



Save the Children

INVESTING IN CHILDHOOD

CHARTING A PATH TO END CHILD POVERTY ACROSS EUROPE

Insights into National Social Protection Systems and the
European Child Guarantee

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Cover photo: Cezara*, 10, sits inside her classroom in a public school in a disadvantaged area of Bucharest, which has a partnership with Save the Children. Photo credit: Claire Thomas / Save the Children

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SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

No European country, no matter how rich, is free of child poverty. While being one of the world's wealthiest regions, Europe is facing increasing numbers of children and families experiencing or being at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Child poverty is not only a denial of fundamental rights, it also has a tangible societal cost. Developing effective strategies is therefore crucial to fight child poverty and to break the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion. As reminded by de Schutter et al:

“ENDING INTER-GENERATIONAL PERPETUATION OF POVERTY WILL GREATLY INCREASE OUR ABILITY TO BUILD A MORE INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND PEACEFUL WORLD. (...) THIS IS NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE DAMAGE IT DOES TO CHILDREN, AND IT IS NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT CAN BE SEEN AS A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. IT IS ALSO BECAUSE OF THE DAMAGE IT DOES TO SOCIETY AND THE DANGERS IT CREATES FOR ALL OUR FUTURES”¹.

This paper aims to offer insights into recent trends and statistics concerning child poverty, with a particular emphasis on the function of national social protection systems and the European Child Guarantee (Child Guarantee).

To do so, it builds on the input, data, and insights received by Save the Children members and offices working in 15 European countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Spain, and Ukraine. They answered a questionnaire drafted by Save the Children in February 2024.

European Union (EU) Member States: 9

- Denmark
- Finland
- Germany
- Italy
- Lithuania
- The Netherlands
- Poland
- Romania
- Spain

Non-EU countries: 6

Candidate countries (5)

- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Kosovo
- Serbia
- Ukraine

EEA countries (1)

- Norway



Fifteen-year-old Alin* stands outside his family's home located in a remote area on the outskirts of Bucharest, Romania, where he lives with his sister and parents. Alin's family receives support from Save the Children.

Photo: Claire Thomas / Save the Children

1. Child poverty: A pan-European crisis

Section 1 shows the extent of child poverty, its recent evolution and how social transfers support households with children experiencing poverty.

1. PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

Child poverty remains widespread, worsened by persistent inflation and difficult access to essential goods and services. Despite slight decreases in monetary poverty indicators post-pandemic, the ongoing inflation crisis continues to strain vulnerable families, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

2. VULNERABLE GROUPS

Children with migrant backgrounds, one-parent families, and households with multiple children face heightened risks, along with other marginalised groups like children with disabilities and Roma communities. These vulnerable populations often lack adequate social support and are disproportionately affected by economic downturns and systemic inequalities.

3. GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES AND MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT

Strong disparities exist across regions. The mental health implications for impoverished children are profound and escalating. Limited access to mental health support services contribute to long-term consequences for their well-being and prospects.

RECOMMENDATION:

In line with the Child Guarantee framework, implement comprehensive and universally accessible public services and support systems, including free access to healthcare, education, childcare, and social protection. Prioritise interventions that target vulnerable groups and regions with the highest rates of child poverty, ensuring every child has the opportunities they need to thrive regardless of their circumstances.



2. The protective role of child support against child poverty

Section 2 presents new insights on the protective power of cash support for children and on its challenges.



Photo: John Owens / Save The Children

1. THE KEY ROLE OF SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Well-designed social security systems, offering cash transfers and in-kind benefits, help mitigate child poverty by providing financial assistance directly to families with children. Studies consistently demonstrate the positive impact of such policies on reducing child poverty rates. They support the full participation of families in society, contribute to equitable opportunities for all children and break the intergenerational poverty cycle.

2. CURRENT BENEFITS PROVISIONS DO NOT SUFFICIENTLY REDUCE CHILD POVERTY

The available evidence clearly demonstrates that the child contingent cash support is essential to reduce child poverty. However, some countries only manage to bring about small improvements in child poverty reduction and in all countries, the current provision is mostly not enough to lift most at-risk-of-poverty children above the poverty line.

3. GAPS AND CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL CURRENT PROVISIONS

Hurdles include: the lack of adequacy of the amounts provided, regressive some non-refundable tax reliefs, gaps in provision, low means-testing thresholds, discriminatory conditions for provisions, no indexation of child support, fragmented and complicated support structures, and fear of having to pay back benefits already received.

RECOMMENDATION:

Make reforms to improve the adequacy, coverage, and accessibility of child contingent benefits, and eliminate discriminatory practices. Enhance coordination between social security programmes and other support services to create a more inclusive and effective system for combating child poverty.

3. On the importance of estimating the cost of the child as a benchmarking for social policies

Section 3 shows how tools for evaluating child-rearing costs are critical for assessing and improving policies to ensure a dignified life and decent standard of living for all children.

1. HIGHLIGHTING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Estimating child-rearing costs is vital for understanding economic hurdles faced by families with children and for shaping policy that enables dignified living standards.

2. HOLISTIC VIEW OF CHILDREN'S NEEDS

Methodologies for calculating child costs must embrace a holistic perspective, integrating societal norms and cultural factors alongside expert opinions, ensuring inclusive reference budgets.

3. BENCHMARKING SOCIAL POLICIES

Reference budgets serve as benchmarks for poverty measurement and assessing income support programmes' adequacy, and for informing policy decisions on financial support.

RECOMMENDATION:

Governments should develop and deploy tools for estimating child-rearing costs that incorporate regional variations and inflation. They should regularly adjust social transfers in line with cost-of-living increases.

4. The European Child Guarantee

Section 4 offers an analysis of the role played by the Child Guarantee and the importance of setting up a proper monitoring system and allocate adequate funding.

1. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE CHILD GUARANTEE

Implementing the Child Guarantee faces hurdles across several EU Member States. In particular, the lack of new policies funded under the scheme raises concerns. Moreover, complexities stemming from decentralised governance in some countries is a real threat to effective measures. This highlights the need for a bold monitoring role for the European Parliament and Commission.

2. 2024 MARCH REPORTING: ASSESSING PROGRESSES AND PUSHING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The national reports that EU governments are expected to share with the European Commission in March are fundamental for evaluating national progress. These reports must give concrete insights to EU institutions and CSOs on the development of the Child Guarantee.

3. FUNDING THE CHILD GUARANTEE

The Child Guarantee's success depends on sufficient funding from EU and national sources. Spain sets an example with over 10% of ESF+ investments allocated to addressing child poverty. However, tracking funding remains challenging across Member States, highlighting the importance of transparent allocation mechanisms and adherence to ESF+ requirements.

RECOMMENDATION:

For impactful implementation of the Child Guarantee, it's crucial to establish streamlined coordination mechanisms, enhance monitoring frameworks, and ensure transparent funding allocation at both EU and national levels.

5. Exclusion of the children most at risk

Section 5 analyses the risk of excluding the children most in need, in particular children with a migration background.

1. CHILDREN WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND

Children with migration backgrounds encounter severe restrictions in accessing benefits across Europe. This points to the need for inclusive policies, improved integration measures, and recognition of universal rights regardless of legal status.

2. VULNERABLE GROUPS EXCLUDED

Children from low-income single-headed households, migrant, LGBTQI+ youth, and others face barriers due to bureaucratic hurdles, systemic biases, and restrictive eligibility criteria, hampering access to social protection.

3. INADEQUATE TARGETING PERPETUATES INEQUALITY

Despite efforts, bureaucratic hurdles, complex eligibility criteria, stigma, and discrimination persist, thwarting effective targeting and delivery of social protection measures.

RECOMMENDATION:

Prioritise inclusive policies and remove barriers to social protection for all families and children, especially those in vulnerable situations. This includes streamlining application processes, investing in public awareness, and ensuring equitable access to benefits and services.

6. Ensuring meaningful stakeholders' participation

Section 6 stresses the importance of engaging meaningfully with children and Civil Society Organisations.

1. CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Diverse engagement strategies tailored to national contexts will allow CSOs to be meaningfully involved in policy processes. Yet, challenges persist in ensuring clear avenues for engagement, hindering effective policy implementation and monitoring.

2. CHILD PARTICIPATION

Structured mechanisms, such as advisory boards and dedicated platforms, are vital for proper child participation in decision-making processes. Empowering children to voice their opinions promotes their rights and well-being, resulting in more relevant and sustainable policies to combat poverty and social exclusion.

3. POLICY TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Initiatives emphasizing transparency and accessibility in policy development, such as online platforms and consultations, make it easier for citizens and CSOs to get involved in decision-making processes. A broader societal input and oversight enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies.

RECOMMENDATION:

Governments should develop and deploy tools for estimating child-rearing costs that incorporate regional variations and inflation. They should regularly adjust social transfers in line with cost-of-living increases.



Sirin*, 10, refugee, now lives in Sweden. Sirin's family receives support from Save the Children.

Photo: Paul Wu / Save the Children

CHAPTER 1

CHILD POVERTY: A PAN-EUROPEAN CRISIS

1.1. CHILD POVERTY IN EUROPE

One in four children in the EU are at risk of poverty or social exclusion². Poverty deprives those 20 million children of the possibility to thrive and reach their full potential in adulthood. Poverty affects every facet of a child's life: their well-being, education, family relationships, and personal and professional development. Even a brief period of deprivation can have long-lasting repercussions for a child, potentially affecting future generations³.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened inequalities and vulnerabilities while straining social services. Children couldn't go to school, socialise, or access essential services. Meanwhile, parents faced job losses or reduced hours. Skyrocketing costs pushed financially stable families into poverty and vulnerable families into deeper poverty⁴. Children's mental health issues are on the rise, while they're also confronted with food insecurity, poor housing conditions, unaffordable recreational activities, and inaccessible or overcrowded schools⁵.

Analysis of information from different countries reported below brings up **six main trends**:

1. PERSISTENT INFLATION CRISIS

The inflation crisis continues to bear heavy on families and children, exacerbating poverty levels, and putting essential goods and services out of reach.

2. CHILDREN WITH A MIGRANT BACKGROUND FACE A HIGHER RISK

In Finland, children born abroad face a 44% higher risk of poverty, with those from Africa and the Middle East at even higher risk (60%)⁶. In Spain, migrant households experience child poverty rates up to three times higher than the general population⁷. In the Netherlands, almost 70% of children facing long-term poverty risk come from non-European backgrounds. Despite similar stories across many European countries, Section 5 shows that these children often face exclusion from national social support systems.

For example, in Germany refugees and asylum seekers used to receive lower social benefits than others for 18 months – that's now been extended to 36 months⁸.

3. OTHER GROUPS AT GREATER RISK

One-parent families and households with more than two children remain highly vulnerable to poverty. In Finland, single-parent households are over eight times more likely to live in poverty than children of two-parent families⁹. In the Netherlands, 11.9% of children raised by single parents face the risk of poverty, compared to 4% of children from households with two parents¹⁰. Other categories of children in vulnerable situations mentioned in this research are children with disabilities, Roma and other minority children, and children in poor communities.

4. GEOGRAPHICAL DISPARITIES

Countries, regions, and cities are registering geographic disparities. In Italy, the regional AROPE rate for under 18s is 11% in Tuscany but 56% in Campania¹¹. In Denmark, despite overall reduced child poverty rates – large differences remain¹².

5. MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Needs for mental health support are surging among children experiencing poverty. Save the Children Spain estimates that poor children are four times more likely to suffer from mental disorders than children from high-income households¹³.

6. POSITIVE IMPACT OF SOCIAL BENEFIT SYSTEMS

Effective child benefit systems in countries like Denmark and Norway have helped reduce child poverty rates.

The chart below presents **trends in child poverty** across various European countries from statistics and insights gathered between 2017 and 2023.

Chart 1: Child Poverty Trends in European Countries from 2017 to 2023

DENMARK

From 2017 to 2022, **child poverty rates dropped**. An improved economy and temporary child benefits from 2019–2023 contributed to the decrease¹⁴.

FINLAND

Children with a **migrant background are at greater risk** of poverty than those with a Finnish background. Moreover, children with a foreign background who were born abroad are four times more at risk (44%) than for Finnish-background children (10%). A sixfold increase applies to children born in Africa and the Middle East¹⁵.

GERMANY

21.6% of children in 2022 were **at risk of poverty**¹⁶. In 2023, 1.9 million children lived in households relying on the Bürgergeld (Citizen's benefit), the basic social benefit for a minimum subsistence level¹⁷.

High (3.8%) **inflation on food and beverages** in 2024 is a big concern for children and families¹⁸.

ITALY

In 2022, 1.27 million children, or **13.4%** of the child population, were in **absolute poverty**, up by 1 percentage point from 2021¹⁹.

The poverty rate rises with more children, from 6.5% in one-child families to 21% in families with three or more children. **Foreign-born parented families see rates soar to 36.1%**²⁰. The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children under 16 of foreign origin is 41.5%, 15% higher than their Italian counterparts.

In 2021, **4.9%** of children under 16 **couldn't afford food** and 2.5% missed protein-rich meals. Food deprivation touched 5.9% of under 16s in 2021, varying between 2.5% in the Centre, 6.2% in the North, and 7.6% in the South²¹.

LITHUANIA

Despite Lithuania's children-at-risk-of-poverty **rate decreasing** to 17% in 2023 from 17.8% in 2022²², it has one of the highest EU child poverty rates. On the other hand, to address this, all social benefits were raised by 42% compared to their levels in 2018²³.

POLAND

In 2022, **household conditions worsened**, largely due to high inflation. Extreme poverty was predominantly among the 0-17 age group, with 6% impacted²⁴.

Children living in **extreme poverty** rose from 5.3% in 2021 to 5.7% in 2022²⁵.

ROMANIA

Romania has the **largest education outcome performance gap** related to students' socioeconomic status²⁶.

THE NETHERLANDS

An expert committee found that families living near the social minimum face a monthly shortfall of EUR 200-500. While they determined that a EUR 6-billion investment was necessary, the government increased funding by only EUR 2 billion²⁷.

Rise in energy expenses prompted **temporary government aid** in 2022 for households in need. In September 2023, the government implemented **various actions to reduce child poverty**, and in December 2023 it renewed the temporary government aid around energy expenses for 2024.

SPAIN

28.9% or 2.3 million children live **below the threshold of moderate poverty**²⁸. The inflation crisis led Spain to high rates of severe material and social deprivation.

55% of the children in single-mother households experience moderate poverty, and **24.5% severe poverty**. Households with migrant parents have child poverty rates up to three times higher than the general population.

ALBANIA

In 2021, **28.5% of all children were at risk of poverty**. 30.2% of all girls were at risk, which means they are more vulnerable. Children with disabilities, Roma and other minority children are in a particularly difficult situation²⁹.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Children **consistently have higher poverty rates (30.6%)** than the general population (23.4%) (2011 figures). Children with disabilities, Roma and other minority children are more vulnerable. Early childhood education and care is not available to all children³⁰.

KOSOVO

In Kosovo, **22.8 % of children live in poverty**, and 7.2% in conditions of extreme poverty³¹. Its social assistance schemes do not meet the demand for basic services³².

UKRAINE

The war has caused a surge in poverty. Children have borne the brunt – an alarming **65.2% now live in poverty**. Families with three or more children are especially vulnerable.




The impact of **poverty goes beyond material deprivation**, children's education, nutrition, and housing are also affected, limiting their learning and future opportunities. Economically disadvantaged children face significant barriers to learning and development, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. Poverty means cutting food budgets and inadequate nutrition. The lack of stable housing for displaced individuals means homelessness, instability, and insecurity, undermining their overall well-being and development.

SERBIA

In 2022, **20% of children were at risk of poverty**. A slowdown of economic growth puts additional pressure on all households but particularly on poor families. Children living in Roma settlements are among the most vulnerable³³.

NORWAY

The number of children in **poverty is decreasing**, partly due to increases in child benefit and cash payments. At the same time, the number of **families depending on food banks is rising**, particularly for those with a migrant background.

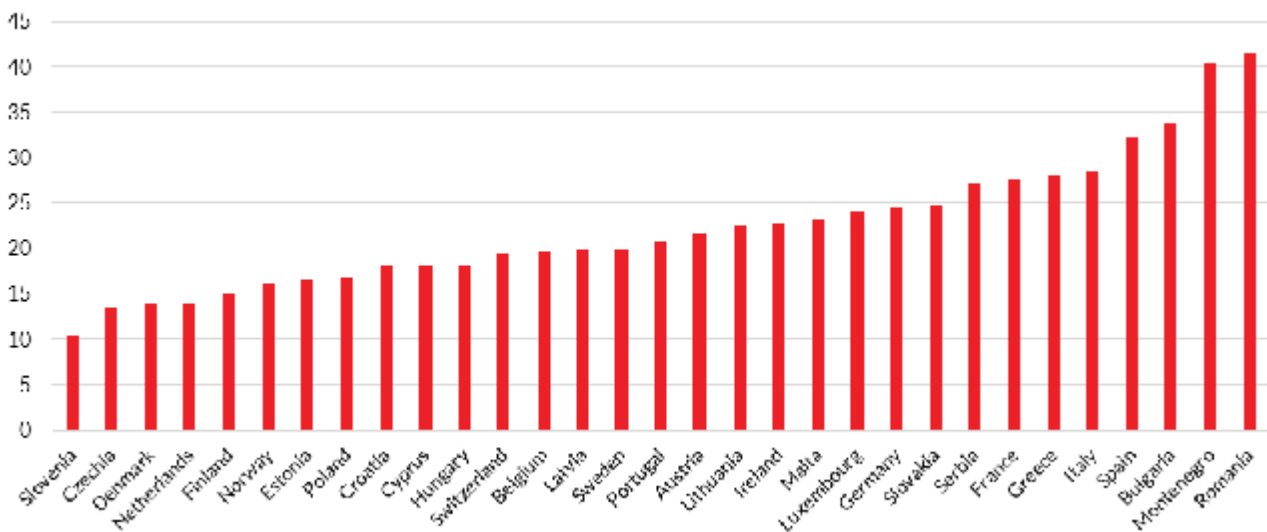
-  - EU
-  - Candidate countries
-  - EEA

1.2. CHILD POVERTY: A LARGE-SCALE STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

Child poverty is about more than a shortage of money. It must be measured using a monetary and a non-monetary approach. Indeed the EU indicator on the risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE³⁴) combines a monetary poverty with severe material and social deprivation and (quasi-)joblessness of the household.

This definition considers that children are deprived if they lack at least three items out of a list of 17 child-specific items that are commonly accepted or encouraged as part of children's development in their societies.

Figure 1: AROPE rate, children 0-18, 2022, %



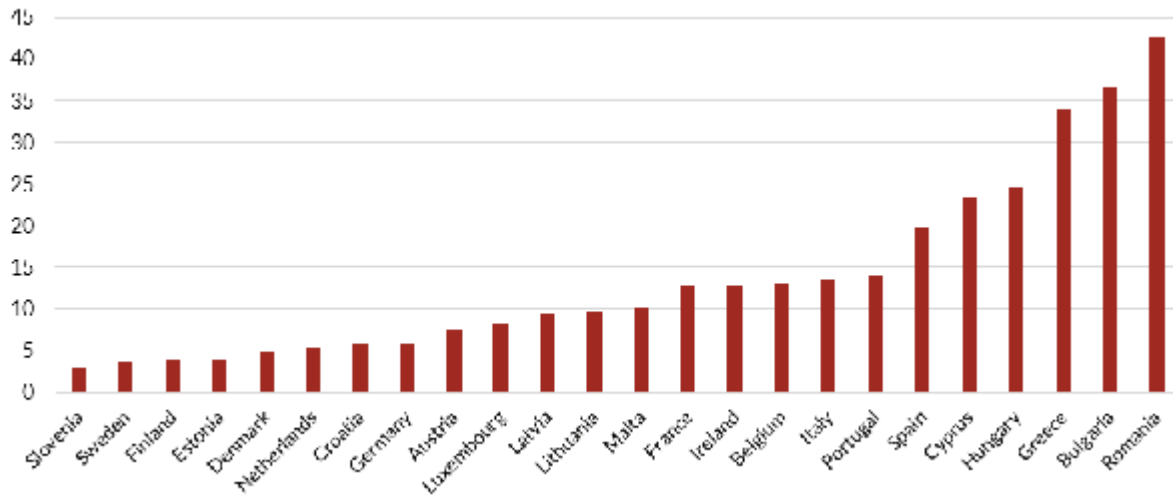
Source: EU-SILC 2022, Eurostat Table [ILC_Peps01n].

Figure 1 shows that the share of AROPE children is substantial in most European countries. In countries covered in this report, it ranges from almost 15% in Denmark and the Netherlands to 41.5% in Romania.

While the above approach helps us compare figures across countries and over time, it does not directly help us understand the living conditions of children. What happens in the home is a black box - no account is taken of the different behaviour of parents who may want to protect their children from the consequences of poverty and of children themselves. Moreover, this approach overlooks the fact that there are goods and services specific to children that are necessary for their healthy development and for their basic human needs. That's why the European Union adopted a child-specific deprivation indicator in 2018.

As shown in Figure 2, a different ranking in the European league table emerges. In Annex 1, a 'heatmap' shows insights into the particular items, children lack in their daily lives (in red the countries with a high risk of deprivation and, in green, those that perform well). Countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland perform well. In these countries, the problems mainly involve financial arrears, the inability to replace worn out furniture and the inability to go on holiday at least once a year. Countries such as Romania show widespread deprivation, including basic items related to nutrition, shoes, clothes or heating, e.g. 10% or more of children lack fruit or vegetables. Remarkably, even the least severe form of deprivation (the lack of holidays one week per year) affects more than one child in ten in half the countries.

Figure 2: Child-specific deprivation rate, children 0-15, 2021, %



Source: EU-SILC 2021, Eurostat User Database, own computations.

Note: Data collected each three years in a specific child module. No data for CZ, SK and PL in 2021.

Both the monetary and the non-monetary approach clearly show that child poverty is a structural problem in the vast majority of countries.

1.3. BEYOND INCOME AND DEPRIVATION

Experiencing poverty in childhood goes beyond insufficient income or material deprivation; it also involves restricted access to vital services like healthcare, nutrition, education, housing, or culture. Limited chances for saving, acquiring assets, or receiving inheritances, coupled with poor social protection, often block children from changing their life trajectory. The stress of poverty, diminishing aspirations, self-assurance, and hope interact and strengthen each other and perpetuate the cycle of poverty³⁵.

Financial aid for childcare and school-related expenses, as well as quality access to childcare and education, are vital to providing equal opportunities for academic success. Access to school meals, extracurricular activities, sports and cultural activities is also crucial.

Free healthcare addresses immediate health needs but also contributes to preventing long-term health issues (including mental health issues) that could exacerbate poverty. For the first time, EU level, data on child deprivation and children’s health were collected for the same children in childhood and unfortunately confirmed that deprivation and health problems are already correlated in childhood³⁶.

Access to such important services is recognised by the Child Guarantee, which is of crucial importance to improve living conditions of children in need (see Section 4). Supporting children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds is an investment in human capital, breaking the cycle of poverty and helping upward mobility.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF CHILD SUPPORT AGAINST CHILD POVERTY

2.1. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A well-designed and comprehensive social security system is a fundamental tool in the fight against child poverty. The provision of transfers in cash or in kind to children/households with children play a crucial role, for a number of well-documented reasons that it is important to continuously repeat:

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Direct financial assistance to families with children, such as child allowances, family benefits, and other financial aids contribute to alleviating immediate economic hardships faced by low-income families. Many studies have shown that such policies can contribute to the reduction of child poverty (e.g. Van Mechelen and Bradshaw, 2013; Van Lancker and Van Mechelen, 2015³⁷).

POVERTY PREVENTION

Adequate financial support and free and effective access to social services act as a preventive measure

by addressing the root causes of child poverty. These types of support assist families in avoiding the pitfalls of poverty and reduce the likelihood of children experiencing deprivation or inadequate living conditions³⁸.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Effective social security systems enhance the social inclusion of families with children and support the full participation to societies, fostering a sense of belonging and preventing isolation.

BREAKING INTERGENERATIONAL PERPETUATION OF POVERTY

Adequate social security systems contribute to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty. When children receive the necessary support, they are more likely to grow into healthy, educated, and productive adults, benefiting both the individuals and society as a whole³⁹.

REDUCTION OF INEQUALITY

A robust welfare state helps reducing income inequality by redistributing resources to those in need. Equality is important for the whole society as the cost of inequality may hamper long-term sustainability.

ECONOMIC STABILITY

Social security measures contribute to economic stability by reducing the impact of economic shocks on employment and consumption. Child poverty has a tangible societal cost as well, in terms of budgetary cost, productivity and employment.

In summary, by addressing economic disparities, providing essential resources, and promoting social inclusion, social security benefits contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and creating a more equitable and sustainable future for children and families.



Photo: Paul Wu / Save The Children

2.2. IS THE CHILD CASH SUPPORT PROVIDED BY COUNTRIES ADEQUATE TO FIGHT AGAINST CHILD POVERTY?

Countries employ different types of social security programs, including cash transfers, in-kind benefits, tax credits, and a large range of social services which have an impact on the causes and consequences of child poverty⁴⁰. The mix and design of these programs vary, making it complex to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing child poverty and to compare them between countries.

Using a Tax and Benefit Model, the Joint Research Centre (JRC)⁴¹ recently developed a method to assess the impact of child-contingent cash support in the EU countries on the share of children at risk of poverty. Child contingent cash support include three elements:

1. child benefits aimed at addressing the costs of raising a child;
2. other benefits that are not aimed at children but include specific clauses for children;
3. child-related tax reliefs that reduce the tax burden of families with children.

This study shows that EU countries offer varying levels of child contingent cash support, with the average per child ranging from 3.2% to 12% of GDP per capita. The mix of policies to reduce child poverty differs across countries. Child benefits form the

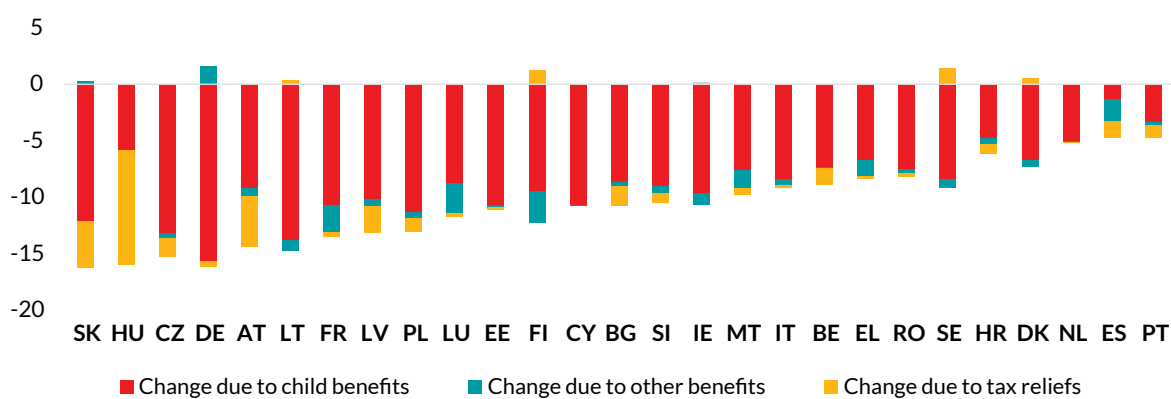
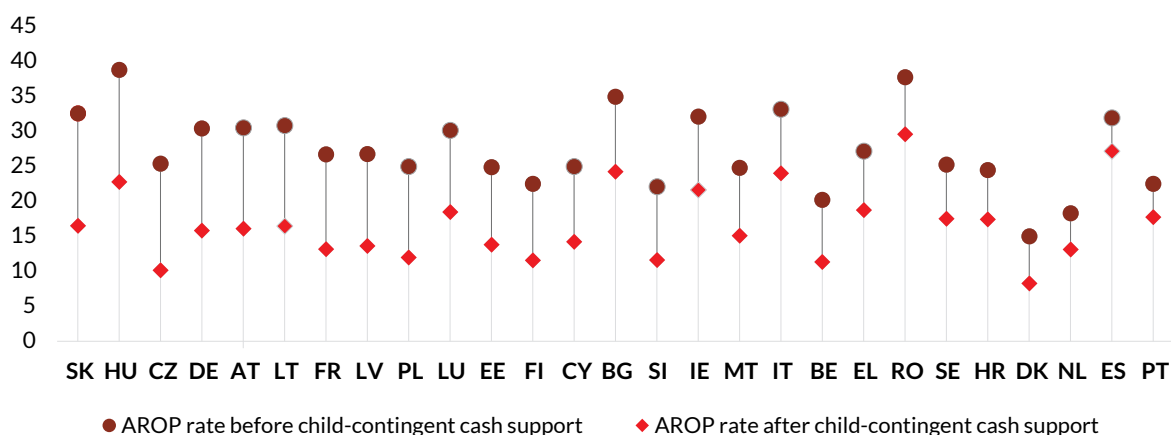
largest share of child cash support in most countries but some balance child benefits with tax reliefs.

Child cash support may be differently allocated along the distribution of income. Child-related tax reliefs usually favour higher-income households, although social assistance benefits, usually means-tested, are more focused on lower incomes households. Depending on the country, child benefits may be targeted or not, progressive or regressive. Over 50% of child contingent cash support goes to non-poor households.

Using EUROMOD, a tax-benefits model, the study assesses the impact of cash support on child poverty. Figure 3 shows that, even if child contingent cash support reduces the child at-risk of poverty rate (AROP) in all countries, some countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, or Italy only manage small improvements (Figure 3, top panel). Countries with higher initial child AROP rates generally see higher poverty reductions with the exception of Spain, Italy and Romania. The bottom panel shows that child benefits often bring the largest reduction in child poverty, compared to other benefits or child-related tax reliefs.



Figure 3: Child AROP rate reduction due to child-contingent cash support, EU-27, 2022



Source: JRC, 2024, Figure 5.

This study then disaggregates benefits into means-tested⁴² and non-means-tested. It shows that non-means-tested benefits significantly help to alleviate poverty for children. Means-tested benefits, while well-targeted, are too low to lift families out of poverty especially in countries such as Italy, Spain or Romania. The most successful countries rely on a mix of universal schemes, contributory parental leave, and adequate means-tested policies. However, the study clearly demonstrates that the current child contingent cash support is not enough to lift at-risk-of-poverty children above the poverty line in many cases.

The consultation of SC members provided very interesting insights on the failure of child support in reducing child poverty. These insights cover child/family benefits (Section 2.3) and other child-contingent benefits (Section 2.4).

2.3. CHALLENGES OF CHILD/FAMILY BENEFITS PROVISION

Tackling the following challenges is imperative to increase the protective role of child/family benefits:

NON-ADEQUACY OF THE AMOUNTS PROVIDED

Many countries have universal benefits, and/or means-tested allowances (child benefits, parent benefits, family allowances).

In many countries that provide child/family allowances, either universal or means-tested, the amount does not cover the cost of the child (see also next Section). For example:

In **Poland**, the effectiveness and adequacy of allowances is varied. There are ongoing discussions about improving the support provided to families with children.

Lithuania has quite a few measures, including universal child benefit that is accessible to all children, and other monetary support for specific cases. Yet there is room for improvement. The amounts provided are not enough to cover all children's needs so the most vulnerable children need additional social and financial assistance. The quality and accessibility of social services also need to be improved.

In **Albania**, economic assistance for families is inadequate, falling below the minimum wage and monthly expenses. A review of the scheme is needed.

In **Kosovo**, the child benefits instrument adopted in 2021 is too low and only available for children under 16. 16 to 18 year-olds are left out.

In **Norway**, the child benefit system is considered as "almost a good practice" but falls short due to its inadequacy, despite recent attempts to increase the benefits.

In **Spain**, the low amount of child benefits mean they have limited impact (Save the Children, 2022; Hernández and Picos, 2021⁴³).

THE REGRESSIVE ASPECT OF SOME NON-REFUNDABLE TAX RELIEFS

In **Spain** the overreliance on fiscal tools, such as non-refundable tax deductions, means that a significant portion of low to middle-income households do not receive support. The main support measure, "minimum for descendants", based on non-working under 25 years olds living in the household, is regressive as it saves more tax for those with higher incomes but doesn't help lower-income families as their tax liability is lower than the amount of the deduction. Since 2022, a refundable deduction has been applied to working mothers with children under 3 years old but it only reaches women with certain employment situations.

In the **Netherlands**, parents of children below the age of 12 are eligible for an 'income-related combination tax credit'. The amount of the credit is linked to the parent with the lowest income because the Dutch government wants to

encourage parents to take up paid work. Parents with an income below EUR 6.074 receive no tax credit, parents with an income from EUR. 6.074 until 31.838 receive 11.45% tax credit and parents with an income above EUR 31.838 receive EUR 2.950 tax credit⁴⁴.

In **Germany**, the universal child benefit is part of the tax benefit system. While most families only receive EUR 250/month from the universal child benefit, high-income families have higher benefits for their children through tax reductions. The maximal tax reduction is around EUR 368 /month. This can add up to a difference of around EUR 25.500 up until age 18⁴⁵.

In **Lithuania**, before 2018, low-income families could not fully benefit from the tax allowance because of low or non-existent taxable income. This regressive impact of tax relief led to a reform of tax allowances and it is now replaced by a universal child benefit.

GAPS IN PROVISION

In some countries, measures for child and family income support are fragmented and scattered across different areas of social policy, leading to gaps in provision and inefficiencies.

For example, in **Serbia**, the support system for children with families remains incomplete and incoherent, with a lack of budget allocations for families with children.

LOW THRESHOLDS USED FOR MEANS TESTING

In **Ukraine**, from March 1, 2024, the government has ceased payments to families whose average monthly income per family member exceeds 9,444 hryvnias (equivalent to EUR 226). This amount is four times higher than the current minimum living standard set at the minimum subsistence level. This will fuel child poverty. The cut-off point for social payments is exceptionally low compared to high household expenses. Additionally, the Ukrainian Parliament aims to reduce the range of social payments for children with disabilities, consolidating them into a single lower social payment, which will also contribute to child poverty.

In **Poland**, the income thresholds for means-testing have not been changed since 2017. This may be one of the reasons of the decrease in the number of families who receive family benefits.

CONDITIONS LEADING TO DISCRIMINATORY PROVISIONS

Sometimes the receipt of benefits is conditional to school attendance or other conditions, to stimulate (pre-)school participation or vaccination. However, this may *de facto* lead to exclusion of children in vulnerable situations.

In **Romania**, the means-tested family support allowance is conditional upon school participation by the family's children.

Similarly, in **Serbia**, the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children blocks the right to the parental allowance if at least one child in the family has not received all mandatory vaccines or does not regularly attend primary school or preschool preparatory programs. This provision has a negative and discriminatory effect on children from the Roma families most at risk. Research shows that in Serbia, there are drastic inequalities between Roma and non-Roma children in coverage of immunisation, primary education, and preschool preparation programmes. Furthermore, the parent and child allowances in a family is limited to four children. This measure disproportionately affects the families most at risk.

In **Italy**, the single allowance, introduced in 2022, is a universal measure, that supports families with children up to 21 years of age. The take-up is now more than 90%.

THE FEAR OF NEEDING TO PAY BACK RECEIVED BENEFITS

In the **Netherlands**, there is a mix of child-related schemes: the General Child Benefit Act (De Algemene Kinderbijslagwet); the Child-related Budget Act (Wet op het kindgebonden budget), childcare allowance (Kinderopvangtoeslag) and the income-related tax credit (IACK).

The criticism of the allowance system intensified due to the "benefits scandal" (toeslagenschandaal). It was revealed in 2019 that the authorities had wrongly accused families of fraud in their childcare allowance applications from 2005 to 2019. Families were coerced into repaying significant amounts (often exceeding EUR 10,000) that they were alleged to have received illegitimately, leading to severe financial hardships. After several years, it was discovered that the tax authorities had made incorrect or very harsh accusations (sometimes

people had to pay back every cent because of a missing signature on a contract) and applied discrimination through ethnic profiling. This scandal resulted in legal charges against the authorities and the government's resignation in early 2021. More broadly, the benefits scandal prompted a political consensus to fundamentally change the allowances system. The benefits scandal led to people not asking for the benefits they were entitled to for fear of having to pay them back.

THE LACK OF INDEXATION OF CHILD SUPPORT

In **Finland**, universal child benefit is an important social security measure but since it is not tied to inflation, its real value has fallen to about 40 % lower than in 1994. Thus, it is far from covering child related expenses, even after recent increases. In December 2022, the amount of the benefit was doubled, and the single-parent increment was also doubled⁴⁶.

In **Poland**, the child benefit has maintained its original nominal amount, resulting in a decline in its real value over time. In 2024, the benefit was raised.

In the **Netherlands** in 2021 the government proposed to stop indexation of child benefits for 2022 and 2023 and to decrease child benefits by 0.1% in 2024. This bill was revoked in 2022 because non-indexation of child benefits can have negative consequences for parent's income while many families struggle due to current inflation.

EXCLUSION OF CERTAIN GROUPS

Foreigners in **Germany**, with specific permit types like tolerance permits, may not be eligible for universal child benefits, creating disparities in support.

VERY COMPLEX SYSTEM

In some countries (e.g. **Denmark**, **the Netherlands** or **Germany**), the system for child and family income support is complex and challenging for families to navigate, leading some not to take up existing benefits.

These challenges highlight the need for reforms to ensure more inclusive, equitable, and effective child support systems in these countries. Box 1 presents a few examples of positive developments.

Box 1: Recent positive developments related to child/family benefits

ITALY

The universal single child allowance (Assegno Unico Universale per i figli), introduced in 2022, is a universalistic measure, which concretely supports families with children from the 7th month of pregnancy up to 21 years of age and replaced several measures with a single unified cash allowance. In 2023, it had a take up rate of well over 90%, reaching around 5.6 million families with 8.93 million children. It provided an average monthly amount of EUR 256 (EUR 161 per child and EUR 216 per child in the lowest income families). Recent estimates⁴⁷ show that that new changes in 2023 especially benefitted families in the lowest income bracket, reducing the poverty risk from 20 to 18.8% and generating a slight decrease in the Gini index (from 31.9 to 31.7)

GERMANY

In Germany the current government decided in its coalition agreement to reform the social benefit system for children and create a new benefit called Kindergrundsicherung (Basic Child Protection). The reform should merge relevant existing support systems into one and improve access through automatization and digitalisation. Unfortunately, the reform is currently stuck in parliament. Nevertheless, SC Germany calls for continued improvements to this law, ensuring it supports all children living in poverty, including currently excluded children who receive benefits from the Asylum Seeker's benefit Act.

SPAIN

While a regressive non-refundable deduction in income tax for each individual under 25 years old (not economically active) is the main support measure in Spain (see above), a refundable deduction for working mothers with children under 3 years old introduced in 2022 has been acknowledged as a good but insufficient step forward.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

A 2022 Law on Material Support to Families with Children in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina relaxed the criteria for claiming the right, aiming to encompass as many children as possible and extend support to all unemployed mothers. Under the updated law, funding for child benefits will be sourced from the general FBiH budget, while financial aid for unemployed mothers will come from the budgets of individual cantons. Furthermore, the eligibility criteria for child allowances now covers all children under eighteen years of age and the allowance will be adjusted to align with the minimum wage. Although this represents a significant milestone, the scope and adequacy of the benefits are not enough to effectively address early childhood poverty across the country.

DENMARK

The direct support in response to the inflation crisis was estimated to be given to 40,500 families. This came at a time when all families, but especially low-income families, felt the negative effects of inflation. There has also been a temporary child benefits scheme (2019-2023) targeted at families in poverty.

ROMANIA

In 2019, a law was passed to prevent the devaluing of the child allowance. From 2022, the social reference index (in relation to which most social benefits are expressed) will be annually updated in line with the inflation rate for the previous year.

In Republika Srpska, in January 2023, the government increased child benefit allocations by approx. 20 % for the children most at risk and children with disabilities. Maternal benefits were also increased. However, in November 2023, the Republika Srpska Public Fund for Children, through which these benefits are allocated, took out a commercial loan to ensure that benefits are actually paid.

2.4. CHALLENGES OF THE OTHER CHILD-CONTINGENT SOCIAL BENEFITS

Other social benefits that are not aimed at children but include specific clauses for children have an impact on child poverty, as shown in Section 2.2. These mainly include complements to unemployment and social assistance benefits for having children. The consultation of SC members showed a number of positive developments and also challenges related to these schemes, most often linked to the inadequacy of the amounts provided to allow a decent standard of living of the households with children (see also Section 3) and to gaps in coverage.

For example, in **Italy**, the 2024 reform of minimum income raises some concerns because it differentiates between “unemployable” households receiving income support and “employable” ones who are directed to activation programs with a 12-month financial aid limit. However, this does not refer to households with children under 18. Moreover, the 2024 budget law provided for an exemption on the share of social security contributions paid by working mothers of two

children for 2024 only, and three or more children until 2026. This impacts around 800,000 mothers but may not boost wages due to increased taxation.

In the **Netherlands**, since 2015 a great deal of the responsibility to fight poverty lies with the municipalities. This has led to different municipalities having different types of subsidies for households who are at risk of poverty, with different application criteria, and different amounts of subsidies available. A child’s opportunities depend on where they live. Also, the Netherlands is the only country in the world that expressed a reservation to article 26 UN CRC, which states that every child has the right to benefit from social security. The government says the reservation made is not a denial of a child’s right to social security but ensures that the provision of this right takes place within the framework of the Dutch system - namely through the parents. However, this means that several groups of children will not benefit from social security this way because, for instance, their parents are absent or do not spend their child benefits on their children⁴⁸.



A Punto Luce playground located in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Rome, Italy.

Photo: Claire Thomas / Save the Children

Spain saw good progress with the introduction in 2021 of the Child Support Supplement (CAPI), linked to the Minimum Income Scheme (IMV). Families with children can access it if they benefit from IMV or meet certain income and asset criteria. Administrative bottlenecks and lack of information means that take-up is lower than it should. The CAPI amounts cover around 10-20% of the estimated cost of raising each child, depending on the child's age. Save the Children Spain believes CAPI is promising, with room for improvement. Despite its shortcomings, it benefits up to 270,000 households. Approximately half of these households do not receive IMV, showing CAPI's wider reach.

In **Finland**, the amount of basic social assistance is mostly too low to cover children's expenses. In Germany, the basic social benefits are not enough for healthy nutrition, social participation and education costs. There are additional various benefits for education and social participation of children but some of them are also too low, and there are many bureaucratic hurdles to get them.

In **Lithuania**, the social benefits, services and allowances directed at low-income families or families with children are positively viewed but most of them are insufficient. They do not account for economic factors like inflation. The average monthly social benefit amounts to only 22% of the absolute poverty line.

In **Serbia**, at 95 EUR month, social assistance is significantly below what is needed for a decent standard of living. Despite a growing demand for social benefits, fewer people are receiving cash social assistance. The implementation of the Social Card Law in March 2022 introduced an automated social support system. The Social Card register compiles extensive personal data about beneficiaries and their relatives, with no assessment role for social workers. This leads to errors and beneficiaries being automatically removed from the system, often due to sporadic work engagements. While the process of dropping out of the system is automatic, renewing the beneficiary status necessitates a new procedure. Concerns arise regarding the dehumanisation of the social protection system through automated decision-making, lack of transparency in the algorithm and violation of the right to personal data protection. The Social Card Law and the social protection system need to be reviewed to better cater for vulnerable children and adults.

Finally, the well-being of families and children displaced due to the conflict in **Ukraine** depends on assistance from host authorities and communities, often putting a strain on communities who do not receive dedicated support.

2.5. KEY ROLE OF OTHER BENEFITS, INCLUDING IN-KIND

The above sections covered the role of child-contingent cash support in the fight against child poverty. These transfers are not the only type of public spending that impact child poverty. A sufficient level of other social transfers (not conditional to the presence of children but benefitting households with children) and public spending on essential services for children are crucial in the fight against child poverty (see Section 4).



Photo: Paul Wu / Save The Children

CHAPTER 3

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTIMATING THE COST OF THE CHILD AS A BENCHMARKING FOR SOCIAL POLICIES

3.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTIMATING THE COST OF A CHILD

Save the Children members agree on the importance of tools to evaluate the costs of the child. They accurately show the financial challenges for households and improve the design of policies for a decent standard of living.

Calculating the cost of raising a child is complex. Methods and approaches vary between countries. Most approaches combine the costs of “individual”

goods and services used by the child, and their individual part in the cost of the “collective goods” used by the whole household (housing, car, etc.).

Reference budgets are designed to reflect the cost of goods and services required for a decent and dignified life in a particular cultural context and can be compared between household types to provide an estimation of the extra cost of a child of a particular age.

3.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING ADEQUATE BUDGETS BASED ON A HOLISTIC VIEW OF CHILDREN’S NEEDS

There are various methodologies to calculate reference budgets and for calculating the cost of a child.

One common method involves analysing household expenditure surveys to estimate average spending on children in categories such as food, clothing, education (e.g. Save the Children **Spain**⁴⁹). In **Germany**, five- yearly “income and consumption sample” is used to calculate the minimum subsistence level and the amount of social benefits necessary for a minimum subsistence level. However, costs for children are not specifically captured – calculations are based on assumptions about how much of this budget is spent on children⁵⁰.

Many reference budgets mainly rely on experts’ judgment on the quantity and quality of goods and services to be included. Most approaches combine these experts’ view with other sources (e.g. surveys).

It is important that calculations do not rely solely on surveys or experts’ views but are also based on people’s own expectations⁵¹ regarding acceptable living conditions, dietary habits, and social participation. People’s views on what constitutes a good life, beyond essentials, help shape reference budgets that reflect social inclusion, dignity, and overall well-being of children.

In view of the degree of arbitrariness of the choices made, it’s important for a recognised independent body (e.g. Statistical national institutes) to lead on the calculation, in close coordination with a large range of partners and the civil society. Some exercises ran at the EU level illustrated the many challenges of following a common approach to define reference budgets in a multinational context⁵². Although some common rules can be applied, the exercise must be grounded in the national/regional context to align with cultural norms and be more likely accepted as a realistic framework.

People's views about the restrictions imposed in reference budgets are valuable and should be better taken into account. In the **Netherlands**⁵³, it is assumed that people have no large unavoidable personal expenditures, do not smoke, have no pets, do not give to charities or to other family members, do not save for pensions or items such as a TV, car etc. In **Romania**, schoolbooks and school supplies are excluded. In **Germany**⁵⁴, occasional restaurant visits or holidays, pets or plants (including Christmas tree) are considered as not essential⁵⁵. Furthermore, many reference budgets assume no curative health costs,

underestimate the education costs⁵⁶ or omit other factors, making the estimated budget unrealistic for most children living in poor households.

Discussing all methodological aspects of reference budget construction via a participatory approach not only ensures that the reference budget reflects the perspectives of the people it intends to serve but also promotes a sense of ownership and trust in the results. This, in turn, enhances the relevance of the reference budget in informing policies.

3.3. THE IMPORTANCE OF USING SUCH TOOLS AS BENCHMARKING FOR SOCIAL POLICIES

Reference budgets may be used as a basis (a threshold) for measuring poverty or for deciding social policies, minimum income or wage⁵⁷, and social assistance programmes. These budgets provide a tangible benchmark for assessing the impact of policy decisions on the well-being of children and their families. Ideally, the actual, realistic costs of raising children should guide the financial support levels provided to children in vulnerable situations.

In times of high inflation, updated reference budgets help understand the impact of inflation on children across different income levels and household types. The child-rearing basket of the poorest is particularly exposed to price hikes in food, rent or energy. Evaluating the erosion of purchasing power is important to assess the adequacy of social transfers and to ensure that benefits evolve in line with rising prices.



Photo: Claire Thomas / Save The Children

Box 2: An example of use of reference budget to assess the adequacy of child support

Penne et al (2020)⁵⁸ studied to which extent cash and in-kind welfare state efforts compensate for the additional needs of families with children and facilitate access to essential goods and services, compared to childless families. They focus on low-earning single parent households and single-earner couples in Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain. They use reference budgets to estimate the out-of-pocket costs of raising a child in a large city in each country and the EUROMOD model to estimate the cash benefits for families with children. Integrating both types of information, gives a child cost compensation indicator. They show that, in all selected cities, the essential direct cost of a child in a single parent or single-earner couple family is compensated only partially, generally less than 60 percent.

3.4. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

We would recommend that all EU Member State governments develop tools to compute the cost of the child and include these estimates for different situations in their structural statistics.

Developing local and regional variants is important⁵⁹, as costs (e.g. housing costs) and constraints (e.g. distances) often differ. This gives policymakers more accurate insights into local and regional contexts and helps them to establish appropriate and tailored

support programmes. Similarly, costs can vary for children in different situations or with specific needs. Having cost estimates for raising children is helpful only if they inform the adequacy of social benefit and reflect changing living costs. Linking benefits legally to these costs ensures support keeps pace with increased living expenses. Germany already applies this method to some social benefits, adjusting them in line with cost-of-living changes.

Box 3: National examples of reference budgets

Finland

A study⁶⁰ from 2023 on the reference budgets presents how much income is needed to ensure a life in dignity, including the cost of commodities such as food, clothing, telecommunications, household goods and equipment, health and personal hygiene, leisure and recreation, housing and mobility. Depending on the family structure and where the family lives, a family needs EUR 1500-3500 / month for a life in dignity. There are also calculations specific to children: depending on the child's age, a life in dignity costs EUR 306-567 month.

Poland

Poland differentiates between social minimum and subsistence minimum. The social minimum covers basic needs like food, education, and social activities at a modest level but in line with health, moral, and legal standards, marking the upper limit of poverty. The subsistence minimum is the bare minimum needed for survival, below which a person's health and development are at risk, defining the lower limit of poverty.



Special spotlight – Child Benefit Tracker

Co-created by Save the Children, UNICEF and ILO

333 million children live in extreme poverty globally, struggling to survive on less than US\$2.15 per day. Nearly 1 billion children live in multidimensional poverty. At the current rate of progress, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals' poverty targets is out of reach. However, ending child poverty is a policy choice. Expanding social protection coverage of children in the fight against poverty is critical, including the progressive realisation of universal child benefits.

To bolster efforts to monitor and reduce the gaps in child benefit coverage, Save the Children, ILO and UNICEF have developed the Global Child Benefits Tracker, an online platform to monitor children's access to benefits and advocate with governments and donors to close the gaps.

The Tracker is designed to provide quantitative data on the scale of child poverty, social protection coverage, and expenditures for children while providing a discursive space to foster a community of practice for sharing best practices and inspiration across countries.

Visit the Child Benefit Tracker⁶¹.

CHAPTER 4

THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE

The Child Guarantee is a crucial instrument in the fight against child poverty. It urges EU Member States to deploy EU and national funds to guarantee access to basic rights and services for children in vulnerable situations. In particular, it aims to ensure that the latter can access free early childhood education and care, free education (including school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day), free healthcare, healthy nutrition, and adequate housing. It also opens new doors for national authorities and NGOs to analyse the state of child poverty at national, regional and local levels, support collaboration and peer learning across Member States, and bring about new concrete policies.

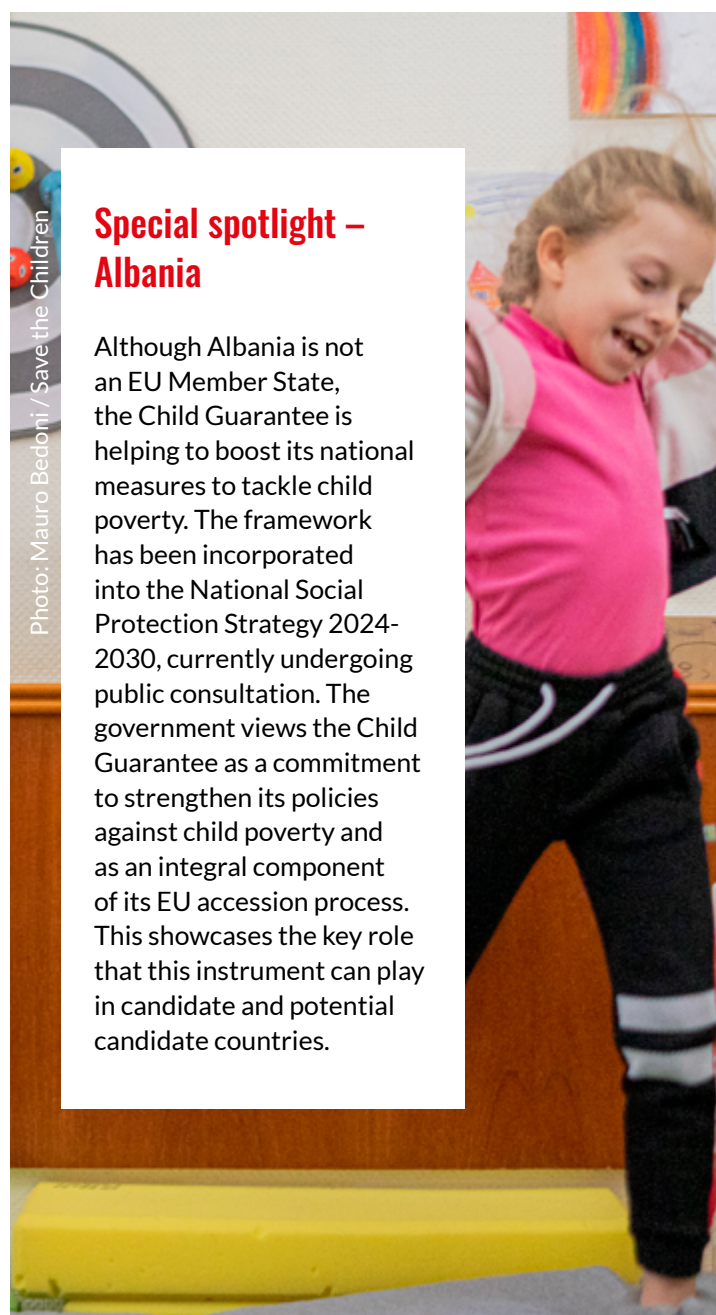
The framework must be swiftly transformed into effective measures. Most countries provide free or subsidised access to some of the services needed by children in vulnerable situations. However, Baptista et al. (2023) mapped the situation in EU Member States and highlighted a number of hefty access barriers for children in need – see the table in the Annexes.

The Child Guarantee holds significant promise as it targets children in vulnerable situations who are frequently overlooked by the national social protection system. The instrument has driven some **positive developments**:

In February 2024, the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs approved the Directorial Decree n.24 to implement 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+)⁶².

The Italian ministry is also working on the project 'DesTEENazione - Desideri e Azioni In Movimento'⁶³, with the aim to set up multifunctional spaces for young people. These spaces will offer a variety of services to support young people's growth and their personal and social skills. The goal is to promote their autonomy, improve their ability to navigate challenges, and help them participate more in society.

In October 2023, the Lithuanian Ministry for Education, Science and Sport opened a call for project proposals under the Child Guarantee scheme about accessible early education.



Special spotlight – Albania

Although Albania is not an EU Member State, the Child Guarantee is helping to boost its national measures to tackle child poverty. The framework has been incorporated into the National Social Protection Strategy 2024-2030, currently undergoing public consultation. The government views the Child Guarantee as a commitment to strengthen its policies against child poverty and as an integral component of its EU accession process. This showcases the key role that this instrument can play in candidate and potential candidate countries.

Photo: Mauro Bedoni / Save the Children

4.1. CHALLENGES IN MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD GUARANTEE

Save the Children has praised the Child Guarantee Recommendation as a historic and innovative framework. However, the organisation has emphasised the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation by Member States to effectively implement this historic instrument. Without proper oversight, there is a risk of the framework remaining effective only on paper rather than translating into tangible actions.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE CHILD GUARANTEE

In Spain and Germany, for example, there is a lack of concrete examples of major new policies funded under the Child Guarantee scheme. This issue is compounded by the complex division of competences between regional and municipal administrations.

CHALLENGES IN MONITORING THE CHILD GUARANTEE

Moreover, Member States use different approaches to monitor the Guarantee's development and, apart from Finland and Italy, monitoring of the Child Guarantee is often separate from broader national monitoring systems for child 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.

2024 MARCH REPORTING – A KEY MOMENT TO ASSESS MEMBER STATES' PROGRESSES

Considering the numerous obstacles encountered by national and European actors, the European Commission and Parliament monitoring roles result more than fundamental. As foreseen by the Council Recommendation⁶⁴, in March 2024, EU Member States are expected to submit to the European Commission a national report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee. This exercise can serve as a crucial moment for EU institutions and CSOs to gather useful information, concretely assess the implementation of this instrument, and push for more accountability from national governments. Due to significant delays in the submission of National Action Plans by numerous Member States (ranging from months to almost two years after the deadline), these reports may be submitted to the European

Commission after March. Additionally, there is a risk that these reports will lack sufficient detail and specificity. As highlighted by Eurofound⁶⁵, developing a well-structured monitoring framework is imperative for monitoring the progress and evaluating the success of the implementation of CG measures. Hence, these reports should adhere to the outline timeline and include a description of the context and state of play and effectively report on what achieved in a structured and comprehensive way⁶⁶.

Below is an overview of the Child Guarantee's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms across countries.

Finland

Finland integrates the national action plan for the Child Guarantee into the broader framework of the National Child Strategy, which also targets child poverty. This ensures continuity across different government terms and implementation plans.

Germany

The monitoring system for the Child Guarantee is currently being developed. SC Germany participates in a working group that gives guidance on the monitoring process. However, Germany's National Action Plan merely outlines what has already been implemented or planned, with no new programmes or legislation linked to the Child Guarantee. Hence, current monitoring can only focus on the state of child poverty and children's access to services in the areas covered by the Guarantee. Finally, there is no extra budget specifically for the implementation of the CG.

Italy

The National Action Plan (PANGI)'s steering committee (cabina di regia) was temporarily halted following changes in the Italian government and resumed only once on December 15, 2023. The Network for Protection and Social Inclusion, established at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, helps to implement PANGI. It ensures its integration into national social planning, including the Plan for Social Interventions and Services to Combat Poverty. The Guarantee is also linked to the Monitoring Committee of the 2021-2027 National Programme for Inclusion and Combating Poverty, attended also by a representative of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB).

Lithuania

The Child Welfare Council has the function of monitoring the Child Guarantee National Plan and review its implementation every six months. The monitoring role of the Child Welfare Council is strengthened by its composition of experienced representatives from diverse institutions, including different Ministries and various stakeholders. The Council's effectiveness could be enhanced by leveraging the opportunities presented by the Child Guarantee. Additionally, there is room for the Council to be more ambitious in proposing measures and generating new ideas.

Poland

The Ministry of Family and Social Policy will conduct the monitoring of the Child Guarantee in 2025 and 2030. The National Action Plan includes a list of indicators for evaluating actions in each area, which is provided as an appendix.

Spain

By 2024, a revised set of indicators will be developed. The monitoring of the CG also involves the participation of the Childhood Observatory (Observatorio de la Infancia).

The Netherlands

There is some progress on the government's plan to monitor the reduction of child poverty, but the indicators do not necessarily match the actions included in the CG National Action Plan.

4.2. FUNDING THE CHILD GUARANTEE

It's crucial to emphasise that the initiatives outlined in the national CG National Action Plans can only materialise if sufficient funding from both the EU and national governments is provided. However, it remains challenging to ascertain whether national funds have been allocated for the implementation of the CG, and how EU funds will be utilised.

An example of **good practice** on the use of ESF+ at the national level comes from Spain, where more than 10% of the ESF+ investments will be used to alleviate child poverty and improve access to basic rights and services for children in vulnerable situations and their families. Strategic initiatives aim to bolster family-based care, modernise child protection systems, and foster free early childhood education and care. Additionally,

innovative measures within schools will promote healthy lifestyles. A substantial portion, approximately EUR 550 million, will be dedicated to providing food and essential items to marginalised groups, such as the homeless, Roma communities, and low-income families with children.

Another good practice comes from Italy where the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs published the public notice 'DesTEENazione - Desideri in azione', which allocates about 250 million euro from the National Programme Inclusion and Fight against Poverty 2021-2027 for the establishment of 60 multifunctional experience spaces for adolescents and pre-adolescents, and contributes to the implementation of the CG.

Tackling child poverty can be programmed under several ESF+ specific objectives. This includes support for early childhood education and care, promoting work-life balance, addressing material deprivation through food assistance, etc. The fund tracks money allocated to fight child poverty using the ESF+ category "Secondary Theme code 06: addressing child poverty" (ST6). At the level of programmes, the allocation of an appropriate amount for the implementation of the CG via targeted actions and structural reforms is tracked via the ESF+ 'Secondary Theme code 06: addressing child poverty' (ST6)⁶⁷.

The amount earmarked by the MS with this code should reflect the level of contribution of actions concerned to tackling child poverty. In the programming period 2021-2027, EUR 8.9 billion, including an EU amount of EUR 6,1 billion, are programmed under Secondary Theme 6. In total, programs directly tackling child poverty amount to EUR 6,7 billion.

Each of the 11 Member States concerned by the thematic concentration requirement have fulfilled their obligation to use at least 5% of their funding from ESF+ towards measures targeting child poverty. Most of them went slightly above the requirement, earmarking up to 13% of their ESF+ envelope for actions implementing the CG and contributing to reduce child poverty.

Some Member States, although not concerned by the thematic concentration, dedicate a significant share of their ESF+ funding to Secondary Theme 6. It is notably the case of Poland and Finland which share of investments under ST6 is above the EU average (7%).

In Denmark and the Netherlands, on the other hand, there are no specific allocations to combat child poverty.

| Country | ESF+ support (total budget) to fight child poverty | Obligation to allocate 5% of ESF+ funds | Share in % under secondary theme code 06 |
|-----------------|--|---|--|
| Austria | € 192.6 million | No (0%) | 20% |
| Belgium | € 100.3 million | No (0%) | 3% |
| Bulgaria | € 165.1 million | Yes (5%) | 5% |
| Croatia | € 266.2 million | Yes (5%) | 12% |
| Cyprus | € 22.5 million | Yes (5%) | 6% |
| Czechia | € 74.4 million | No (0%) | 2% |
| Denmark | N/A | No (0%) | 0% |
| Estonia | € 47.9 million | No (0%) | 7% |
| Finland | € 69.5 million | No (0%) | 8% |
| France | € 53.9 million | No (0%) | 1% |
| Germany | € 752.9 million | No (0%) | 6% |
| Greece | € 874.4 million | Yes (5%) | 13% |
| Hungary | € 368.1 million | Yes (5%) | 6% |
| Ireland | € 132.2 million | Yes (5%) | 12% |
| Italy | € 2.1 billion | Yes (5%) | 8% |
| Latvia | € 54.6 million | No (0%) | 7% |
| Lithuania | € 125.6 million | Yes (5%) | 9% |
| Luxembourg | € 2.5 million | Yes (5%) | 7% |
| Malta | € 9.1 million | No (0%) | 5% |
| The Netherlands | N/A | No (0%) | 0% |
| Poland | € 1.2 billion | No (0%) | 8% |
| Portugal | € 540.5 million | No (0%) | 6% |
| Romania | € 605.7 million | Yes (5%) | 7% |
| Slovakia | € 329 million | No (0%) | 0% |
| Slovenia | € 214.9 million | No (0%) | 0% |
| Spain | € 1.1 billion | Yes (5%) | 7% |
| Sweden | € 11.3 million | No (0%) | 2% |

CHAPTER 5

EXCLUSION OF THE CHILDREN MOST AT RISK

This section shows that national social security systems and social investments struggle to reach the most at-risk groups, despite these groups having the highest rate of child poverty. In particular, the following groups of children are often excluded from social protection support:

- children from low-income single-headed households
- children with a migrant background
- homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation
- Roma children
- LGBTQI+ youth
- children in institutions

Policymakers should prioritise inclusive policies that address the specific needs of these groups, including simplifying eligibility criteria, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and implementing anti-discrimination measures.

These are the main trends emerging by the information gathered at the national level and reported in the breakdown below:

1. EXCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND AND OTHER AT-RISK GROUPS

Asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and those with foreign-born parents all struggle to access social protection measures in countries like Italy, Spain, Germany, Finland, Poland, and Ukraine. Restrictions related to residence requirements, household definitions, and lack of documentation often meant they do not receive social security benefits and services. This makes them more vulnerable and more marginalised. Governments should make sure that all children can access to essential social protection services, including healthcare, education, and financial assistance, irrespective of their legal or residential status. Similarly, targeted interventions and inclusive policies must address the needs of other

marginalised groups, including Roma communities, LGBTQI+ and undocumented children. Policymakers should adopt a human rights-based approach, prioritising policies that promote social inclusion and equality. They should actively dispel myths and stereotypes that blame people experiencing poverty for their circumstances and which are too often used as an excuse for inaction⁶⁸.

2. IMPACT OF DECENTRALISATION

Decentralisation of social protection systems, as observed in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands, might lead to disparities in support across regions. Children could be disadvantaged simply because of their location. National authorities should alleviate disparities by allocating targeted funding, capacity-building, and coordination initiatives.

3. CHALLENGES IN TARGETING AND DELIVERY

Efforts to support vulnerable groups are often blocked by bureaucracy, complex eligibility criteria, stigma, discrimination, and lack of awareness. This leaves many unable to access essential benefits and services, worsening their poverty and social exclusion. Governments should invest in better communicating the availability of such support as well as investing in streamlining application processes, and training and empowering of frontline workers to deliver services effectively. Implementing solutions like automatic eligibility for certain benefits, seen in Denmark and Germany, or unified application process could ensure those entitled to benefits do receive them⁶⁹.

4. CAPITALISE ON THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE

EU Member States should leverage the Child Guarantee to fully support marginalised and disadvantaged children, ensuring they and their families have assured access to high-quality essential services, tailored to their specific requirements.

Below is an overview of challenges encountered by children, particularly those with migrant backgrounds, within the social security systems of several European countries.

Spain

The social security system in Spain has significant obstacles. Most benefits are tied to the income tax system which does not reach most vulnerable groups. Excessive bureaucracy makes targeted benefits difficult to access. The Minimum Income Scheme has steep requirements such as the need to prove one year of uninterrupted residence – which automatically excludes undocumented migrants. Additionally, the way households are defined complicates access for families of migrant or Roma origin who often live in shared or extended family settings, disqualifying them due to the total household income being deemed too high.

Italy

There are only a few measures targeting specific vulnerable groups, such as those leaving care and for Roma, Sinti and Caminanti families.

🌐 Focus on children with a migrant background

Families with a migrant background typically do not benefit from national social measures. Recently, the European Commission initiated two infringement procedures due to overly restrictive criteria hindering foreign families' access to the poverty reduction measures and the single allowance.

Finland

The minimum social security benefits in Finland are too low to cover the basic needs of recipients, in violation of the revised European Social Charter. The government's proposed cuts to social security are likely to worsen the situation.

🌐 Focus on children with a migrant background

Asylum seekers cannot access social security benefits. They can only apply for a reception allowance, which is not granted automatically and only addresses immediate basic needs. Similarly, undocumented migrants get no social security benefits. Depending on where they live, they might receive urgent and essential social services, guidance and counselling support.

Germany

Variations across states or municipalities makes evaluation difficult but there is a clear lack of support

for at-risk categories. Section 2 highlights the disparity in support, with tax reductions favouring high-income households, to the detriment of middle- and low-income families.

The basic social security system (especially "Bürgergeld"/ Citizen's benefit) overlooks support for single-parent households at risk of poverty. Furthermore, educational investments by the federal state often fail to target schools and students most in need. The inflation crisis led to numerous measures to benefit all households, which hindered support specifically for low-income families dependent on social assistance⁷⁰. A new program will invest EUR 20 billion over a decade in schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged children, marking the first concerted effort to change this trend⁷¹.

🌐 Focus on children with a migrant background

Asylum seekers cannot access social security benefits. Instead, they receive benefits under the Asylum Seeker's Benefit Act. The government argues that their presumed temporary status means they have less need of certain goods and services crucial for societal integration. Save the Children Germany rejects this argument: every child has equal rights and should be integrated into society from the moment of arrival. Despite some politicians' view that benefits should be minimal to avoid incentivising migration, the German constitutional court has ruled that social benefits for asylum seekers cannot be deliberately kept low. Those covered by the Asylum Seekers Benefit Act cannot access full health services and are only entitled to treatment for "acute illnesses and pain conditions".

Denmark

A high proportion of people who receive the lowest benefits belong to ethnic backgrounds other than Danish⁷². Moreover, families within the asylum system receive significantly less financial support.

Lithuania

Some at-risk groups receive considerable government support, but others are left behind. While all children are entitled to certain general benefits, vulnerable families need additional financial aid and provision of services. These families include low-income single-headed households, a significant number of Ukrainian households, families raising children with special education needs, as well as children residing in institutions.

Focus on children with a migrant background

Families and children who are registered as asylum seekers from countries other than Ukraine are only given essentials such as food, clothing, footwear, bedding, hygiene items, and housed in refugee reception centres. Child asylum seekers have the right to attend school.

The Netherlands

Since decentralisation in 2015, many policies are enacted at municipal level. A comprehensive national overview is hard to determine. Children could be disadvantaged based on where they live.

Focus on children with a migrant background

Universal child benefits, intended to reach everyone, exclude undocumented children and parents, a group that is most in need.

Poland

Poland has implemented several social security measures and investments to help vulnerable groups. Regular assessments of their effectiveness are essential to improve them over time and get better results.

Focus on children with a migrant background

Although Ukrainian refugees have access to Poland's social protection system, there remains significant gaps. For children covered by the Temporary Protection Directive (TDP), Poland's system offers a combination of universal social assistance benefits, means-tested programmes, and sickness benefits, resulting in a coverage rate ranging from 62% to 85%. However, Ukrainian children outside the education system, including those in remote learning and many from Roma communities, are ineligible for certain benefits. Challenges for Roma refugees from Ukraine include lack of identity documents for access to essential services and discrimination in securing accommodation, which makes it difficult to find jobs.

Kosovo

Poverty in Kosovo disproportionately affects families in rural areas and female-led households. Children and youth from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, children with disabilities and women face greater risks to end up in poverty, due to long-term unemployment, higher participation in the grey economy, and lack of opportunities to generate alternative income sources. As the economy shrinks and unemployment increases, these groups at risk of

poverty will be disproportionately affected.

The Social Assistance Scheme, Kosovo's primary poverty reduction programme, lacks a child-centred approach does not identify the groups in most need. A specific budget allocation for child welfare must be defined within the country's public budget, and meticulously coordinated across sectors.

Focus on children with a migrant background

A key transit route for migrants, Kosovo integration system is still in its early stages of development. Kosovo has made progress to increase staffing and build skills. It remains crucial to strengthen procedures for unaccompanied minors, including age determination, legal guardianship, and communication.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

A decentralised approach to social protection results in varying levels of coverage and adequacy across the country. The determination of eligibility criteria, targeting, efficiency, availability, and generosity of cash benefits is based on the place of residence rather than the level of need.

Apart from the issue of inadequate targeting, many families are not able to access social benefits due to restrictive eligibility criteria, complex administrative procedures, potential costs, stigma, discrimination, limited geographic provision, or simply a lack of awareness about entitlements. Additionally, local-level social care service providers are severely under resourced. Services for marginalised and vulnerable children are often scarce.

Focus on children with a migrant background

Refugee and migrant children passing through Bosnia and Herzegovina routes to western Europe, as well as asylum seekers, are largely accommodated in temporary reception centres and are not entitled to any kind of cash benefits. They are supported with basic necessities, and have access to health care, legal counselling, support in child-friendly spaces for younger children, and inclusion in formal and informal education for older children. Only those children who have been granted subsidiary protection (asylum) have access to the social welfare system under the same conditions as national citizens.

Serbia

Contrary to its intended purpose of protecting the most at risk, recent developments in Serbia's social support system, particularly the implementation of

the Social Card system, have led to the exclusion of children and adults in vulnerable situations. Over 44,000 beneficiaries are facing extreme poverty after being removed from the system. It's estimated that 30-40% of them are children, potentially leaving up to 17,000 children living below the poverty line without support⁷³.

🌐 Focus on children with a migrant background

Welfare benefits are available to asylum seekers and to those granted asylum or subsidiary protection. However, only those living in private accommodation are eligible. People living in asylum centres are not eligible. Moreover, lengthy procedures to qualify for social welfare ignore the immediate needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

Ukraine

While government efforts are made to provide support to those in need, bureaucratic hurdles, lack of adequate resources, and systemic biases can hinder the effectiveness of these efforts. This means some vulnerable populations, such as LGBTQI+ youth, Roma families, children in compact settlements, and undocumented individuals, might not receive urgently needed support. Moreover, marginalised and frontline

rural communities are often left behind widening the gap between urban and rural areas. Communities along the shifting frontlines and in the vicinity of active fighting face extreme levels of needs and long-term repercussions of rising poverty levels due to the destruction of economic activities and service provision.

🌐 Focus on children with a migrant background

Undocumented children and adults, including migrants and internally displaced persons, along with Roma communities, struggle to access national social security benefits. Their exclusion is largely due to legal status, lack of necessary documentation, discrimination, and systemic barriers. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions and inclusive policies to ensure everyone can access social security systems.

Norway

The child benefit and welfare services are available to all, but additional measures target the most vulnerable. For instance, single parents receive a higher child benefit, and at-risk groups have some exemptions from costs for kindergarten and after-school programmes.



Photo: Paul Wu / Save The Children

CHAPTER 6

ENSURING MEANINGFUL STAKEHOLDERS' PARTICIPATION

6.1. ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOS

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in combatting poverty and social exclusion because they work directly with the groups most at risk and they represent diverse societal perspectives. Through their knowledge, experience and expertise, CSOs influence policy development, implementation, and monitoring. Their direct engagement with communities makes them essential players in overseeing, creating, executing, and assessing the effectiveness of proposed interventions. Nonetheless, the data reported below show that CSOs are often shut out of meaningful inclusion processes.

In Italy, the Working Group on Social Policies and Interventions in favour of Children in the implementation of the Child Guarantee had included CSOs but its mandate expired in December 2023. This has limited CSOs' avenues for participation in the implementation phase. On the other hand, CSOs were engaged in the National Observatory on Childhood and the Network for Protection and Social Inclusion. Poland and Bosnia and Herzegovina also demonstrate positive examples of CSOs' active engagement in consultation processes, advisory committees, and law making.

The data presented below can be summarised as follows:

1. STRUCTURED CONSULTATIVE MECHANISMS ARE BETTER FOR CSO ENGAGEMENT

In Italy and Poland, the establishment of formal platforms allows CSOs to better engage with national authorities. Effectively run, they ensure ongoing consultation and monitoring in policy implementation, potentially leading to more effective outcomes.

2. DIVERSE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES YIELD DIFFERENT RESULTS

While Poland involve CSO stakeholders through consultation processes and advisory committees, the Netherlands struggles with less clear avenues for CSOs engagement. The contrast highlights the need for engagement strategies tailored to specific national contexts, with structured mechanisms clearly driving more meaningful participation.

3. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Bosnia and Herzegovina's approach emphasises transparency and accessibility in policy development by using online platforms and consultations. This way of working, especially through tools like the "eConsultation" platform, encourages citizens and CSOs involvement in decision-making processes, potentially making them more legitimate and effective.

Below we outline efforts and mechanisms aimed at fostering the meaningful engagement of CSOs in shaping and monitoring policies related to children and social security systems.

Italy

In Italy, the Working Group on Social Policies and Interventions in favour of Children in the implementation of the Child Guarantee had included CSOs. It was particularly active in the drafting phase, but its mandate expired in December 2023. However, the Child Guarantee National Action Plan calls for CSO participation through the National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence and the Network for Protection and Social Inclusion⁷⁴. This will offer structured and recurrent consultations with CSOs.

Poland

While still room for improvement, progress is being made in ensuring meaningful engagement of CSOs in setting up and monitoring measures, including social security systems, to invest in children.

The government conducts consultation processes with CSOs, academics, and ministry representatives to incorporate diverse views on policies concerning children and social security systems.

Advisory Committees and Working Groups with sector experts also guide policy. For example, the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy established a Working Group in January 2024 to address issues concerning premature newborns.

The Netherlands

It is unclear how CSOs can engage with the policy making process around social protection system and the implementation of the Child Guarantee. An interdepartmental working group on poverty only occasionally invites CSOs.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, laws are developed with active participation from civil society. Government institutions must share pre-draft legal regulations online and solicit feedback. They must also consult with specified stakeholders.

Participation includes official consultations, sharing analyses and recommendations for policy changes, and advocating through media, rallies, lobbying, and other channels. The “eConsultation” platform managed by the Ministry of Justice is a proactive transparency tool that empowers civil society to get involved.

6.2. CHILD PARTICIPATION

The right for children to express their opinions and have them considered in all matters that affect them, both directly and indirectly, is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and included in the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Given that children’s opinions and experiences are an invaluable resource for decision-makers, good mechanisms for child participation are essential

for developing and monitoring impactful policies to combat child poverty. Regardless of the format and target group, every child’s participation must be safe, meaningful, and inclusive. These criteria should not be used by state actors and CSOs as an argument for not involving children in vulnerable situations but rather seen as a prerequisite. Instead, there should be good policies in place to protect children from harm in participation processes.

Below we gather positive examples of child participation from Finland, Italy, Spain, Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Less positive examples include Germany and Norway, where involvement of children in decision-making is still limited or inconsistent, lacking transparent and meaningful participation mechanisms at federal level.

1. IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURED MECHANISMS

Positive examples show that establishing structured mechanisms such as advisory boards, councils, and dedicated platforms provide avenues for children to voice their opinions, contribute to policy development, and advocate for their rights effectively.

2. COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Successful initiatives bring government institutions, CSOs, and international agencies together to create inclusive and meaningful participation opportunities for children. This collaboration ensures diverse perspectives are considered and strengthens the impact of child participation efforts.

3. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Child participation initiatives empower children by recognising their agency and making it easy for them to engage in decision-making processes. They strengthen their rights, well-being, and development.

4. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Negative examples show that it is difficult to have transparent and meaningful child participation at all levels of governance. Authorities should resolve issues such as inconsistent establishment of participation mechanisms, lack of consideration for child rights perspectives, and limited involvement of children and families.

5. NEED FOR CONTINUED EFFORTS

Even in the most positive examples, the participation of children in vulnerable situations is still lacking and should be prioritised. There is a need for continued efforts to address existing gaps and make participation mechanisms more effective.

Finland

In 2022, the Finnish government consulted young people aged 13-20 through workshops and surveys for their views on social security reforms. The process was organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in collaboration with CSOs.

Germany

Since 1988, Germany's Bundestag has had a children's sub-committee (Kinderkommission) but the involvement of household members and children falls short. In its open hearings it often gives a platform for children themselves, or CSOs that support their interests, but the influence of these committee members on child-focused policies is limited. The government is starting a much-needed national action plan on child participation in Germany as today's opportunities for participation are not sufficient and should be expanded. The Child Guarantee Action Plan is a lever to develop child participation mechanisms, but the process is just starting.

Italy

In 2021 Italy established a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) with UNICEF's support, so that teenagers could participate in the development of Child Guarantee initiatives. The Youth Advisory Board is a group of about 20 teenagers who work closely with relevant ministries and participate in monitoring committees, ensuring the involvement of children in policy-making processes. The group includes young individuals who are beneficiaries of experimental policies for care leavers⁷⁵. They contributed to the definition of the CG-related call for tender for the construction of 60 community centres for adolescents throughout the country⁷⁶.

Lithuania

The Children's Council in Lithuania was launched in 2021 and operated for two years under the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service. Its purpose was to strengthen children's involvement in decision-making on areas such as child right's protection policy, culture, education, health, environmental protection, and other relevant issues. They Council ceased its operations in 2023.

The government also established a Child Welfare Council, composed of governmental institutions, NGO's and children. It aims to analyse and advise on protecting child rights, lawmaking and child welfare issues.

Yet, these positive initiatives are still struggling to include children from the most vulnerable groups.

Poland

Initiatives such as participatory budgeting and child and family councils enable direct participation of children and families in decision-making processes at the local level. These mechanisms empower citizens to advocate for child-friendly policies and services.

Spain

The State Council for Child and Adolescent Participation (CEPIA) plays a pivotal role in empowering children aged 8-17 to propose initiatives, collaborate with government bodies, and participate in developing, monitoring, and evaluating the Strategy for the Rights of Children and Adolescents. CEPIA's broad role shows its dedication to giving children a strong voice in the policies that directly affect them.

Albania

The National Agency for Child Rights and Protection guarantees child participation through its guidance on child and adolescent participation. In the past, groups of children have engaged in processes.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Platform for the Advancement of Children's Rights offers a platform for children and CSOs to participate in public policy processes concerning children. Other mechanisms include children's parliaments which were piloted largely through internationally funded projects. However, they have survived in only a handful of local consultative bodies to municipal governments⁷⁷.

Kosovo

The Law on Local Self-Government mandates municipalities to consult the public on new policies and investments. Moreover, initiatives like the child-led group 'Respect our Rights', supported by Save the Children, offer children additional opportunities to engage in consultations.

Ukraine

As Ukraine faces major economic and demographic challenges due to the ongoing war, participation of children as key agents of change should be central to the recovery processes. This including drafting processes of recovery plans on national and regional levels. The Ukraine Regulation Facility and Child Guarantee should also be used as framework tools to set up consultations with children.

Norway

Although the Norwegian labour and welfare administration have some user boards, including youth boards, consistent inclusion of children is lacking.

Table 1: Heatmap showing the share of children (0-15) lacking each deprivation item, EU countries, 2021, %

| Country | Fruit/veget | Books | Shoes | Indoor game | Proteins | Internet | Celebrations | Outdoor Equip | Clothes | School trips | Inviting friends | Car | Home warm | Reg leisure | Arrear | Holidays | Replace furniture |
|---------|-------------|-------|-------|-------------|----------|----------|--------------|---------------|---------|--------------|------------------|------|-----------|-------------|--------|----------|-------------------|
| SI | 0.6 | 0.9 | 0.7 | 0.5 | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 2.6 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 1.0 | 0.8 | 4.2 | 9.7 | 3.0 | 3.5 |
| SE | 0.2 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 1.3 | 1.0 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 3.4 | 1.8 | 3.8 | 6.2 | 5.6 | 5.8 |
| FI | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 0.1 | 5.0 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 12.7 | 5.0 | 8.0 |
| HR | 1.0 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 1.2 | 1.8 | 0.7 | 1.5 | 1.2 | 2.3 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 2.6 | 3.4 | 2.6 | 19.5 | 11.2 | 8.2 |
| AT | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 0.3 | 1.0 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 2.0 | 1.3 | 5.3 | 2.1 | 7.6 | 7.0 | 11.4 | 9.5 |
| DK | 0.3 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.0 | 0.2 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 2.5 | 2.3 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 5.3 | 3.3 | 2.9 | 7.0 | 4.5 | 9.7 |
| EE | 0.5 | 0.2 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 3.1 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 7.4 | 4.8 | 11.8 |
| NL | 0.2 | 0.5 | 1.5 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 1.2 | 0.9 | 1.6 | 0.7 | 1.2 | 3.1 | 1.8 | 3.5 | 3.1 | 6.7 | 12.9 |
| LT | 3.7 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 0.6 | 1.9 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 1.2 | 3.7 | 0.8 | 2.9 | 6.1 | 19.5 | 5.6 | 10.1 | 6.0 | 14.7 |
| DE | 1.1 | 1.1 | 3.1 | 1.7 | 3.4 | 2.0 | 1.2 | 3.4 | 3.2 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 6.8 | 3.5 | 5.7 | 7.8 | 11.4 | 15.8 |
| BE | 1.4 | 2.8 | 3.6 | 2.4 | 2.9 | 1.8 | 3.3 | 3.9 | 8.9 | 1.9 | 3.9 | 5.9 | 4.4 | 5.6 | 6.3 | 17.5 | 16.1 |
| MT | 1.0 | 1.4 | 3.8 | 1.8 | 3.3 | 2.5 | 3.5 | 4.2 | 4.4 | 0.3 | 3.5 | 1.4 | 7.0 | 5.5 | 10.4 | 14.5 | 16.7 |
| LV | 1.3 | 1.6 | 3.1 | 1.5 | 1.6 | 0.7 | 1.9 | 3.1 | 7.5 | 3.9 | 2.3 | 9.2 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 9.4 | 8.5 | 16.7 |
| IE | 1.4 | 0.6 | 4.0 | 2.1 | 1.3 | 1.8 | 1.6 | 2.9 | 5.2 | 3.8 | 1.6 | 6.1 | 3.0 | 5.6 | 17.8 | 20.9 | 19.6 |
| LU | 0.4 | 1.3 | 1.1 | 1.2 | 0.9 | 0.3 | 3.7 | 3.3 | 3.9 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 1.1 | 2.7 | 3.3 | 9.6 | 7.6 | 20.0 |
| IT | 1.3 | 4.0 | 2.5 | 2.7 | 2.5 | 5.2 | 3.4 | 3.7 | 4.0 | 4.5 | 4.7 | 2.5 | 7.8 | 9.1 | 9.8 | 16.9 | 23.0 |
| FR | 1.9 | 0.8 | 3.0 | 0.8 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 0.9 | 1.9 | 4.5 | 3.1 | 1.9 | 4.1 | 5.7 | 6.0 | 15.3 | 10.6 | 23.7 |
| CZ | 1.3 | 1.3 | 0.6 | 1.1 | 2.1 | 0.8 | 1.4 | 3.4 | 1.6 | 2.8 | 1.4 | 5.6 | 2.0 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4.5 | 24.3 |
| ES | 2.0 | 1.7 | 2.0 | 3.4 | 2.8 | 2.0 | 5.5 | 4.4 | 5.7 | 6.9 | 5.9 | 5.5 | 12.7 | 8.4 | 19.8 | 25.7 | 28.7 |
| HU | 10.4 | 7.4 | 4.0 | 7.6 | 11.2 | 6.3 | 5.6 | 8.8 | 11.7 | 10.0 | 11.8 | 17.8 | 6.5 | 15.5 | 18.4 | 29.2 | 32.9 |
| PT | 0.4 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 1.6 | 0.6 | 4.3 | 6.6 | 1.5 | 3.5 | 10.1 | 9.7 | 9.3 | 15.5 | 33.7 |
| BG | 15.7 | 19.9 | 22.0 | 17.7 | 14.6 | 11.5 | 11.3 | 28.2 | 13.8 | 18.7 | 17.0 | 14.2 | 20.1 | 24.3 | 22.5 | 29.6 | 34.4 |
| CY | 0.3 | 3.2 | 0.4 | 2.4 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 6.4 | 3.9 | 2.7 | 3.3 | 6.4 | 1.0 | 24.6 | 11.2 | 25.1 | 23.8 | 34.5 |
| RO | 10.8 | 16.0 | 17.1 | 31.0 | 14.9 | 14.2 | 20.5 | 36.3 | 13.9 | 26.1 | 22.3 | 25.6 | 11.4 | 35.5 | 12.2 | 40.1 | 49.5 |
| EL | 3.0 | 10.8 | 2.0 | 6.3 | 5.5 | 1.7 | 13.4 | 8.9 | 2.5 | 11.0 | 5.8 | 6.1 | 16.7 | 20.4 | 40.5 | 26.4 | 59.5 |

Source: Guio and Van Lancker, 2023⁷⁸. Own computations using Eurostat User Database. No data for Czechia, Slovakia and Poland

ACRONYMS USED IN THIS REPORT

(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

| | |
|----------------|--|
| AROPE | At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion |
| CEPIA | State Council for Child and Adolescent Participation |
| CG | Child Guarantee |
| CSOS | Civil Society Organisations |
| EEA | European Economic Area |
| ESF+ | European Social Fund Plus |
| EU | European Union |
| EU-SILC | European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions |
| IMV | Minimum Income Scheme |
| JRC | Joint Research Centre (of the European Commission) |
| LGBTQI+ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, and others |
| PANGI | National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Child Guarantee |
| SAS | Social Assistance Scheme |
| SC | Save the Children |
| ST6 | Secondary Theme code 06: addressing child poverty |
| TDP | Temporary Protection Directive |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| YAB | Youth Advisory Board |

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Eleven-year-old Raluca* inside her family's home in a remote area on the outskirts of Bucharest, Romania, where she lives with her brother and parents. Raluca's family receives support from Save the Children.

Photo: Claire Thomas / Save the Children



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