

A close-up photograph of four young children of diverse ethnicities smiling and hugging each other outdoors. The child on the far left is a white boy with blonde hair, wearing a black scarf. The child next to him is a Black girl with curly hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The child next to her is a white girl with blonde hair, wearing a pink t-shirt. The child on the far right is a Black boy with short hair, wearing a grey sweater over a white shirt with a red pocket. The background is a blurred green field with trees.

PES

SOCIALISTS &
DEMOCRATS

The European Child Guarantee:

For a fair start in life

February 2013

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion László Andor (MSZP Hungary) presents a recommendation titled "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage".

May 2014

The PES manifesto for the 2014 European elections states that *"[...] the quality and affordability of education, [...] of healthcare, childcare [...] are crucial components of our societies"*

June 2015

Sergei Stanishev is re-elected as PES President, with child poverty as a central component of his campaign.

August 2017

As requested by the European Parliament, the European Commission launches a preparatory action to identify how best to implement the 2013 recommendation.

October 2015

The European Parliament adopts its report on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty, which first references the European Child Guarantee.

April 2016

The PES Presidency officially adopts the European Child Guarantee as party policy, as the fourth component of our Youth Plan.

We protect child rights in Europe: a quick look at **what we are doing**.

**November
2017**

The European institutions jointly proclaim the European Pillar of Social Rights, including the right to education, to childcare and to housing.

**February
2019**

The European Child Guarantee is reaffirmed as PES policy in our European elections manifesto.

**December
2019**

Nicolas Schmit takes office as Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, with a mandate to implement the European Child Guarantee.

Phase III of the preparatory action begins: two-year pilot projects in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Italy are testing new models of services and interventions.

**November
2020**

PES, FEPS, S&D and the PES Group in the European Committee of the Regions jointly call for the rapid entry into force of the Child Guarantee as part of the "Child Union" campaign.

**January
2021**

S&D negotiators for the European Social Fund Plus obtain a dedicated earmarking for tackling child poverty: member states with above-average child poverty must dedicate 5% of the ESF+ to the Child Guarantee. If every member state did so, this would amount to more than €4bn.

**June
2021**

Thanks to the action of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, the EPSCO Council adopts the recommendation establishing a Child Guarantee.

**June
2021**

The PES Presidency reiterates its commitment to the Child Guarantee and encourages swift implementation at all levels of government.

**March
2022**

Deadline for the submission of Child Guarantee Action Plans

FOREWORDS

Sergei Stanishev

PES President

Making the promise of free and universal education and healthcare a reality for all children regardless of background is a major challenge of our times. All over Europe, parents have to reduce their working hours because childcare is out of reach, families have to make sacrifices to provide school textbooks for their children, and these same children do not receive the same quality of healthcare as their better-off classmates.

It is because formal access to does not always translate to effective access of equal quality for vulnerable people that we, socialists and democrats, have pushed for the adoption of a European Child Guarantee. The idea that public services and institutions are the manifestation of social rights that should be guaranteed to all, rather than consumer services that should be bought by those that can afford them, is a central tenet of our socialist and social-democratic values.

Our political family has pioneered this approach at the European level, starting with the European Youth Guarantee, which in 2013 created a right to further education, training or employment for young people facing long-term exclusion from the labour market. This rights-based vision of what the modern European welfare state should look like, and what role the European Union should play in its development, reached its logical conclusion in the European Pillar of Social Rights, jointly proclaimed in 2017 by all the institutions and Member States at the initiative of Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven.

By this point, our political family had already started to raise the issue of investment in children and young people in the EU policy debate, including through our manifesto



for the 2014 European elections. Then, as now, roughly 1 in 4 European children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. When I ran for re-election as PES President in 2015, I wrote in my letter of intent that “I cannot accept that in the wealthiest Union in the 21st century, we have children who are hungry and cannot go to school,” and together with the S&D Group, PES launched a campaign against child poverty. With the welcome contributions of MEPs, this campaign evolved into the European Child Guarantee, with its five-pillar structure: early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, housing and nutrition. This was enshrined as PES policy in our 2016 Youth Plan.

The process by which we went from a policy concept to the actionable Council recommendation adopted in June 2020 is explained within this publication. Without the Action Plan presented by Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit, endorsed by the European

Council at the May 2021 Porto Social Summit, the Child Guarantee may happily have been ignored by the more conservative elements of the Parliament, Council and Commission. It brings me great pride that it is we socialists and democrats, across all the institutions, that have once again been able to drive a shift in mindsets on public services and deliver such a concrete achievement for the most vulnerable Europeans, in this case children. I now call on Member States to seize this opportunity to raise their life chances by truly delivering on the promise of universal social rights from birth.

Agnes Jongerius

Chair of the PES Social Europe Network

If you want to fight inequality, you should at least make sure that children have a fair start. Can you imagine how difficult it is to pay attention in the classroom if you have an empty stomach? Throughout Europe, children and their parents are faced with this. With the European Child Guarantee we are addressing child poverty.

The S&D Group in the European Parliament has been discussing the concept of a European Child Guarantee for almost 10 years, and I am delighted that we have been able to deliver on this promise in the form of a Council recommendation. Socialists and democrats in the European institutions are turning the page of neoliberal politics, and writing the new chapter of a more social, human-centred Europe. After the Youth Guarantee, the Child Guarantee will raise the bar for Member States' actions in favour of vulnerable groups.



Obtaining the European Child Guarantee was a threefold challenge: Firstly, convincing Member States of the value of EU-level commitments on child poverty and public services.

Secondly, once the principle of EU action was agreed, setting the social rights covered by the Guarantee, the targets and the measures taken to reach them.

Thirdly, obtaining the European funding to equip Member States with the tools to expand the provision of services.

Extending services that are considered rights in some countries to all of Europe's vulnerable children, thereby strengthening the Union's unity, fairness and cohesion, is central to the Child Guarantee's purpose. This is the case for housing and nutrition, but also and most noticeably early childhood education and care (ECEC). The differences in provision are stark and bear repeating: in some countries, fewer than 20% of children at risk of poverty are part of any kind of ECEC, compared to more than 70% among the top income households. ECEC is instrumental in reducing school attainment gaps, and its lack of affordable provision in many Member States serves only to reinforce inequality from generation to generation.

Ensuring the same coverage for all children by offering free access to specific target groups represents a significant long-term investment and a structural change in priorities. This is why it was vital that socialists and democrats were able to secure the dedicated funding within the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). As S&D coordinator in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, I know the effort that colleagues put in to securing earmarked funds for tackling child poverty as part of the ESF+ regulation. Member States cannot be expected to deliver a whole new range of services, for free, without sufficient financial support from the European budget. The ESF+ and the other Structural and Investment Funds are the key to ensuring equal opportunities for all Europeans, whatever their socio-economic backgrounds and whichever region they live in. We cannot accept that children grow up in poverty in Europe.

We socialists and democrats will continue to build a Social Europe brick by brick, recommendation by recommendation, directive by directive, and regulation by regulation. Thanks to the Pillar of Social Rights, we have a clear blueprint, and with the S&D MEPs, PES commissioners and ministers in the Commission and Council, we have a very proactive team of builders. I look forward to continuing the collaboration with all the members of our political family in the PES Social Europe Network and beyond, and I am confident that, with resolve, we will have many more achievements to celebrate in the years to come.

Yonnc Polet

PES Deputy Secretary General

The European Child Guarantee has been at the core of PES social policy and our plans for delivering on social rights for over five years, building on the success of the European Youth Guarantee. Our PES Youth Plan campaign in 2016 was the first pan-European campaign to



focus on the issue of youth unemployment and unequal access to public services, and we sought to anchor children's rights as part of this broad fight for fairness, through the concept of a Child Guarantee.

I am delighted that we have now reached a point where we can ask ourselves not whether it will be approved, nor whether we will be able to include the five pillars that are so essential to a child's development, but rather what the best way to implement it is, what indicators are needed and what the governance structures should be.

With this publication we are finally able to delve into the details of implementing the Child Guarantee and the complexities of putting in place such a multi-level tool across 27 different countries, with at least as many different approaches to education, children and family policies.

Local and regional governments are undoubtedly central partners in making the Child Guarantee work for its potential beneficiaries. In most countries, they are the



primary organisers of childcare, education, housing – and occasionally healthcare – services, and they therefore have the most detailed knowledge of how to meet vulnerable children’s needs. This is why it is vital that they are involved in the preparation of the Child Guarantee action plans and given sufficient resources to live up to the commitments made by national governments.

Across Europe, progressive local and regional governments are already going above and beyond to improve access to essential services for children in need. Our

friends and comrades in the PES Group in the European Committee of the Regions, in partnership with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, are forming a valuable network of best practices on early childhood education and care as part of the “Child Union” campaign. When mayors, regional executives and councillors learn from each other, it is societies as a whole that benefit. I am proud that as PES we are able to contribute to these long-term reflections on the future of family – and child-oriented public services to reduce structural inequalities and open up opportunities for all.

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1 INTRODUCTION

On 14 June 2021, the Council of the European Union adopted the recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee¹. This text commits member states to offering children **at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) effective and free access** to high quality **early childhood education and care (ECEC), education and school-based activities**, at least **one healthy meal each school day** and **health-care**, as well as effective access to **adequate housing and healthy nutrition**.

This represents a significant step towards a Social Europe: for the first time, children's **effective access** to basic services is considered as a right guaranteed at the European level. Over a hundred years after free and universal education became the norm across most of Europe, the EU will now ensure that vulnerable children **have equal access to quality public services in practice, not just in theory**.

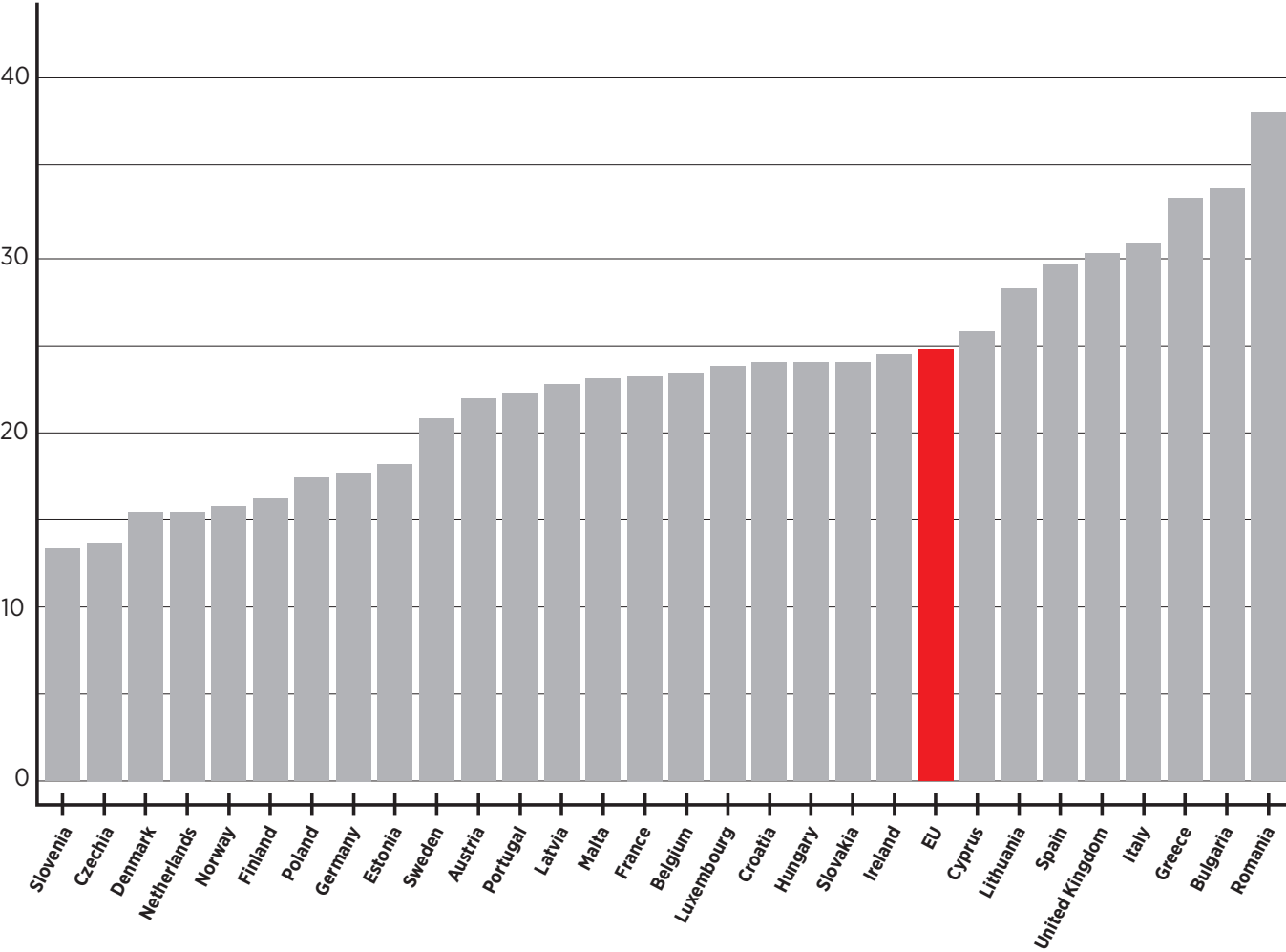
Even before factoring in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, **more than one in five children** in the EU were **at risk of poverty or social exclusion**². This is why PES, our member parties, the S&D Group in the European Parliament, the PES Group in the European Committee of the Regions and FEPS have campaigned for several years for the EU to take action against child poverty and its impacts.

The European Child Guarantee will help deliver on the European Commission's action plan for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, presented by **Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit**³, which includes a target of **5 million fewer children at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030**. Thanks to action by S&D MEPs, it will be supported by **dedicated funding from the European Social Fund+ (ESF+)** for child poverty. The extension of free childcare foreseen by the ECG is also instrumental to improving women's labour market participation, especially in single-parent families.

Member states now have **nine months** to submit their Child Guarantee action plans, led by a **National Child Guarantee Coordinator**. As progressives, we must keep up the pressure on governments to deliver ambitious and effective action plans, that reach out to **all the target groups**. The purpose of this briefing is therefore to retrace the steps to the origins of the Child Guarantee, while also setting out some **best practices** for improving access to quality ECEC, education, nutrition, healthcare and housing for children in need.

Share in children at risk of poverty and social exclusion

Percentage Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2018



2 A PROGRESSIVE ACHIEVEMENT

Issues of social inequality, including child poverty, have always been at the heart of our socialist family's priorities for Europe. The steady construction of a Social Europe is down to the achievements of the PES family, our member parties and sister organisations. The adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017 is our most significant recent achievement. The past decade also saw the convergence of ideas between NGOs, MEPs, and ultimately the Commission and Council, on the need for measures targeted specifically against child poverty and its consequences. The European Child Guarantee is the result of this political and institutional process, of which we are proud to have played a leading role.





László Andor, Secretary General of FEPS, former European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

2.1. THE CHILD GUARANTEE AS PES AND S&D POLICY

In 2013, under the impetus of Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion László Andor (MSZP Hungary), the Commission published a recommendation titled “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage⁴”, providing guidance in the context of the 2014-2021 Multiannual Financial Framework.

The Commission recommendation was followed in 2015 by an own-initiative report of the European Parliament spearheaded by the S&D Group and NGOs, which first called for “[the introduction of] a child guarantee, so that every child in poverty can have access to **free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition**, as part of a European integrated plan to combat child poverty⁵”. This resolution set the standard “**five pillar**” **definition** of the ECG. In its 2017 budget, the EP requested that the Commission conduct a preparatory action studying the feasibility of an ECG.

The child rights agenda was further strengthened in 2017 with the adoption of the Social Pillar under the leadership of Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (SAP Sweden), which includes the right to education (Principle 1) and children’s right to ECEC and protection from poverty (Principle 11)⁶.

The 2014 PES manifesto already committed us to “safeguard the rights and well-being of children [...]. [...] the quality and affordability of education,[...] of healthcare, childcare [...] are crucial components of our societies”. As we sought to build on the success of our campaign for a European Youth Guarantee, the ECG was incorporated as the fourth component of our European Youth Plan⁷. Our commitment to the ECG was reaffirmed in our 2019 manifesto⁸.



Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

2.2. A PRIORITY FOR THE NEW COMMISSION

Thanks to effective negotiation by our political family, the ECG was established as a priority for the Von der Leyen Commission's work programme. Its design and implementation featured in the mission letter of Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights (LSAP Luxembourg).

The feasibility study requested by the EP in 2017 was published in March 2021⁹. It concluded that access by vulnerable children to the five policy areas (ECEC, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing) needs to be improved, and that **the lack of access constitutes a failure to uphold children's rights**. Furthermore, it concluded that it is feasible to guarantee access to the five policy areas, and that the types of action necessary are known. Though the responsibility remains with the member states, EU action was deemed necessary to provide **political leadership** and encourage a

more effective use of EU funds.

In December 2020, SPD ministers for the German Presidency of the Council of the EU coordinated a joint declaration of ministers responsible for social affairs **calling for the rapid establishment of the ECG as part of the pandemic response**¹⁰.

On World Children's Day (20 November) 2020, PES, FEPS, the S&D Group and the PES Group in the European Committee of the Regions launched a call for a **Child Union** built on three objectives: a rapid entry into force of the ECG; the development of an investments ecosystem for European children starting with Next Generation EU; and guaranteed equal access to quality and inclusive early childhood education and care for all¹¹.

3 TRANSLATING THE ECG INTO POLICY

3.1. THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Thanks to the concerted action of **Commissioner Schmit** and **Ana Mendes Godinho, Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security** (PS Portugal) for the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, less than four months elapsed between the publication of the Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on 24 March 2021 and its adoption by the EPSCO Council of 14 June.

The text lost none of its ambition, **maintaining all five pillars** and unequivocally requiring member states to guarantee the following for children in need:

- A** *Effective and free access to high quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and healthcare;*
- B** *Effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing.*

The recommendation also identifies **six specific disadvantages** that should be taken into consideration when designing measures (see section 5.1).





3.2. THE ESF+ EARMARKING

The campaign for a European Child Guarantee coincided with the negotiations for the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and the accompanying programmes, including the European Social Fund+ (ESF+). **The ESF+ is the EU's main financial instrument for improving workers' mobility, employment, education and training opportunities, fostering social inclusion and fighting poverty.** It combines the ESF with several previous funds, including the more poverty-focussed Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

From the very beginning the S&D Group, led by **EMPL coordinator Agnes Jongerius** (PvdA Netherlands) and **ESF+ shadow rapporteur Brando Benifei** (PD Italy), pushed for dedicated funding to be earmarked for tackling child poverty, in particular by supporting projects implementing the forthcoming Child Guarantee.

A breakthrough in interinstitutional negotiations was reached under the Portuguese Presidency in January 2021: member states with an **above-EU-average rate of under-18s at risk of poverty or social exclusion** (2017-2019) must **allocate at least 5%** of their ESF+ resources under shared management for targeted actions to address child poverty¹². If every member state dedicated 5% of their ESF+ budget under shared management to this objective, this would amount to over 4 billion euros over the next seven years¹³.

In combination with the Council recommendation establishing the principles of the ECG, this EU funding will help member states to rise to the challenge of tackling child poverty in a holistic manner.

4 TURNING THE RECOMMENDATION INTO REALITY: THE FIVE PILLARS

Many member states, regions, cities and towns are very successful in the fight against child poverty and its effects on access to public services and opportunities. The ECG and the elaboration of national plans should serve as a springboard to widen the adoption of these good practices. It must be noted that while the ECG serves to address the worst consequences of child poverty, it will not be able to lift children out of poverty without accompanying measures that support their families, and especially mothers. **Decent wages, strong social safety nets and progressive redistribution remain the only long-term answer to the child poverty crisis and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage for vulnerable children.**

4.1. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Children from disadvantaged families, children with special needs, low-income households and people living in rural and remote areas are less likely to access early childhood education and care (ECEC): in some countries, **fewer than 20% of them are part of any kind of ECEC**, compared to more than 70% among the top income households.

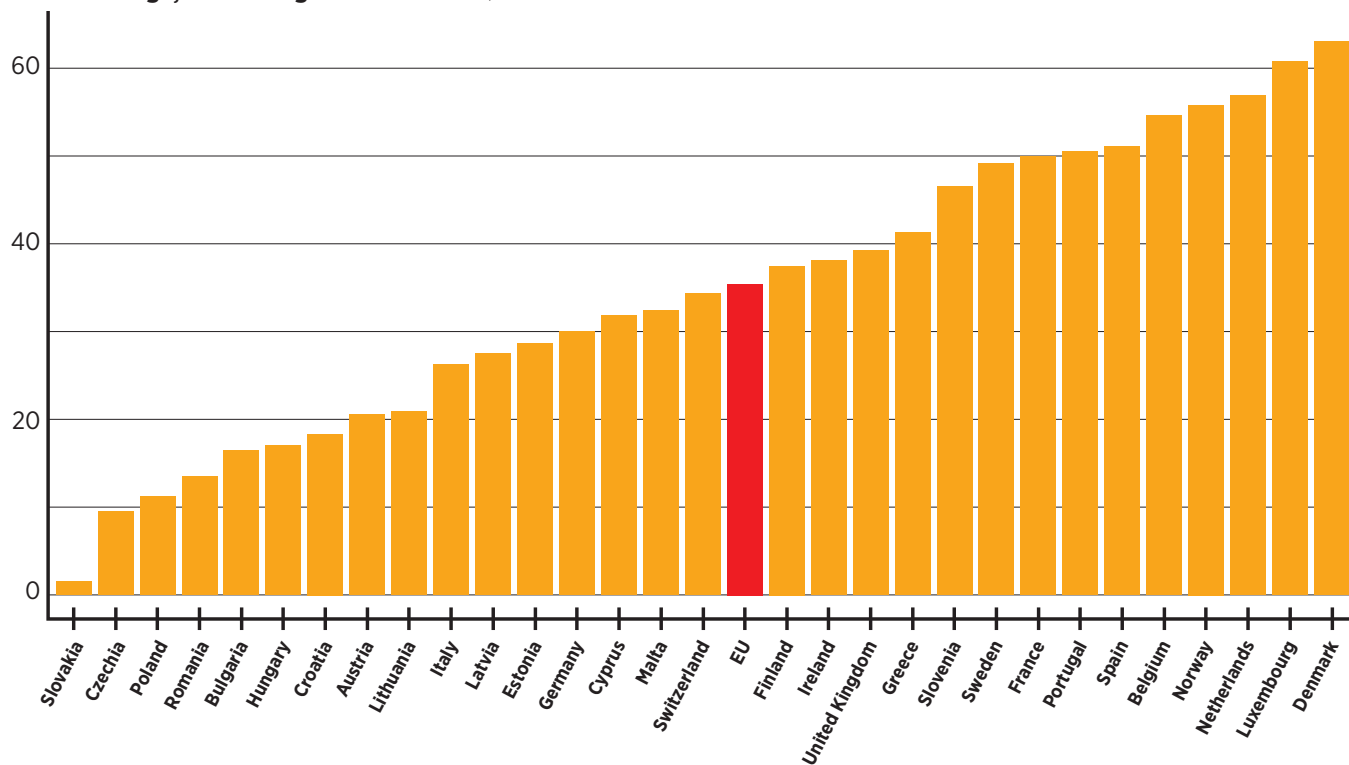
Solutions to these inequalities are known and available: for example, a study led by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and partners

found that European children aged between 0 and 3 years old from the bottom 40% socio-economic status are about **15% more likely to attain average scores once teenagers, if they have access to quality child-care at the age of 1 or 2¹⁴**.

Improving access to ECEC will also help reduce overall poverty levels by allowing women who were previously excluded from the labour market due to caring activities to seek work, thereby increasing their income and independence.

Share of children in childcare programmes

Percentage, children aged 0-3 Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2018



Guio, A-C., Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2021).

"Study on the economic implementing framework of a possible EU Child Guarantee scheme including its financial foundation"



- The private ECEC sector will not be able to provide the necessary additional services: the expansion of ECEC will require publicly run and/or publicly funded services.
- Improving access to ECEC must not come at the cost of quality: National ECG plans must include investment in training and qualifications for ECEC staff.
 - A third of member states, including Portugal, Germany and Finland, require at least one staff member per group of children to have a bachelor's level qualification, at all levels of ECEC¹⁵.
- Across Europe, progressive governments are already leading the way in tackling ECEC inequalities:
 - In 2013 the Maltese government of Partit Laburista introduced the Free Childcare Scheme, whereby government provides free childcare services to parents/guardians who are in employment or are pursuing their education, with the aim to help families achieve a work/life balance.
 - In September 2021 the Portuguese government of Partido Socialista extended

free ECEC to all vulnerable children. The change means 35,000 children in the country now benefit from the policy.

- Since 2009, alongside the compulsory one year of nursery schooling introduced nationally, the City of Vienna has introduced free full-day nursery facilities, an entitlement for children up to the age of six to receive pre-school education and care, regardless of parents' income and circumstances. The free nursery schools have played a key role in ensuring equal access to education, combating poverty, and promoting inclusion and social cohesion¹⁶.
- Under the Carinthian government's 2018-2023 programme, the region is set to become the most child-friendly region in Europe, providing support to meet the costs of parents or legal guardians, whose children are being educated and cared for in a crèche, nursery, kindergarten or by a childminder¹⁷. With this initiative, Carinthia seeks to ensure that every child has the opportunity to access pre-school education free of charge.

4.2. EDUCATION AND SCHOOL-BASED ACTIVITIES

Education is free and compulsory in all member states, but work remains to be done to make this access effective for vulnerable children. **Getting to school, acquiring textbooks and materials and paying for after-school activities** are all costs that can weigh hard on the household budgets of lower income families. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed disparities related to internet access, online learning tools and digital learning material. ECG action plans must address these challenges to make free quality education a reality for all.

Member states must also take into consideration specific challenges faced by girls and minority groups that prevent them from fully benefiting from their education due to stereotyping, sexual harassment and bullying.

- **Public transport or school buses should be made free for children and those accompanying them.**
 - In 2020, Paris extended free public transport passes to all under-18s attending school within the city¹⁸.
- **Mandatory school textbooks should be provided for free or made available in school libraries.**
 - In 2019, the Portuguese government made school textbooks free for all children in the first two cycles of schooling using a voucher system¹⁹.
 - With the help of the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, La Rioja will launch the initiative Interactive Digital Classrooms and fund the acquisition of mobile devices for the most vulnerable²⁰.
- **As identified in the ECG feasibility study, governments must ensure that funding is fairly distributed across schools and across educational tracks.**
 - In 2020, La Rioja launched the first edition of the Open Summer School, a programme of non-formal education for a thousand students in need of educational support or social disadvantage²¹.



4.3. HEALTHCARE

The Commission's feasibility study finds that despite the existence in principle of free healthcare for children in 22 member states, 13 of these have gaps in universality of service and **only nine of the country experts surveyed did not report problems in delivering a universal free service**²². These problems particularly impact children with a migrant background, with only 11 member states fully compliant with the obligation to deliver healthcare to migrant children.

COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdowns and restrictions on social life have also drawn attention to the silent epidemic of mental ill-health among European teenagers. Mental illnesses including anxiety and stress disorders are **increasingly affecting younger children**²³. Free healthcare also means providing free therapy and counselling to children that need it.

- **Member states must implement free health-care coverage for children, regardless of their parents' employment or residency status.**
 - **The six member states without a universal free service must at the very least establish an equivalent service for children, especially vulnerable ones.**
 - **Prescription charges and co-payments must be waived for low-income families.**
- **Free healthcare for children should include dental care, glasses and hearing aids.**
- **As part of broader outreach strategies, new parents should be provided with "maternity packages" containing baby supplies such as care products and clothes. This has been policy in Finland since the 1930s**²⁴.
- **As called for in our 2021 publication Affordable and quality healthcare for all!, we need new, more accurate indicators for unmet health needs**²⁵.



4.4. SCHOOL MEALS AND HEALTHY NUTRITION

A healthy and balanced diet is essential to children's mental and physical development, so active policies are needed to ensure children in need enjoy the same quality nutrition as their peers from better-off backgrounds. Governments and local authorities can act within school settings by providing healthy breakfasts, warm lunches and snacks (supported by the EU's fruit and milk scheme).

There is very wide disparity between member states when it comes to free school meals. At one end of the spectrum countries such as Finland and Sweden **provide free school meals** to all children, whereas at the other, most schools in Greece, Cyprus and the Netherlands do not provide meals on the premises at all^{26 27}. Most member states offer reduced fees for certain families, but the shift to free meals enshrined in the ECG will therefore represent a **substantial change in approach**.

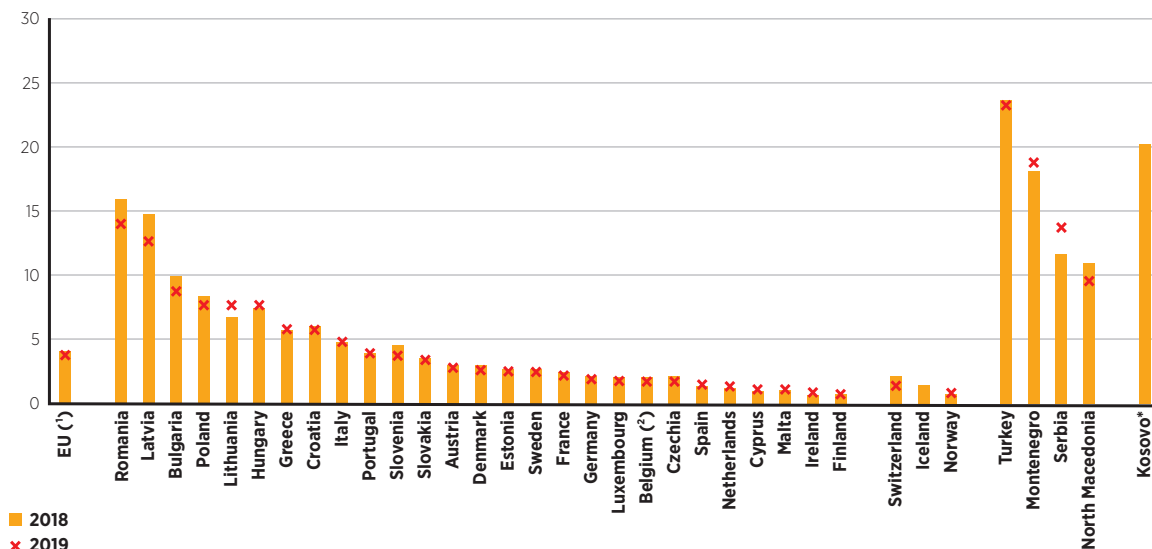
Wider action is also needed outside schools to make sure that vulnerable children have access to **healthy nutrition at home**.

- Children in need should be provided with free healthy lunches, as is already the case in Finland (all children), Portugal and Lithuania (low-income families). Extending the policy to all children helps avoid stigma.
- Governments should continue to use ESF+ funding (ex-FEAD) to provide food aid to vulnerable families.
 - Many member states and local authorities accompany food distribution with advice on cooking and storage (Portugal), nutrition and how to reduce food waste (Malta)²⁸.
 - Food distribution should also be accompanied by advice on accessing other essential public services.



Severe housing deprivation rate, 2018 and 2019

Percentage Source: Eurostat



■ 2018

✕ 2019

(¹) Estimates.

(²) Break in series.* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_mdho06a)

4.5. HOUSING

Housing is a human right, recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enshrined as Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Tackling poor housing for children naturally means providing adequate housing to their parent(s). **Solving this problem therefore means solving the wider societal housing crisis**, though there are some targeted measures that can be put in place.

Since the economic crisis in 2008, **investment in affordable housing has steadily decreased**. The housing market displays evident failures, distortions and deep fragmentation due to gentrification, financialisation and touristification. **80 million people in the EU are overburdened by housing costs**²⁹. With housing costs increasing faster than incomes, models like

Vienna's, where 60% of the city's residents live in rent-controlled flats owned either by the municipality or cooperatives, merit being applied to other cities across Europe³⁰.

Part of the problem is that the **current EU legislation sees housing as a market, not a service**, meaning it falls under the remit of competition law. For our vision for a progressive urban agenda to be realised, housing must be granted the same kind of exception as education and health. In the meantime, **legislation does not restrict the provision of social housing to target groups such as low-income families with children**. We should seize this opportunity to start by fixing the housing market from the bottom up.



- Governments must start by acknowledging that housing is a human right, not a commodity and that the role of the state is to provide safe, decent and affordable housing for all. This can be social, public, cooperative, for limited profit, affordable rental and affordable home ownership.
- Social housing should be intended for all citizens and must be seen as the backbone of socially mixed neighbourhoods. The ambition should be to cover the housing needs of the three lowest income quintiles and reduce by half housing cost overburdening among this group by 2030.
- As outlined in the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee report *A strong social Europe for Just Transitions*, at least 30% of new builds should be affordable housing for the lower-income group, and another 30% should be affordable for the middle-income group³¹.
- In areas of acute pressure, radical options, including rent caps and freezes, must be explored.
- Since 2019, the city of Barcelona has been granted the power to buy properties that have been vacant for over two years at half the market rate³².
- Overall, priority access to social housing should be given to families with children, especially in large or single-parent families.
- Additional housing benefits should be provided to families with children.
 - 175,000 households in Sweden are in receipt of families housing allowance, which increases with the number of children³³.
- Families with children have the right to appropriate housing and protection against eviction.
- Member states should adopt a Housing First approach to homelessness, especially for families: this means quickly providing permanent accommodation before accompanying them with social support.

5 HORIZONTAL CHALLENGES

5.1. IDENTIFYING AND REACHING TARGET GROUPS

Child poverty **interacts negatively with a number of additional disadvantages** to create even greater marginalisation. The recommendation identifies the following six situations:

- A** *homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation;*
- B** *children with disabilities;*
- C** *children with mental health issues;*
- D** *children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin, particularly Roma;*
- E** *children in alternative, especially institutional, care;*
- F** *children in precarious family situations.*

National anti-discrimination legislation should prevent differentiated access according to protected characteristics such as ethnicity or disability, but this is not always applied. The recommendation makes clear that the outcome of the ECG should be improving effective access for children in need, not just formal access. In addition to legislating to widen eligibility and remove cost barriers, practical processes must be put in place to **make sure potential beneficiaries are aware of their rights**.



- Authorities should reach out to target groups in an integrated manner so as to increase uptake of services across the five pillars of the ECG. Though the focus is children, the broader family situation must form part of the action plans.
- The Brussels Capital Region has put forward a comprehensive action plan for single-parent families which covers access to services, but also the wellbeing of children and the parent³⁴.
- Public authorities must adopt a holistic, proactive approach to providing access to services for vulnerable and/or marginalised groups. Enrolment must be facilitated for migrant families, itinerant groups or those who face a language barrier.
- Malmö has set up a one-stop-shop for child-care and preschool, health and social counselling, pedagogical support and language learning for children and parents³⁵.
- Member states should study the option of automatically granting certain social benefits without requiring eligible individuals and families to apply.
- EU anti-discrimination legislation enshrining equal treatment regardless of sex, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, age, religion or belief must extend beyond employment to areas such as social protection, healthcare, education and access to goods and services, including housing.
- As called for in the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 presented by Commissioner for Equality Helene Dalli (PL Malta)³⁶, the Council should adopt the proposal for a horizontal directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment outside the field of employment.





5.2. COSTING THE CHILD GUARANTEE

The cost of implementing the ECG will vary significantly from country to country for two main reasons: **the size of the gap** between current service provision and universal effective provision, and **the cost of supplying the services** to close the gap. Though there are some upfront costs associated with new infrastructures (creches, schools, canteens, housing, etc.), **the bulk of the costs will come from running these expanded and improved services**. Without guarantees of continued financing, many local authorities will not be in a position to bid for funding to provide these additional services.

The second phase of the Commission's feasibility study provides estimates of the cost of putting in place different measures. These are very rough estimates, with a number of caveats: while it is possible to evaluate the size of the implementation gap,

"information on the cost of services is scarce and estimates of these costs are extremely difficult³⁷".

The cost estimates are broken down into two groups: Group 1 covers the cost of free school meals, free ECEC and removal of school costs (based on macro- and micro- data and information provided by national experts); Group 2 covers health examinations, provision of services aimed at preventing and fighting child homelessness, and provision of integrated delivery of services (based on in-depth analysis of specific programmes).

A full breakdown of the methods and assumptions underpinning the cost estimates can be found in **Part J of the study** (pp.223-278). We include a selection of cost computations for specific Group 1 measures as an appendix.

5.3. IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING THE CHILD GUARANTEE

The delivery (and even design) of child-oriented services covered by the ECG is very often the responsibility of local and regional authorities, which is why they must be involved from the very beginning of the process. In the absence of reliable data, the input of local and regional authorities will be indispensable to the correct implementation of programmes designed to put the Child Guarantee in practice, as well as monitoring their success. As the ECG seeks to address the multifaceted challenge of child poverty, its progress must be charted across a range of indicators, not all of which are currently available and reliable. The initial phase will therefore require a well-resourced network of national experts until Eurostat is equipped to gather better and more disaggregated data.

- **Local and regional authorities must be involved in the monitoring, evaluation and governance of these action plans.**
- **The EU's Technical Support Instrument programme must support the collection of data relating to the Child Guarantee objectives.**
- **Eurostat must be provided with the resources to develop an ad hoc "Child Guarantee" module, with a survey to be conducted every two years to monitor advancements.**
- **The Council of the EU's Social Policy Committee should establish a dedicated ad hoc Working Party for the Child Guarantee.**



	Effective and free access to ECEC		Free s
	Finance needed to provide free ECEC to all AROP children under 5	Finance needed to improve the availability of ECEC for AROP children under 5	Finance needed to secondary e
BE	103.779.931	640.794.713	
BG	30.072.904	108.066.123	
CZ	42.726.108	146.354.524	
DK	26.003.745	167.022.418	
DE	86.475.002	1.732.698.475	
EE	0	16.453.899	
IE	235.267.877	91.727.422	
EL	0	98.721.394	
ES	395.977.236	678.401.049	
FR	317.154.288	2.048.934.437	
HR	6.620.567	N/A	
IT	0	1.633.801.641	
CY	17.629.063	13.243.307	
LV	0	29.026.627	
LT	23.464.126	59.491.507	
LU	5.429.530	44.436.140	
HU	15.944.238	58.053.475	
MT	0	N/A	
NL	181.321.220	279.781.992	
AT	59.857.055	273.623.898	
PL	118.656.263	539.942.197	
PT	24.285.068	N/A	
RO	170.114.273	219.838.294	
SI	20.720.679	22.430.381	
SK	25.779.280	129.445.964	
FI	0	206.227.732	
SE	110.445.806	524.195.820	
EU28	1.913.944.328	9.762.713.429	

Original estimates from Guio, A-C., Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2021). Totals are from own calculations.

School-based activities	Free school meals	TOTAL
To remove school costs in primary and education for all AROP children	Finance needed to provide free schools meals to AROP children, improved quality, all school days	(ECEC, school costs, meals)
169.944.200	168.714.000	979.452.913
N/A	47.689.815	185.828.842
35.996.690	24.593.400	249.670.722
0	59.954.917	252.981.080
N/A	530.227.586	2.349.401.063
N/A	0	16.453.899
59.570.000	81.904.177	468.469.476
73.250.000	133.765.330	305.736.724
974.379.000	336.546.875	2.385.304.160
466.840.115	989.544.600	3.822.473.440
36.840.000	20.353.169	63.813.736
1.316.950.000	1.339.996.667	4.290.748.308
8.640.000	6.915.456	46.427.826
6.930.000	2.126.108	38.082.735
13.104.000	7.578.218	103.637.851
1.131.392	6.675.000	57.672.062
1.872.000	6.612.480	82.482.193
3.850.000	4.743.750	8.593.750
56.329.000	159.117.116	676.549.328
105.141.000	126.849.600	565.471.553
3.404.000	124.180.815	786.183.275
3.968.000	4.992.730	33.245.798
259.242.950	230.028.034	879.223.551
N/A	0	43.151.060
N/A	32.855.053	188.080.297
0	0	206.227.732
0	0	634.641.626
3.597.382.347	4.445.964.896	19.720.005.000



6 CONCLUSION

The European Child Guarantee marks a paradigm shift in the way the EU considers access to essential public services for children at risk of poverty and offers an opportunity for all member states to **reconsider the quality and delivery of these services**. Several member states have a significant head start, which is why S&D MEPs' fight for a strong ESF+ with earmarking for child poverty is such an important achievement: **the EU must demonstrate solidarity in tackling child poverty and its consequences**.

Member states had to submit their Child Guarantee action plans by March 2022, but first they had to appoint **National Child Guarantee Coordinators**. This first step is vitally important to the success of the action plans, **as the coordinator needs to be sufficiently high-ranking to be able to drive real horizontal cooperation** across ministries, departments and agencies. As one of the main organisers and providers of education and care services, **local and regional governments should be involved** from the very beginning in the design of the action plans.

Socialists and social democrats have been at the forefront of developing the European Child Guarantee, and **we must remain at the cutting edge of its implementation** through well-funded, accessible public services and innovative outreach strategies. PES will continue to enable the exchange of ideas and best practices to ensure that the Child Guarantee recommendation becomes a reality.

The post-pandemic society which we envision is one in which citizens' wellbeing is at the forefront of all public policies, from cradle to grave. With this new European instrument, we are ensuring that child policies are driven up the agenda **in every member state, in every region and in every town**, and that the best, most innovative solutions can be adopted as widely as possible. Every child, no matter which part of Europe they come from and no matter their parents' income, must have access to these essential public services. This is **the promise of a fair start in life** which the European Union now guarantees.

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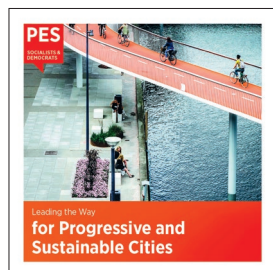
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