

## From Commitment to Reality: Recommendations for advancing the implementation of the European Child Guarantee

### 1. Beyond statistics: understanding the impact of child poverty in the EU

#### Addressing Child Poverty in the EU

Child poverty in the EU is an ongoing and urgent crisis affecting over 20 million children. This equates to one out of four children. This crisis goes beyond numbers; it profoundly impacts children's lives, affecting their physical and mental health, education, and overall well-being. Even short periods of deprivation can have long-lasting effects, trapping children and families in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage for generations.

Every EU country, no matter how wealthy, has children living in poverty and social exclusion. While the situation varies from country to country, the result is always the same: children's rights are not respected, protected, or fulfilled.

Child poverty is not only a denial of fundamental rights; it also has tangible societal costs that undermine the stability of the European project. Developing effective strategies is therefore crucial to fighting child poverty, creating 'safety nets' for children and families, and breaking the vicious and intergenerational cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

#### The Deepening Roots of Child Poverty Amid Modern Challenges

In recent years, child poverty has worsened, with vulnerable children and families bearing the brunt of economic challenges exacerbated by the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises, and climate change. In particular, the COVID-19 crisis has intensified children's health and mental health issues and had a detrimental impact on their physical health, as demonstrated by the increasing cases of childhood obesity. The pandemic also led to more screen time and less physical activity, contributing to a greater sense of loneliness among children. Single-parent households, often headed by women, encounter additional mental health challenges, which further complicate their ability to create long-term plans and escape poverty. This situation inevitably affects their children too.

The rising cost of living coupled with inflation has made it even harder for families to access healthy food and quality key services, pushing many into poverty and worsening existing inequalities. Geographic disparities further exacerbate the issue, with specific regions and areas within cities experiencing disproportionately high rates of child poverty. For example, the regional AROPE rate for under-18s is 11% in Tuscany and 56% in Campania. Finally, the pandemic exacerbated intersectional discrimination and its impact on mental health, as racialised children and their families found themselves unfairly blamed for the ongoing crisis.

### Exclusion of the children most at risk

Children from marginalised groups, including Roma and other racialised children, those in institutional care, children living in single-parent households, children with disabilities, and children with a migrant background, are particularly vulnerable to poverty and its consequences. And yet, they are often the very children at risk of being excluded by the frameworks and policies set up to meet their needs.

### (EU elections - child poverty must remain a priority for the EU institutions)

The Alliance welcomes the recent [La Hulpe Declaration](#)'s commitments to achieving the Barcelona targets and acknowledging the significance of investing in universally accessible, affordable, high-quality childcare. It also fully supports the emphasis on implementing and strengthening the European Child Guarantee. However, these laudable words risk proving empty without concrete action.

While recent commitments have shown promise, we need political will and tangible action from all the EU institutions to ensure that children's rights are upheld and protected. We cannot afford to let another generation of children suffer in poverty. Therefore, it is imperative that children's rights are prioritised in the next EU political agenda, with key instruments such as the European Child Guarantee being prioritised, implemented, adequately financed, and monitored.

## **2. Seizing opportunities: harnessing the potential of the Child Guarantee**

The [European Child Guarantee](#) is a pivotal, innovative, and timely framework to ensure access to basic rights and services for children in vulnerable situations across EU Member States. After years of dedicated advocacy and collaborative efforts, the EU Alliance for Investing in Children (Alliance) warmly welcomed the adoption of the Child Guarantee as a significant milestone in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion. We were pleased to observe that most of the requests we made over the years were incorporated into the final text of the Recommendation.

### How the Child Guarantee can translate into tangible benefits for children

By guaranteeing access to quality services such as healthcare and education, as well as basic necessities such as housing and healthy food, the Child Guarantee serves as a vital tool for prevention and early intervention, safeguarding children from the harmful effects of poverty.

For example, healthy nutrition is a vital component of the Child Guarantee and school meal schemes are a good example of its successful implementation. Access to fruit, vegetables and healthy meals is essential in preventing diseases, especially childhood obesity, and ensuring a healthy life for children, particularly the most vulnerable. Healthy diets are associated with better mental health, cognitive skills, and improved educational performance. Ensuring that mothers have access to nutritious food during pregnancy and after childbirth is crucial for their well-being and the health of the child.

Moreover, the Child Guarantee serves as a catalyst for positive developments, driving initiatives such as integrated interventions for vulnerable communities and projects to enhance social inclusion and youth empowerment. For example, in February 2024, the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs approved the implementation of a series of integrated interventions aimed at strengthening the social

inclusion of Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti children and their families, allocating EUR 40.000.000 from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). The Italian ministry is also working on the project 'DesTEENazione - Desideri e Azioni In Movimento', allocating around 240 million euros to set up 60 multifunctional spaces for young people.

#### *The role of the Child Guarantee in empowering policymakers, children and CSOs*

The Child Guarantee provides stakeholders working to end child poverty with unprecedented opportunities. The opportunity to work on the framework in different countries has created an important occasion to discuss and analyse what child poverty and social exclusion mean at the national, regional, and local levels, and how they should be addressed. This focus on the children most at risk offers a unique occasion to identify groups of children often overlooked by broader instruments and strategies. In several countries, committed policymakers and CSOs have used the framework to highlight the severity of the situation, request urgently needed policies, and demand more conspicuous investments in children. Where this is not the case, the instrument has been used as a tool to put pressure on policymakers and request them to live up to their commitments.

Additionally, the instrument supports multi-sectoral collaboration in addressing child poverty and should be seen as an opportunity for peer learning within and among EU Member States. Moreover, having national plans as living documents that will remain in force until 2030, allows the instrument to adapt to the changing circumstances at the national, regional, and local levels and provides stakeholders with a combined short-term and long-term perspective.

The Child Guarantee also offers an opportunity to establish meaningful frameworks for child participation. Positive examples from countries such as Finland, Italy, Spain and Poland show that it is possible to establish structured mechanisms such as advisory boards, councils, and dedicated platforms, can provide avenues for children to voice their opinions, contribute to policy development, and advocate for their rights effectively.

#### *The potential of the Child Guarantee*

After working with their national members to develop the Child Guarantee, the Alliance networks are fully convinced that this framework holds immense potential to reshape EU and national approaches to tackling child poverty, addressing its short- and long-term impacts on children's health, equity, and well-being. By engaging stakeholders at various levels and focusing on children most at risk, the Child Guarantee provides a unique platform for meaningful discussions and analyses of child poverty and social exclusion, fostering multi-sectoral collaboration and peer learning.

Furthermore, the Child Guarantee extends its impact beyond EU Member States, playing a crucial role in EU candidate and potential candidate countries' efforts to tackle child poverty. For instance, in Albania, the framework has been integrated into the National Social Protection Strategy 2024-2030, underscoring its significance in the country's EU accession process.

### **3. Challenges and Recommendations**

The Child Guarantee holds significant promise as a comprehensive and proactive approach to addressing child poverty, protecting the rights and well-being of vulnerable children, and fostering social inclusion across Europe and beyond. Yet, significant obstacles must be addressed.

### Ensuring the effectiveness of the National Action Plans

Despite being three years post-adoption of the Child Guarantee, the National Action Plans (NAPs) submitted by Member States lack innovation in combating child poverty. Many simply list existing programs or vaguely mention future endeavours, with some countries yet to implement planned measures. Different plans lack concrete examples of new policies funded under the Child Guarantee. This issue is then further complicated by regional and municipal divisions of authority, and a lack of knowledge of the instrument by local authorities and service providers.

- Member States should **utilise the biennial report and the Commission feedback to update and strengthen their NAPs**, capitalising on the opportunity offered by the Child Guarantee to support children in vulnerable situations and reinforce their social protection systems.
- Member States, EU institutions, and CSOs should cooperate and **ensure the full implementation of the NAPs**, emphasising their dynamic nature and the need for frequent revisions to maintain relevance and effectiveness.
- Support for children and families should start as early as possible. The NAPs should establish and strengthen **family-centred and quality early childhood intervention systems**, beginning with the early identification of risks, to ensure quality and individualised support for children and families. This support should enable children to access ECEC and inclusive education, as well as the family support necessary to foster their inclusion and prevent placement in alternative care or, when this has already happened, their transition to family and community-based care. Additionally, NAPs should enhance their emphasis on providing maternal and infant health care services that can support children and their mothers during the first 1000 days. These services should encompass both physical and mental health and be linked to wider national policies and strategies covering maternal and infant health services.
- Policies covering access to **nutrition, housing, and affordable and high-quality healthcare** are essential and need to be **further promoted** within the NAPs. Particularly in mental health facilities, there are several gaps in both service provision and preventive measures.

### Ensuring Adequate Funding

The effective implementation of the NAPs depends on adequate funding. Moreover, providing nurturing care for healthy growth, development, and well-being is a sound investment which lays a strong foundation early in life, benefiting the prosperity of both individuals and societies. And yet, many plans lack clear indications of financial sources. While countries such as Spain demonstrate good use of ESF+ funds, overall funding transparency is lacking and threatens impactful implementation. For national and international CSOs, it remains challenging to ascertain whether and how funds have been allocated for the implementation of this framework and how to engage with the process.

- Member States should ensure that national measures to curb child poverty are **adequately funded** by EU and national funds.
- The EU should welcome the European Parliament's pledge to **increase funding for the Child Guarantee** as part of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework revision.
- In addition to EU funds, Member States should ensure national **steady and committed lines of financing** to address child poverty in all dimensions, including early intervention and preventive approaches.
- Providing high-quality services also means **investing in the training and well-being of all those working and involved in these services**. For example, teachers, social workers, health professionals, and the formal and informal carers who support children and their families.

### Ensuring meaningful participation in monitoring efforts

Member States use different approaches to monitor the Guarantee's development and, apart from a few cases, monitoring the Child Guarantee is often separate from broader national monitoring systems on poverty. Overall, there is some progress in monitoring child poverty reduction across different countries, but the alignment between indicators and measures implemented needs to be improved.

The Child Guarantee Recommendation clearly emphasises the critical importance of EU Member States engaging with various stakeholders while designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the Child Guarantee. Regrettably, the Alliance has registered a worrying lack of meaningful participation processes and transparency in developing the national action plans, and we are concerned that this will also be reported in their implementation. The lack of stakeholder engagement seriously hampers effectiveness and transparency. CSOs play a crucial role in combating poverty and social exclusion because they work directly with the groups most at risk and represent diverse societal perspectives. Their direct engagement with communities makes them essential players in overseeing, creating, executing, and assessing the effectiveness of proposed interventions. Nonetheless, CSOs are often shut out of meaningful inclusion processes, including those concerning the Child Guarantee.

Considering the numerous obstacles encountered by national and European actors, the monitoring roles of the European Commission and Parliament are more than fundamental. In particular, the biennial report the Member States are currently submitting to the European Commission on the implementation of the framework can and should be a crucial instrument for EU institutions and CSOs to gather useful information, concretely assess the implementation of this instrument, and push for more accountability from national governments.

- **Developing a well-structured monitoring framework** is imperative for monitoring progress and evaluating the success of CG measures' implementation. Member States and the European Commission should ensure that the **biennial reports** adhere to the outlined timeline, include key information on the state of play, and effectively report on what has been achieved in a structured and comprehensive way. This can be achieved only by including

**meaningful participation processes** for stakeholders in developing, analysing, and using the biennial report.

- The European Commission should establish a **formal and transparent consultation with stakeholders before its 2026 Child Guarantee assessment**. Additionally, organising a Brussels event post-assessment would facilitate constructive discussions between stakeholders and national authorities, enhancing collaboration and effectiveness.
- EU Member States should also establish **formal mechanisms to promote children's meaningful and rights-based participation** in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Child Guarantee NAPs and relevant frameworks developed as part of these plans. In particular, they should develop structures to promote the meaningful participation of children in vulnerable situations and in the biennial reporting of EU Member States to the European Commission. In addition, it will combat existing patterns of discrimination and adopt specific tools to create opportunities for marginalised, racialised, and discriminated children.

### *Addressing the needs of the children most in need*

The main aim of the Child Guarantee is to support children in vulnerable situations. Yet, several plans fail to identify, reach, and support the children identified as at greater risk of poverty and exclusion by actors working with and for them.

Asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and those with foreign-born parents all struggle to access social protection measures in the vast majority of EU countries. Restrictions related to residence requirements, household definitions, and lack of documentation often mean they do not receive social security benefits and services. This makes them more vulnerable and more marginalised.

Decentralisation of social protection systems might lead to disparities in support across regions. Children could be disadvantaged simply because of their location. Bureaucracy, complex eligibility criteria, stigma, discrimination, and lack of awareness often block efforts to support vulnerable groups. This leaves many unable to access essential benefits and services, worsening their poverty and social exclusion. Considering that children born in well-off areas can expect to live around 20 years longer in good health than those born in the most deprived areas shows the importance of prioritising children most at risk.

- EU Member States should capitalise on the Child Guarantee to **reach and support the most vulnerable, racialised, and disadvantaged children**, ensuring that all identified categories of children in need and their families have guaranteed access to the high-quality key services, where and when they need them. National efforts should address intersectional inequalities, exclusion and discrimination of children and families, and ensure that services are accessible to, and meet the needs of, those who face the most significant barriers in accessing essential services.
- **Early childcare and schools** are essential in reducing inequalities and empowering children, particularly those in vulnerable situations. To achieve this objective, the Child Guarantee must support fully inclusive educational environments that address gaps and inequalities from an early age. For children with disabilities and developmental issues, inclusive and accessible

ECEC and education are crucial but may not be enough if not paired with early childhood intervention, and the provision of early individualised support to families to foster healthy development and social inclusion.

- Member States should create **one-stop shops within existing local and regional structures**. These centres are intended to simplify and improve access to essential information and resources, providing support for obtaining social security and assistance in a single location. These centres help to raise the take up of the services by vulnerable families, combat discrimination and foster integration.

#### 4. Data

One of the main challenges identified by the Alliance networks while working on the Child Guarantee concerns the stark need for a clear national framework for data collection and indicators and targets specifically focused on children in vulnerable situations.

- EU Member States and institutions should ensure the proper monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee at both EU and national levels by **setting clear, multi-sectoral, and comparable metrics, investing in efficient and effective data collection, and defining more specific targets**.
- Data should be collected in the **best interest of the child** without stigmatisation and putting children and their families at risk. The monitoring and evaluation system must reflect the multidimensional nature of the Child Guarantee and include the different areas covered by the framework.
- Data should be **disaggregated by target and age groups and gender and include children from birth to age six**. Additional maternal and child health and well-being indicators would be important to measure access to quality pre- and post-natal care and support for all mothers and infants.

#### *The Child Guarantee as a fundamental component of a stronger Social Europe*

Child poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon that must be addressed through a comprehensive and integrated approach. For this reason, the Child Guarantee should be connected and integrated with broader instruments at the EU and national levels, as well as with an ambitious EU social and climate agenda.

- Children's rights should be effectively mainstreamed into the different areas of the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and Just Transition policy framework**. This involves integrating child rights considerations into policies, programs, and initiatives across various sectors, including education, health, and social inclusion. Given that the EPSR action plan will be revised in 2025, and with the EU having a new European Parliament and a new College of Commissioners from June onwards, it will be crucial to ensure that the fight against child poverty and the implementation of the Child Guarantee remains at the heart of the EU political agenda and are prioritised in its policies and frameworks.

- Building a stronger social Europe **must involve all relevant stakeholders**, including governments, policymakers, healthcare professionals, educators, parents, children, and youth organisations, among others. Particular attention given to individuals operating at the regional and local levels, who are often unaware of the possibilities offered by this framework and are not adequately supported.

#### Ensuring healthy, green and safe living places for children

A child's well-being is heavily affected by the physical environment in which they grow up. The Child Guarantee should focus on guaranteeing all children a healthy living environment free from pollution, with sufficient green spaces, parks, and free access to playgrounds. Air pollution has a negative impact on children's health, affecting children in vulnerable situations more than others as they are most likely to live in areas more polluted, with limited access to recreational green spaces and free and safe playgrounds. Access to safe green space can significantly benefit children's physical, mental and social developmental health, but children living in poverty often lack access to these crucial facilities.

- The EU and Member States should consider the Child Guarantee as a comprehensive framework for **advancing children's overall well-being**. Healthy living environments, access to green space, and safe playground areas need to be integrated into the Child Guarantee and reflected in the revisions of the national action plans. More data on children living in healthy environments with sufficient green spaces and access to free and safe leisure activities should also be collected at national and local levels.

#### **5. Final pledge: children's rights and fighting child poverty must remain a priority**

Addressing child poverty requires a concerted effort and a comprehensive approach that prioritises children's rights and well-being. As we approach the European Elections, we must underscore the **central importance of the Child Guarantee and the fight against child poverty**. Ensuring these critical issues remain at the **forefront of EU institutions and Member States' political agendas** is utterly fundamental.

- As evidenced by the challenges outlined in this statement, the road to eradicating child poverty has many obstacles. However, the Alliance firmly believes that meaningful progress can be achieved by prioritising the implementation of the Child Guarantee and **engaging all relevant stakeholders**. We call on EU Member States to acknowledge the crucial contributions of CSOs in shaping the Child Guarantee and tackling child poverty. By involving children and CSOs in the development process, we tap into their deep-rooted connections within communities, ensuring policies are not just formulated but are imbued with the voices and experiences of those most affected by poverty and social exclusion. We urge EU institutions, particularly the European Commission, to **champion and model formal, meaningful, and transparent processes for CSO involvement in evaluating national plans and their forthcoming 2026 revision**. This would signify a profound dedication to amplifying diverse voices, fostering accountability, and ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of the European



Child Guarantee. Let us unite in this endeavour, recognising that progress stems from collective action and genuine partnership.

- Moreover, we would like to capitalise on this opportunity to stress once again the importance of **identifying, reaching, and supporting children most at risk**. The strength of the Child Guarantee lies in its main aim: supporting children in vulnerable situations. This can only be done with ambitious NAPs reporting on the categories most at risk in the different countries and outlining specific measures to support them. We must take advantage of the unique opportunity offered by the Child Guarantee, prioritising inclusive policies and removing barriers to social protection for all families and children. Only through these efforts can we guarantee that no child is left behind and truly transform this framework into a success.

**The following Alliance members endorse this statement:**

- Alliance for Childhood European Network
- Caritas Europa
- COFACE Families Europe
- Don Bosco International (DBI)
- Dynamo International
- EAPN
- EASPD
- EPA - European Parents' Association
- EPHA
- Eurochild
- Eurodiaconia
- EuroHealthNet
- European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network
- Hope and Homes for Children
- ISSA - International Step by Step Association
- Learning for Well-being Foundation
- Lifelong Learning Platform
- Make Mothers Matter
- Mental Health Europe
- Save the Children
- SOS Children's Villages
- UNICEF