accessible programmes to reduce school dropout;
- Free access to sports and cultural opportunities;
- Free access to opportunities to reduce the digital divide;
- Easy access to public;
- Safe and clean playgrounds;
- Free access to wellbeing (both mental and physical) support;
- Access to adoption and foster care.

Other key suggestions for Italy from the Child Guarantee Taskforce include:

- The lack of stable cooperation between the State, regions, local authorities and the Third Sector is an obstacle to achieving a positive impact on the lives of all children in need in Italy;
- Quality standards on civil and social rights must be ensured;
- The gaps between the central- north and central-south regions of Italy is not acceptable anymore;
- A strong, transparent national monitoring framework is needed to oversee the implementation of the Child Guarantee, and funding mechanisms at all levels: national, local and regional.



Country Report Spain

Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child
Guarantee National Action Plan
in Spain



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Taskforce Lead

Plataforma de Infancia

Taskforce Team Members

Plataforma de Infancia is a network of 76 entities that work to achieve full compliance with the rights of children and adolescents by enforcing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



There are 8,325,756 children in Spain. Children make up 17.6% of the total population. 31.8% of children in Spain are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Governance

National actors and their functions

Mrs. Lucía Losoviz was appointed the Child Guarantee National Coordinator in January 2022. She is the General Director for Children's and Adolescents' Rights, in the Ministry of Social Rights, and Agenda 2030.

Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

Plataforma de Infancia have a close and collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030. In addition to working with this Ministry, Plataforma de Infancia is in constant communication and collaboration with different ministries, including the Ministry of Education, on issues affecting children's rights. It is also in close collaboration with the Directorate General for Family Diversity, whose director is Mrs. Patricia Bezunarte,

and the High Commissioner for Child Poverty, which is part of the Presidency of the Government.

We are currently not aware of any established structure to collaborate across the ministries, but we believe all relevant ministries should be involved. There is a need for tools to support such collaboration and for dialogue with the general directorates of the Ministry of Education, the European Social Fund Administration Unit (UAFSE) and with the Autonomous Communities, who are responsible for managing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

We believe the role of the National Coordinator is to ensure that the Autonomous Communities are aligned with the National Action Plan. To do so, the National Coordinator and Autonomous Communities should work in collaboration on the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of impactful operational programmes.

Plataforma de Infancia are keen to support and engage in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan in Spain. From our experience in the First Years First Priorities campaign, where we created a national alliance with more than 15

national children's organisations, we identified national priorities regarding early childhood development. We know how important it will be for the National Action Plan to be developed with stakeholders from the start.

Main Recommendations by Taskforce Spain

- There should be an established structure that ensures collaboration across all the ministries whose work has an impact on children; Government ministries must stop working in 'silos' and collaborate to develop an enabling policy framework;
- The National Action Plan should be developed, implemented, monitored and evaluated with stakeholders, including children;
- It is essential, given the exceptional situation in Spain, that control mechanisms and accountability processes are created to ensure equity for children in need across the different Autonomous Communities;
- There are four particularly vulnerable groups of children in Spain whose needs must be included in the National Action Plan: Children at risk of poverty or currently living in poverty - particularly marginalised children such as Roma children, children with disabilities, and migrant children - especially unaccompanied children; children living in institutions; and children under 6 years of age.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

There are four particularly vulnerable groups of children whose needs must be included in the National Action Plan for Spain.

Children and adolescents living at risk of poverty or currently living in poverty

In Spain, the rate of child poverty and social exclusion is among the highest in the EU with more than 30% of children living at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Children growing up in single parent families or large families as well as children in families with a migrant background are among the most vulnerable. Although there is currently financial and fiscal aid available to help families living in vulnerable situations, it is not enough to tackle the situation of child poverty in Spain.

Children and adolescents at risk of social exclusion

These include Roma children, children with disabilities

or migrant children, and above all those in the most vulnerable situations such as migrant and especially unaccompanied children. It is therefore essential to put in place policy actions designed to protect children in this situation of special vulnerability. Roma children are under the persistent and structural confluence of different factors of vulnerability, including poverty (89%).

Children living in institutions

According to the recent publication from the DataCare project, there are currently more than 20,000 children living in institutions in Spain, and more than 1,100 of these children are under 6 years old. Children do not belong in institutions. The best place for a child to live and grow up is in a family-based care setting. A great effort must be made to ensure that the children currently living in institutions in Spain can be placed in foster care (family-care), as this will greatly improve their development and better meet the needs of each child.

Children under 6 years of age

Studies also show that most of the public health problems we suffer in adulthood, such as obesity or certain cardiovascular and mental health problems, are related to early childhood experiences, especially during the first 1,000 days of life. It is therefore essential that the rights of children aged 0-6 years and especially children aged 0-3 years, should be placed at the centre of our public policies. Although the school enrolment rate in the 0-3 age group in Spain is 45.8%, children with fewer economic resources are left out (26.3% enrolment) and it is mainly the middle and upper classes who have access to this education (62.5% enrolment).



Previous or ongoing outreach activities by the government as well as other relevant actors

To date there has only been a diagnosis carried out by UNICEF Spain on behalf of the European Commission which is working with the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO), to pilot projects

across seven Member States, with Spain being one of them. These pilot projects are expected to complete in July 2022. The most recent programmatic update is the European Child Guarantee - Phase III of the Preparation Action: Testing the EU Child Guarantee in the EU Member States, which aims to focus on: how the different levels of governance work together - national, regional and local; identifying barriers to key services for the children most in need; social protection systems; and data collection.

Plataforma de Infancia have participated together with other civil society organisations and universities in this project as part of the advisory council.

Stepping up efforts - reaching more children in need

In September 2021, the State Council for Child and Adolescent Participation, was created. This has led to more than 330 municipal Children's Councils. These Children's Councils are made up of 34 children between the ages of 8 and 17 years. Children are invited to express their concerns and make proposals. They will meet at least twice a year, once every six months. The aim of this Council is for children to freely express their ideas and propose measures, defend the social recognition of their rights, formulate proposals on issues that affect them at state level and become the spokespersons and interlocutors of children and adolescents before public institutions.

Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

Current national policies and strategies

Different legislative processes and actions are being developed with the aim of reducing and eradicating poverty and inequalities among children in Spain. Among these processes we would like to highlight:

- The newly developed Children's Participation Council;
- The National Strategy for the Rights of the Child and Adolescents (this strategy is currently being developed);
- The Law on Family Diversity due to be approved; work will be completed on the Strategy for Comprehensive Care for Unaccompanied Migrant Children in the coming months.

In addition, a supplement to the Minimum Vital Income (MVI) is being implemented, which is a measure focused on improving the situation of vulnerable households that has greatly improved the amounts of previous aid, although the thresholds have been reduced. A child supplement to the MVI has recently been approved, which means an increase of 100 euros for children from 0-3 years, 70 euros for 3 to 6 years and 50 euros for 6 to 8 years. The thresholds for this supplement have been substantially increased.

Plataforma de Infancia and other children's organisations welcome this measure, but now it is time to see if it reaches all the families in need, as we are aware of problems in its implementation. For example, there are additional "minimum incomes measures" in some Autonomous Communities, although with the MVI some have been suppressed. There are specific aids in some Autonomous Communities for the 0-3 age group that we believe need to be improved. The government has announced a new law on Family Diversity, which is expected to become law in 2022, that will include a parenting allowance and aid for single parent families, but this law has not yet been drafted.

Gaps and omissions in current national policies

The levels of child poverty in Spain are alarming, indeed Spain has the third highest level of child

poverty in Europe. Although there is help for families, it is not enough. Last year, the minimum vital income was approved, a measure that will help many families with children and adolescents but, due to the requirements, will leave many others in need without assistance.



Special attention should be paid to early childhood, since according to published studies, the first 1,000 days of a child's life can mark his or her future life. Financial support for families, ensuring universal and free early care and education services (0-3) and the implementation of effective work-life balance measures with a child-centred perspective, should also be considered.

It is essential to offer more services free of charge or financed by the administration for families, such as, for example, free access to food at school, support for the work-life balance of these families, specific support for single parents that show higher poverty rates.

Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a ‘whole of government approach’

Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

Different Directorates are developing relevant strategies and policies that could support the implementation of the Child Guarantee. However, there are concerns that they are working in ‘silos’. For example, a Strategy for Children’s Rights has been proposed, which is being developed by the Directorate General for Children’s Rights and will run until 2030. However, there is no specific mention of this issue in the Strategy to Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2019-2023). This is a missed opportunity to develop an enabling policy framework, because the Strategy for Children’s Rights will depend solely on



the Directorate General for Children’s Rights, while it should be part of the more general policy agenda of other Ministries. Many of the powers of the Spanish Government are delegated to the Autonomous Communities, therefore it is important that the success of the Child Guarantee does not depend just on the National Coordinator or Autonomous Communities, but it should be a common objective of all Ministries in the Spanish government.

In addition, for this Strategy, the High Commissioner against Child Poverty, the Directorate General for Children’s Rights and the Directorate General for Family Diversity are deeply involved. We know that The Administrative Unit for the European Social Fund is going to be involved in some way but there is a concern about the role that the Autonomous Communities will play in this Strategy. We have been informed that the Autonomous Communities will participate through the Childhood Observatory and they will participate with other administrations and with civil society organisations. However, we believe it is important for Autonomous Communities to take ownership of this Strategy and be part of its development rather than being informed that they should implement it.

Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

In Spain, many powers of the central government are delegated to the different Autonomous Communities, which means that there is a great difference in services, quality and accessibility to services. We believe that the Child Guarantee will be a driving force, and an opportunity for the different Autonomous Communities to collaborate, and to work towards a common goal, and that all children, regardless of where they live, can access quality services, and have their rights realised. Therefore, it is essential, given the exceptional situation in Spain, to create control mechanisms and accountability processes to monitor what is being done in the different Autonomous Communities.

Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Existing checks and balances

One of the biggest problems encountered when analysing the situation of children in Spain is the lack of disaggregated data, which makes it very difficult to implement and analyse indicators and results. There is also a lack of information on the use and accountability of the ESF+ and how this is being implemented in the Autonomous Communities.

Suggested steps towards a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework

Poverty disaggregated data already exists, but it is essential that this clearly identifies the number of people, including children, experiencing severe poverty. Again, this data should be disaggregated by age, and by age and sex. Such data should also include information on schooling, children receiving free school meals, children in need who receive school grants to meet school costs, and data about children within the protection system.



“
There is a lack of specialised resources such as disaggregated data collection mechanisms to be able to effectively monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee. The establishment of more robust mechanisms could have a much bigger impact on the work that organisations like us can do in Spain.
”



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