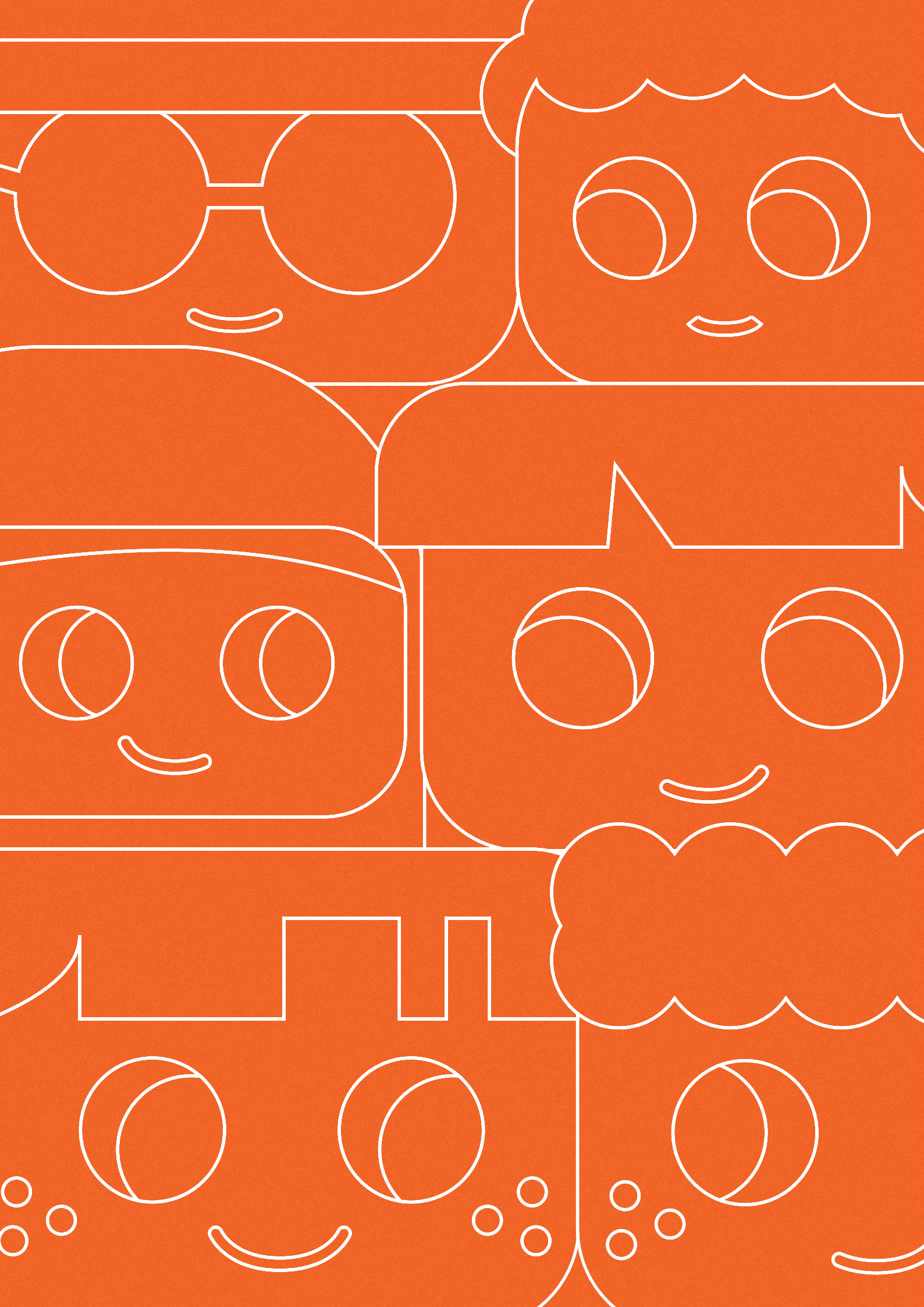


Rights need resources

Eurochild 2026 report on
children in need across Europe

Eurochild
Putting children at the heart of Europe



Eurochild is the largest network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects, protects and promotes the rights of all children. We represent over 234 organisations and individuals from 41 European countries, reaching approximately 5,000 organisations and individuals on the ground. Our mission is to promote the rights and well-being of children in policy and practice, through advocacy, membership exchange, and research. We aim to bring about tangible positive changes in the lives of children, particularly those affected by poverty and disadvantage. Acting as a bridge between professionals and practitioners on the ground, who understand the realities and challenges faced by children and families, and the European Union (EU) institutions and other international stakeholders, we facilitate dialogue and monitoring processes to ensure that children's voices are heard and their rights are upheld. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

Eurochild
Putting children at the heart of Europe

info@eurochild.org - www.eurochild.org
Avenue des Arts 7/8 1210 Brussels, Belgium
+32 2 511 7083
For more information, contact:
Dr Ally Dunhill
Eurochild Director of Policy,
Advocacy and Communications
Ally.Dunhill@eurochild.org

Content

11 Background

13 Eurochild Members' Reports on Strengthening Social Protection Systems

26 Policy Recommendations

30 Country Profiles

31 Albania
35 Austria
41 Belgium
47 Bulgaria
53 Croatia
57 Cyprus
61 Czechia
65 Denmark
69 England
73 Estonia
77 Finland
81 Germany
91 Greece
101 Hungary
107 Ireland
111 Italy
119 Kosovo
123 Latvia
127 Luxembourg
131 Malta
137 Moldova
141 Netherlands
145 Portugal
153 Romania
159 Scotland
163 Serbia
167 Slovenia
171 Spain
179 Sweden
185 Türkiye
191 Ukraine
199 Wales

203 Eurochild Child Participation

209 2026 Eurochild Conference Report: Child Protection Systems

234 Statistics Explained

236 Other Eurochild Publications



Purpose of the report

Eurochild's Flagship Report is a leading annual, comprehensive assessment of children's rights in Europe, led by civil society. Drawing on evidence from organisations and professionals working with children, this year's edition focuses on child poverty, social protection and funding, and examines how economic circumstances, access to essential services and the availability of adequate and sustainable resources affect children's ability to enjoy their rights in practice.

This year's edition also includes a report on Eurochild's 2026 Conference on Child Protection Systems, featuring reflections and contributions from Eurochild members who led workshops and Human Library sessions during the conference. This section captures the experiences, practices and perspectives shared by members, complementing the report's wider analysis with insights from practice.

Acknowledgements

This report is based on assessments provided by 54 Eurochild members and contributors in 32 countries.

These members are: Child Rights Centre/ECPAT **Albania**; CONCORDIA Social Projects and Austrian Network for Children's Rights for **Austria**; Francesca Stuer (individual member) and STEKR from **Belgium**; CONCORDIA Social Projects and Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University for **Bulgaria**; Network of Associations for Children for **Croatia**; Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC) for **Cyprus**; Asociace Dítě a Rodina for **Czechia**; Joint Council for Child Issues for **Denmark**; Children's Rights Alliance for **England**, part of Just for Kids Law; Estonian Union for Child Welfare for **Estonia**; Central Union for Child Welfare for **Finland**; Bertelsmann Stiftung, Child and Youth Welfare Association, German Children's Fund and Network for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for **Germany**; Panhellenic Association of Adapted Activities, Network for Children's Rights, The Smile of the Child and ThinkOnception Education Hub for **Greece**; Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation, Hungarian Child Rights NGO Coalition, Terre des hommes Foundation Lausanne for **Hungary**; Children's Rights Alliance for **Ireland**; Agevolando APS, Rosalba Mirci (individual member), Fondazione S.O.S. Il Telefono Azzurro for **Italy**; CONCORDIA Social Projects for **Kosovo**; Latvian Child Welfare Network for **Latvia**; The Ombudsman for Children and Youth - OKAJU for **Luxembourg**; Office of the Commissioner for Children

and The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society for **Malta**; CONCORDIA Social Projects for **Moldova**; Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights and Utrecht University - Dynamics of Youth for the **Netherlands**; Fundação Bom Sucesso, Instituto de Apoio à Criança, PAJE - Plataforma de Apoio a Jovens (Ex)acolhidos and Sérgio Costa Araújo (individual member) for **Portugal**; CONCORDIA Social Projects and Florina Balint (individual member) for **Romania**; Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) for **Scotland**; Network of Organizations for Children of **Serbia** - MODS; Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth for **Slovenia**; Coordinadora Estatal de Plataformas Sociales Salesianas, FEDAIA and Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia for **Spain**; Bris and ERIKS Development Partner for **Sweden**; Hayat Sende and Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilisation for **Türkiye**; Polina Klykova (individual member), Kids of Ukraine, Partnership for Every Child (P4EC) and Ukrainian Education Platform for **Ukraine**; Children in **Wales**.

We are very grateful to all Eurochild members who contributed to the 2026 questionnaire and follow-up exchanges; all Eurochild Secretariat staff, in particular Ally Dunhill, Brisa Wiklund, Davide Rambaldi, Federica Marra, Francesca Pisanu, Mieke Schuurman and Zuzana Konradova; Giorgiana Rosa, Eurochild Advocacy Consultant; and Hank Studio for design. This report was made possible by the support of the European Commission, the Oak Foundation, and Tanya's Dream Fund.

“Children’s rights need to be backed by adequate resources, strong public services and effective social protection. Too many children across Europe continue to grow up in poverty or face barriers to the support they need. We need to close these gaps by investing in children and the systems that support them, and by ensuring that children’s voices are part of the decisions that affect their lives.”

Tanya Ward, President of Eurochild

Background

Across Europe, children's rights continue to be shaped by the social and economic conditions in which children grow up. In 2025, 24.3% of children in the European Union (EU) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with families and children in vulnerable situations facing particular difficulties in securing an adequate income and accessing essential services. At the same time, social and child protection systems face persistent funding gaps, uneven implementation and weaknesses in coordination, data and accountability. These challenges underline the need to ensure that commitments to children's rights are matched by sustained investment and effective systems.

This report brings together Eurochild members' analysis of child poverty, social protection and funding with the experiences and practice shared during Eurochild's 2026 Conference on Child Protection Systems, held in Paphos, Cyprus. The first part of the report examines the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, gaps in social protection and the funding needed to ensure that support reaches children and families. The second draws on conference workshops and Human Library sessions led by Eurochild members and invited guests, as well as their reflections on the conference, highlighting practical experiences and approaches to strengthening child protection systems.

Together, these contributions illustrate the close relationship between rights, resources and systems, and the importance of placing children's experiences at the centre of policy and practice.



Eurochild Members' Reports on Strengthening Social Protection Systems



Introduction

Child Poverty

According to the latest Eurostat data for 2025, 24.3% of children in the European Union (EU) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. After slightly decreasing in 2024, the rate increased again in 2025. Compared with 2024, child poverty increased in 10 countries, decreased in 15 countries and remained unchanged in two countries. Spain has the highest rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, at 33.8%, followed by Bulgaria with 33.1%, and Romania with 32.4%.

The highest increases in child poverty since 2024 were recorded in Austria, Estonia and Ireland, with increases of 3.5, 2.9 and 2.8 percentage points respectively. The most significant decreases were observed in Croatia (-3.6 percentage points), Malta (-3.2 percentage points) and the Netherlands (-3.1 percentage points). Among Enlargement Countries (EU candidates and potential candidates), the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains significantly higher compared to EU Member States. However, cross-country comparisons should be interpreted with caution, as the latest available data does not necessarily refer to the same year. For example, Albania has data from 2023, with a rate of 46.6%, while Moldova's 31.4% is from 2025. For Ukraine, data on poverty is not available but according to the latest UNICEF report 70% of children in the country lack access to basic goods and services as material deprivation increases.

For England, Scotland and Wales, this report draws on data from each country's national sources. In 2023-2025, Wales reported the highest rate with 32% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The Social Protection Gap

Across the countries in this report, the evidence points to a persistent social protection gap for children, with the greatest risks concentrated among those experiencing multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage. Children in households with low-income, unemployment or low work intensity, children with single parents, children in larger families, and those whose parents have lower levels of education consistently face higher risks of poverty and material deprivation. These risks are further amplified for children from Roma and other marginalised communities, children from migrant and refugee backgrounds, children with disabilities or special needs, and those living in rural, remote or socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Financial, administrative and structural barriers can prevent families from exercising their rights in practice. Many eligible families do not take up benefits because of insufficient information, stigma, complicated procedures and administrative barriers. Some social transfers also have a limited effect on poverty reduction, where systems are designed primarily around adults rather than children.
In conflict-affected settings, such as Ukraine, these challenges extend beyond traditionally identified vulnerable groups, with disruptions to education, healthcare and housing creating risks for an entire generation of children.

Across these different contexts, financial hardship is frequently compounded by unequal access to quality public services and limited availability or adequacy of income support, making it more difficult for families to meet children's basic needs and fully participate in social and economic life.

The evidence also shows that these disadvantages often intersect and reinforce one another, contributing to persistent and, in some cases, inter-generational cycles of poverty and exclusion. Taken together, the country findings highlight that closing the social protection gap requires not only expanding coverage and awareness of social protection systems, but also ensuring that these systems are sufficiently adequate, inclusive and responsive to the diverse and complex needs of children and families facing the greatest difficulties.

Children's access to the digital environment is also shaped by their families' income, educational background and where they live, with a lack of suitable devices, reliable Internet connectivity and digital skills potentially reinforcing existing inequalities in education and social participation Across Europe, there is a need to integrate digital

inclusion into wider measures to tackle child poverty and support families, combining affordable connectivity and access to devices, including assistive technology, with opportunities for children and caregivers to develop digital skills.

The Investment Gap

The report identifies a persistent gap, across countries, between policy commitments to tackling child poverty and the level, stability and allocation of resources available to deliver them. In several countries, investment in social protection has declined, failed to keep pace with inflation and the rising cost of living, or remains insufficient relative to growing needs. Even where overall public expenditure or spending on child-related policies has increased, resources are often fragmented across programmes, services and levels of government, limiting their ability to generate sustained improvements in children's well-being.

A significant part of this gap concerns investment in services and implementation capacity. Funding for early childhood education and care, family support, child welfare, disability and inclusive education, mental health and psycho-social support, and community-based services remains uneven, particularly at municipal and regional levels. Shortages of specialised staff and financial pressures on local authorities further constrain access and quality. In several countries, services for vulnerable children and families also depend heavily on short-term EU programmes, temporary grants or project-based funding, creating uncertainty about continuity and making longer-term planning difficult.

Public budgets are often focused on maintaining existing services rather than adapting to changing needs or investing in innovation and prevention. Systems often respond more to crises than to early intervention and family strengthening, while important areas such as affordable housing, early childhood provision, support for care leavers and integrated family services receive insufficient or uneven investment. This limits the capacity of social protection systems to prevent problems from escalating and increases pressure on already stretched services.

The European Child Guarantee

There is good evidence that the European Child Guarantee has driven reforms, dedicated funding, and improved access to some services. However, implementation of the European Child Guarantee varies across countries, with common challenges including weak monitoring and accountability, limited data, insufficient targeting and coordination, and uneven involvement of civil society and children. In some countries, *National Action Plans* have been developed but lack dedicated resources or effective mechanisms to translate commitments into a positive impact on the lives of children and families.

Of the five key services covered by the European Child Guarantee, school meals, early childhood education and care and education have so far been relatively well addressed. By contrast, the healthcare and housing strands appear to be lagging behind.

Housing insecurity and insufficient affordable housing, coupled with the rising cost of living, is a persistent and growing concern, and an area where the European Child Guarantee should be strengthened.

Across countries, the measures identified as most likely to strengthen the Child Guarantee include stronger monitoring and accountability, sustainable long-term public financing, expanded quality childcare and early childhood services, affordable housing, and more targeted support for children facing specific barriers. To make the Child Guarantee more effective, there is a need for stronger anti-poverty frameworks, greater local awareness and funding and, in some national contexts, an adequately funded child basic income scheme.

The Global Charter on Children's Care Reform provides an additional framework to consider alongside the European Child Guarantee, as it offers an important reference on children's care, reform and protection.

Country Reports at a Glance

Child Poverty

In 2025, 24.3% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, slightly up from 2024. Rates varied significantly across countries, with Romania and Bulgaria among the highest, while poverty also remained particularly high in Enlargement Countries such as Albania. In Ukraine, 70% of children lack access to basic goods and services, while Wales recorded that 32% of children are living in poverty.

The European Child Guarantee

While the European Child Guarantee provides a valuable framework, implementation remains uneven, with weak coordination, limited monitoring and accountability, insufficient data, and limited involvement of children and civil society. Stronger links between national plans and local services, alongside stable long-term funding and better coordination across sectors, are needed to ensure its effectiveness.

Funding

Funding for child-centred social protection remains insufficient, fragmented and unevenly distributed. Benefits and services often fail to keep pace with rising living costs and demand, while complex eligibility and administrative processes limit access. Short-term, project-based funding also undermines the sustainability of essential services, particularly in early childhood education, childcare and child protection.

Most vulnerable children and families

Child poverty disproportionately affects single-parent and large families, children with refugee or migrant backgrounds, Roma children, children with disabilities, and those living in low-income, rural or socially excluded households. Unequal access to services, regional disparities, housing insecurity and underfunded local services can deepen these vulnerabilities, highlighting the need for an integrated approach that combines income support, access to essential services and early intervention.

Better data and accountability

More timely and disaggregated data is needed to understand which children are most affected by poverty and whether support is reaching them effectively. Stronger monitoring, evaluation and coordination would help to measure not only spending and service provision, but also access, quality and outcomes for children.

Recommendations from Eurochild members

Albania

Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA - ECPAT Albania)
"Albania should establish an integrated, child-centred social welfare system in which income support is combined with guaranteed access to quality social, educational, health, justice, and child protection services. This would improve early identification of needs, reduce inequalities, and give children in vulnerable situations better opportunities for development, well-being, and participation"

Austria

Netzwerk Kinderrechte Österreich – National Coalition
"Austria should introduce an adequately funded child basic income scheme *(Kindergrundsicherung)* to guarantee a minimum standard of living for every child. This should be complemented by easier access to social benefits, investment in inclusive education through a comprehensive school system, free early childhood education and care, healthy school meals and affordable educational and leisure opportunities. Children with a refugee background should have equal access to social protection, regardless of their residence status. Climate adaptation and social policies should systematically assess their impact on children's rights, with the meaningful participation of children and young people, particularly those most affected. Austria should also establish an independent children's rights monitoring mechanism, comparable to the monitoring committee under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to regularly assess the implementation of children's rights and hold public authorities accountable"

CONCORDIA Social Projects
"As the European Union prepares its next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), Austria should champion long-term investment in prevention, integrated community-based services and the social workforce, as core pillars of the European Child Guarantee. Sustainable financing, meaningful child participation and strong partnerships between public authorities and civil society are essential to ensure that every child can access quality support before problems escalate, and can receive coordinated, long-term assistance whenever needed."

Belgium

STEKR
"When children and young people cannot access quality housing, this affects not only their right to adequate housing, but also their rights to education, leisure, health, safety, and privacy. The housing crisis must be addressed as a matter of priority, by investing in quality social housing, supporting families waiting for social housing to access housing on the private market, regulating quality and prices in the rental housing market, and tackling discrimination (based on income, family size, ethnic background etc) in the private housing market"

Francesca Stuer – Individual Member
"To tackle child poverty in Belgium, five actions are recommended: target support where poverty is highest; make it easier for eligible families to access benefits; protect investment in children; strengthen links between financial and child support services; and ensure child benefits are adequate for single-parent and larger families"

Bulgaria

CONCORDIA Social Projects
"Bulgaria should strengthen and better target its social protection system by increasing the adequacy of child and family benefits, indexing them regularly to inflation and living costs, and prioritising support for single-parent households, large families and families with low work intensity, as these groups face the highest risk of poverty. Such a reform would help reduce the persistently high rates of child poverty and social exclusion, improve access to adequate nutrition, housing, education and childcare, reduce material deprivation, and ultimately support better health, learning outcomes, social inclusion and future life chances for the one in three children currently at risk of poverty or social exclusion"

Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University
"Bulgaria should systematically collect and use more comprehensive and reliable data when planning, implementing, and reporting on social protection, child protection, and the European Child Guarantee. In particular, data should track how specific

measures affect children living in poverty and other vulnerable groups. Without robust, disaggregated evidence, policymakers cannot design properly targeted interventions (which is currently the case), nor can they verify whether the lives of children most at risk of poverty and exclusion are improving"

Croatia

Network of Associations for Children

"Croatia should ensure sustainable public financing and establish a stronger child-centred monitoring and coordination framework within its social protection system, to ensure that children at risk of poverty and social exclusion are identified early and have equal access to essential services. A systematic approach to tracking children's access to income support, early childhood education and care, healthcare, nutrition and social services would enable better targeting of policies and resources, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. This would improve coordination between sectors and contribute to better child outcomes by ensuring that no child is left behind due to poverty, location or family circumstances"

Cyprus

Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC)

"Cyprus should take action to facilitate children's participation in all decisions that affect them, seriously consider the effects of political, spending and legislative decisions on children before these decisions are taken, and invest in government and social housing, which is currently almost non-existent"

Czechia

Asociace Dítě a Rodina

"Czechia should adopt comprehensive legislation that connects social, health and educational support for vulnerable children and families, ensures stable funding for these services, and strengthens the system of affordable housing and accessible, coordinated services, so that children can receive timely help before their situation worsens"

Denmark

Børnesagens Fællesråd - Joint Council for Child Issues)

"Denmark should strengthen its child-centred social protection system by adopting a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy that ensures adequate income support and equal access to high-quality services for all children, particularly those in vulnerable situations. This includes establishing a national poverty measure, reducing bureaucratic barriers to benefits, investing in mental health and inclusive education, strengthening early intervention, and introducing a national coordination mechanism for the European Child Guarantee with clear targets, monitoring, and civil society involvement, thereby ensuring that political ambitions — including those in the government's 'Children's Denmark' agenda — translate into measurable improvements in children's well-being, equality, and life chances"

England

Children's Rights Alliance for England, part of Just for Kids Law

"The UK Government, in its forthcoming 10-year plan for Britain, must set out a clear roadmap towards full and direct incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). UNCRC incorporation is the most effective way to realise children's rights, including those relating to social protection. An important first step towards incorporation is placing Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) on a statutory footing, in line with the recommendation of Module 2 of the UK Covid 19 Public Inquiry and supported by over 160 civil society organisations"

Estonia

Estonian Union for Child Welfare

"Estonia should adopt a child-centred approach to social protection by ensuring that all policies and budget decisions affecting children are guided by children's rights, regularly assessed for their impact on children, and are combined with adequate financial support and equal access to quality services regardless of a child's family income or place of residence. This would reduce child poverty, prevent inequalities from becoming entrenched and give every child an equal opportunity to thrive"

Finland

Central Union for Child Welfare
"As child poverty is a root cause for many problems faced by families and children, Finland should set the eradication of child poverty as a high political priority against which all decision-making is evaluated. Eradicating child poverty requires evidence-based decisions and actions. Efforts must be made to gather reliable data to enable an assessment of policy decisions and their outcomes.
The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare has, for example, proposed a large-scale randomised experiment in which families with children who have received social assistance for a long time would be given a substantial increase in benefits. This would allow the assessment of the effects on children's well-being of an increase in the money available to families"

Germany

Child and Youth Welfare Association - Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe - AGJ
"The AGJ calls on policymakers to recognise child, youth and family poverty as a structural issue primarily resulting from insufficient material resources, and to address it through a comprehensive poverty prevention and reduction strategy. This should include ensuring adequate, poverty-proof social benefits; providing non-discriminatory, low threshold access to support services; and strengthening child and youth welfare services as key infrastructure for social participation and equal opportunities"

Bertelsmann Stiftung
"Reducing child poverty and ensuring good opportunities for children should be political priorities. This could be achieved by strengthening the European Child Guarantee with binding targets and reliable funding, and by designing an integrated, child-centred system that connects adequate income support, high-quality education, support services and participation. Local infrastructure and education infrastructure – from early childhood education and care to tertiary education – should be designed to meet children's rights and needs. Data should be collected on needs, take-up, outcomes and spending, with the involvement of children themselves. The discussions around a social state reform in Germany provide a window of opportunity to design less bureaucratic benefits that are easy for families to access"

Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk e.V. (DKHW) - German Children's Fund
"By redefining children's minimum subsistence level based on need, benefit rates could better reflect children's actual living conditions and help reduce material deprivation, while promoting equal educational, developmental, and social participation opportunities for children at risk of poverty"

National Coalition Germany - Network for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
"Germany should establish a rights-based, child-centred social protection system that guarantees adequate and non-discriminatory support to every child, provides benefits automatically or through simple procedures, and combines income support with accessible services in education, healthcare, housing and child and youth welfare. This requires binding targets and disaggregated monitoring that includes refugee children and children in residential care, so that legal entitlements translate into effective support, and so all children can grow up in dignity and participate fully in society regardless of family income, residence status, disability, care arrangement or place of residence"

Greece

ALMA - Panhellenic Association of Adapted Activities
"Effective support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) requires a comprehensive, community-based service system. Systematic registration of children with ASD at the local level would enable evidence-informed planning, equitable resource allocation, and efficient service delivery. Integrated community services should provide continuous access to assessment, early intervention, therapeutic support, education and social inclusion, reducing geographic and socio-economic inequalities. A specialised coordinating body should oversee service organisation, promote collaboration across healthcare, education, and social welfare sectors, and ensure continuity of care. Regular evidence-based assessment and reassessment of each child's needs would improve service quality, adapt interventions over time, and strengthen accountability and efficient use of resources"

Network for Children's Rights
"To improve the child protection system, there is a need for specific information, measures and indicators to monitor and address violations of children's rights, and the political will to prioritise children's rights, dedicate funding to children's rights education, invest in community support and

the prevention of family separation, and ensure meaningful child participation. In addition, there is a need to strengthen financing of the child protection system and to create coordination and cooperation networks between relevant Ministries and other competent authorities, in order to improve implementation of existing measures. Greece must also ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure (OPIC)"

The Smile of the Child

"Greece should strengthen its social protection system by expanding adequately funded child and family benefits, with enhanced support targeted at households facing poverty and social exclusion, simplifying access through integrated digital and local support services, ensuring timely payments, and linking cash assistance with high-quality early childhood education, healthcare, nutrition, mental health and employment support for parents. This integrated approach would reduce child poverty and material deprivation, improve family stability and parental well-being, increase access to essential services and learning opportunities, promote healthy physical, cognitive, and emotional development, and ultimately give all children, especially those in vulnerable households, a fairer chance to thrive and reach their full potential"

ThinkOnception Education Hub

"Greece should establish a locally coordinated child-centred access pathway in every municipality, linking income support with early childhood education and care, education, health and family support services, with a designated coordinator responsible for outreach, referrals and follow-up, enabling public authorities to identify children who are not being reached and to support families through fragmented procedures. Improving access requires the engagement of qualified local educational and civil society actors, and systematic monitoring of whether children actually access and remain connected to the services they need. These measures are necessary to reduce non-take-up of services, prevent inequalities from becoming entrenched and improve children's learning, well-being, participation and long-term prospects"

Hungary

Hungarian Child Rights NGO Coalition

"The state must not allow families to fall behind, as ensuring children's safety and well-being is only possible by securing the stability of their families. The income security and life chances of families could be enhanced through a variety of government instruments, including targeted transfers and services, the tax system, employment, and the expansion of the social housing network. Real social protection means helping professionals to work together before a crisis happens, and involving families in decisions that affect them"

Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation

"Hungary should strengthen and provide stable funding for universal child and family welfare services to enable effective early intervention, while expanding the workforce, investing in professional training, and establishing meaningful cooperation and joint case management across social, health, education and child protection institutions. Grounded in children's rights, non-discrimination and the best interests of the child, this approach would help families in need, especially those facing poverty or multiple disadvantages, to receive timely and coordinated support, would prevent avoidable family separation and disengagement from early childhood education or school and would improve children's safety, well-being, educational participation and long-term life chances"

Ireland

Children's Rights Alliance

"Ireland should increase the Daily Expense Allowance rate paid to all children living in the international protection system as a matter of urgency. In Budget 2027, Ireland should increase the amount lone parents can earn from employment before it impacts the amount they receive from the One Parent Family Payment, from €165 to €255 per week, to restore its value to 2020 levels, and should index link future increases to the National Minimum Wage rate"

Italy

Agevolando APS

"Italy should recognise the transition from care to independent living as a priority under the European Child Guarantee and Youth Guarantee, ensuring tailored policies and practices for young people leaving care, including foreign minors, until at least 21 years of age. This should include working with the third sector to build an ecosystem of assistance that provides safe housing, mentoring, mental health support, access to higher education and vocational training, adequate income support and pathways into employment. Italy should also establish national minimum standards for services for care leavers, and a monitoring system, to guarantee equal access across regions"

Rosalba Mirci – Individual Member
"Italy should turn the European Child Guarantee into an enforceable national framework combining adequate income support with guaranteed minimum access to early childhood education and care, healthcare, education and local social services across the country, supported by permanent funding, disaggregated monitoring and the meaningful participation of children and civil society. Making access to these services an enforceable entitlement would reduce inequalities, help prevent the inter-generational transmission of poverty and improve children's health, learning, well-being and inclusion"

Fondazione S.O.S. Il Telefono Azzurro ETS
"Italy should strengthen national minimum standards for local social services, reduce geographic inequalities, ensure stable funding for third sector organisations, improve national data collection on vulnerable children (linking living conditions to mental health outcomes), and secure long-term investment to prevent educational poverty among children, including by investing in digital skills"

Kosovo

CONCORDIA Projekte Sociale
"Kosovo should establish dedicated, predictable and needs-based national and municipal financing for licensed, integrated community services - connected through effective referral pathways with social assistance, education, healthcare and child protection - so multidisciplinary teams can identify vulnerable children early and provide continuous family support. This would improve school attendance and learning, nutrition, physical and mental health and family resilience, while reducing neglect, violence, exploitation, school drop-out and the inter-generational transmission of poverty"

Latvia

Latvian Child Welfare Network
"To improve social protection, Latvia must make child well-being a cross-cutting national priority. This requires linking education, healthcare, and social policies into a mandatory, state-funded Early Preventive Support System in every municipality. Backed by a stable multi-year budget rather than short-term project funding, this proactive approach would ensure early risk identification — such as developmental delays or nutritional needs —and prevent children from falling into deep poverty regardless of where they live"

Luxembourg

Ombudsman fir Kanner a Jugendlecher in Luxembourgish - The Ombudsman for Children and Youth (OKAJU)
"Recognising that all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights, Luxembourg should ensure that social policies are drafted with children at their heart, with early intervention and access to support as key priorities"

Malta

Office of the Commissioner for Children (Malta)
"Since Malta's national minimum wage may not always be sufficient to meet the full cost of living for families with children, consideration should be given to increasing state support that supplements the income of low-income working families, so that their overall household resources are better aligned with essential living costs. This would help shield children from the effects of rising living costs and economic pressures by strengthening family incomes, while avoiding the potential economic challenges that could accompany significant increases in the national minimum wage"

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS)
"Malta should focus on migrant families and third country nationals, with proper consideration of children in families with non-Maltese nationals, to ensure that they are getting the support they need, as they are among the children most at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This would contribute to better outcomes and give children in poverty a chance to flourish"

Moldova

A.O. CONCORDIA. PROIECTE SOCIALE
"Moldova must scale up nationwide community-based integrated services, such as CONCORDIA's Day Centre model, to build an ecosystem of early intervention services that can support families, prevent children from being separated from their family and ensure that all children have access to early education, nutrition, and remedial schooling. This also requires an urgent financial investment to increase social workers' salaries and stabilise the local workforce"

Netherlands

Het Kinderrechtencollectief (Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights)
"The Netherlands should adopt a comprehensive child poverty strategy based on children's rights that guarantees an adequate standard of living for every child, strengthens income support for low-income families, invests in affordable housing, and ensures universal access to healthcare, education, childcare, and participation opportunities. Such a strategy should include meaningful participation of children, long-term funding for preventive family support, and systematic child rights impact assessments. By addressing both income poverty and the wider conditions affecting children's development and well-being, the Netherlands can improve children's health, educational outcomes, social inclusion, and future life chances while fulfilling its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child"

Portugal

Fundação Bom Sucesso
"Portugal should take action to reduce inequalities in access to basic services, including improving children's timely access to high quality healthcare, early childhood education and care, and education services, given the overwhelming scientific evidence in several disciplines – pedagogy, social sciences, neuroscience, psychology, and economics – on the importance of early childhood development. Prolonged exposure to adversity and toxic stress in early childhood can have lifelong consequences on health, learning, behaviour, and well-being across the life span"

Instituto de Apoio à Criança - Child Support Institute
"Portugal should improve coordination between the government and local authorities, and strengthen support, particularly financial support, for civil society organisations that implement policies to fight child poverty. Similarly, it is important to value children's participation in shaping government policies that affect them"

PAJE – Plataforma de Apoio a Jovens (Ex)acolhidos
"Portugal should strengthen its child-centred social protection system by increasing long-term investment in adequate income support, affordable housing, and integrated services for vulnerable families, while ensuring effective coordination between social protection, education, healthcare, early childhood education and care, and child protection services. Greater investment in prevention and early intervention, combined with equitable access to high-quality services, would help reduce child poverty and social exclusion, improve children's health, educational attainment and overall well-being, and ensure that every child can reach their full potential, regardless of their socio-economic background"

Sérgio Costa Araújo - Individual Member
"Use the forthcoming review of public policies to strengthen mechanisms for protecting children living in poverty"

Romania

CONCORDIA România
"Romania should establish sustainable multiannual funding for preventive community-based services, fully implement Law No. 100/2024 ('the money follows the beneficiary'), and strengthen integrated social, education and health services to ensure vulnerable children have timely access to quality support and to prevent school drop-out, family separation and child poverty"

Florina Balint - Individual Member
"To combat child poverty, the Ministry of Labour and local authorities must use state funds and European Social Fund Plus resources to systematically finance social support services and expand nutrition initiatives like the Healthy Meals programme. Rather than placing all the responsibility on under-resourced rural municipalities, the government must simplify public procurement rules so local authorities can easily contract accredited, frontline non-governmental organisations to deliver case management, material aid, and professional clinical supervision directly to vulnerable families within the community"

Scotland

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)
"The Scottish Government should strengthen efforts to tackle child poverty by ensuring full implementation of the UNCRC (Incorporation) Scotland Act 2024 across all areas of government and public services, supported by sustained investment in workforce capacity, civil society and accountability mechanisms, so that children's rights are realised in practice. This should include embedding a joined-up, rights-based approach across social security, housing, health and other public services; closing gaps in protection arising from reserved matters and pre-1999 legislation; strengthening children's rights impact assessments across decision-making; and creating opportunities for babies, children and young people to shape the

anti-poverty policies, services and wider decisions that affect their lives."

Serbia

The Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia
"Serbia should establish a child-centred social protection system that combines adequate income support with guaranteed access to early childhood education, healthcare, housing and community-based services, with earmarked funding based on child poverty and local needs, clear assessments before any support is withdrawn, and priority given to Roma children, children with disabilities, children in rural areas, children in street situations and care leavers. Access to essential support should depend on children's rights and needs rather than the fiscal capacity of the municipality in which they live"

Slovenia

Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth
"Slovenia should strengthen social protection for children by creating a child-centred minimum income system that reflects the real cost of living and provides easy access to benefits. Income support should be combined with affordable housing, free school meals, healthcare, early childhood education and care, psycho-social support and access to extra-curricular activities. Priority should be given to single-parent families, children with disabilities, Roma children and children living in low-income households. This would reduce child poverty, improve health and education outcomes, and give every child a fairer start in life. The state should also ensure comprehensive and inter-ministerial responses to tackle and prevent child poverty"

Spain

FEDAIA - Federació d'entitats d'atenció a la infància i l'adolescència
"Catalonia should establish a universal and adequate child support allowance, embedded in a rights-based system that combines income security with affordable housing, inclusive education, healthcare, nutritious food, leisure and community-based family support. This would reduce non-take-up and stigma, strengthen the redistributive impact of social protection, prevent persistent and inter-generational poverty, and ensure that every child — regardless of family structure, origin, disability, residence or administrative status — can grow in dignity and safety and with equality of opportunity"

Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia
"Spain should introduce a universal child allowance that guarantees financial support to all families with children, regardless of income level. Spain is one of the few European Union countries without a universal child benefit, placing its most vulnerable families at a disadvantage. Establishing such a benefit would align Spain with successful European models and significantly contribute to reducing income inequality among households with children"

Coordinadora Estatal de Plataformas Sociales Salesianas
"Spain should strengthen social protection for children through an automatic child support allowance that is sufficient and compatible with other forms of support, and which prioritises households below the poverty line. Social protection should be linked to integrated pathways covering housing, education, mental health, healthy eating and family support, provided by public services and social organisations. This would reduce non-take-up of support, alleviate families' financial burden, enable early intervention and improve key outcomes for children and adolescents, namely their well-being, education, participation and healthy development"

Sweden

Erikshjälpen - ERIKS Development Partner
"Sweden needs to continue to develop approaches that ensure children are genuinely listened to and that their views are taken into account in decisions affecting their lives. Within public authorities, schools, social services, healthcare services, and other social spheres, children should be recognised as active participants rather than passive recipients of support. Strengthening child participation will improve children's protection and fairness of decisions, while promoting children's rights and well-being. This requires child-friendlycommunication and opportunities for children to express their views. A society that listens to children is better equipped to safeguard their interests and support their development"

Bris - Barnens rätt i samhället
"Sweden should index the child allowance, housing allowance, and maintenance support to protect children and families from the effects of inflation, and apply similar indexation mechanisms to the national standard for social assistance. It should also ensure adequate and long-term funding for the mandates and operations of social welfare authorities, strengthen children's participation in

social services investigations and interventions, and improve children's rights, support and participation in the context of legal proceedings"

Türkiye

Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilisation
"Türkiye should further strengthen its social protection system by enhancing coordination among relevant institutions and promoting an integrated, inclusive, child-centred and child-sensitive approach to service delivery, enabling the efficient and equitable allocation of resources and ensuring that all children, including those living in poverty, rural areas, or refugee communities, have equal access to quality education, healthcare, early childhood education and care, nutrition, and social protection services. This would reduce regional and socio-economic disparities, strengthen family resilience, improve children's well-being and development, and help to ensure that no child is left behind"

Hayat Sende
"Türkiye should introduce a regular, means-tested child benefit for low-income families, combined with guaranteed access to essential services such as free school meals, early childhood education and care, and social services. Strengthening the integration between income support and child-focused services would help ensure that financial assistance translates into better outcomes for children. Such an approach would reduce financial pressure on families while improving children's nutrition, school attendance, health and overall well-being. It would also contribute to preventing child poverty from leading to social exclusion and unnecessary family separation"

Ukraine

Polina Klykova - Individual member
"Ukraine needs a social protection system based on children's real needs rather than outdated standards. The state's minimum subsistence threshold should be regularly reviewed and reflect current needs, including digital access. Adequate income support should be combined with guaranteed access to education, childcare, healthcare, and social services, and effectiveness should be assessed through actual outcomes for children, rather than the number of payments made or nominally available services. There should be reparations to cover financial losses caused by the Russian Federation"

Ukrainian Education Platform
"Ukraine needs to switch from a system that reacts to ongoing crises to a child-centred social protection system aligned with the European Child Guarantee, and that invests in prevention, early intervention and family strengthening, providing each child with equal access to integrated social, educational, medical and psycho-social support services, regardless of their location or family status. Through sustainable state funding and partnerships with civil society organisations, this approach will move Ukraine from crisis response to crisis prevention and enable long-term investment in children's well-being"

Partnership for Every Child (P4EC)
"Ukraine should improve social protection for children by strengthening the child protection and social work workforce, ensuring systematic rather than ad-hoc training, and increasing the salaries of child protection professionals and social workers"

Wales

Children in Wales – Plant Yng Nghymru
"We want to see an end to child poverty in Wales. Both the Welsh and UK Governments must take action to prevent families falling into poverty and, if they do, take decisive action to lift them out. Governments must make sure that families have an adequate income to lead a full and decent life, by providing access to well-paid quality jobs and adequate levels of welfare benefits which provide the necessary safety net for all babies, children and young people to live in dignity with their rights fully protected and secured"

Policy recommendations

1. Invest in children to strengthen the foundations of the European Social Model

Investing in children is not optional. It is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty, strengthening social cohesion and building a fairer and more resilient Europe. Poverty in childhood can have lasting consequences, increasing the risk of poverty and disadvantage later in life. This underlines the importance of investing early in children and in the services, systems and support that enable them to grow up safe, healthy and able to fulfil their rights.

The **2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) must protect and strengthen investment in children** and ensure that tackling child poverty remains a visible and adequately financed EU priority.

The **European Child Guarantee** should remain at the centre of this commitment, supported by dedicated funding. Experience from the current programming period shows **the value of dedicated funding**. Earmarking 5% of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) resources to address child poverty in eleven Member States has helped to strengthen investment in children as well as the planning, governance and implementation of related measures. At the same time, investment levels vary considerably across the EU. Five additional Member States have programmed more than 5% of their ESF+ resources to address child poverty, with Austria allocating as much as 20%, while France has programmed only 0.37% for this priority. These disparities underline the importance of sustained earmarked investment in children as a central feature of the post-2027 EU funding architecture.

Eurochild is calling for at least 25% of National and Regional Partnership Plans to support social inclusion and for a specific child poverty earmarking of at least 5%, increasing to 10% in Member States with higher child poverty rates. This should translate into at least €20 billion for tackling child poverty and implementing the European Child Guarantee.

The future funding framework must also include strong human rights safeguards. **Compliance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** should be reinforced through explicit reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). EU funding should not support institutionalisation or segregation, it should prioritise prevention, inclusive education, family- and community-based care, and accessible services for children and families, and prioritise these areas through the European Semester.

The partnership principle must be strengthened and properly enforced. Children's rights organisations, anti-poverty organisations and other civil society actors should be meaningfully involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of EU-funded programmes, while children in vulnerable situations should have opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them. Adequate capacity building and technical support should accompany this participation so that it is meaningful in practice.

Overall, the post-2027 MFF should move away from fragmented, short-term projects and towards sustained social investment that complements national public spending and strengthens long-term prevention, community-based services and the social workforce.

2. Strengthen implementation of the European Child Guarantee

The **European Child Guarantee should remain a central EU instrument for reducing child poverty** and ensuring effective access to essential services. Implementation needs to move beyond broad commitments towards stronger delivery, monitoring and accountability. Member States should set measurable, timebound, quantifiable targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion, supported by clear responsibilities at national, regional and local levels and regular evaluation of progress.

Adequate and sustainable financing is essential. *National Action Plans* should be backed by sufficient EU and domestic resources, and measures that have demonstrated their value should not end when temporary project funding expires. So far, €9.6 billion for addressing child poverty has been programmed

for 2021–2027 under the ESF+, but this needs to increase in order to reach the target of reducing the number of children in poverty by at least 5 million by 2030, as mandated in the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The European Child Guarantee can help reduce child poverty by improving children's access to essential services. However, household income and social transfers remain critical to families' ability to meet children's needs. Social protection systems therefore need to be better adapted to the realities faced by families with children, including rising living costs, low wages, housing costs and energy poverty. Particular attention is needed to the non-take-up of benefits and services. Families may be unable to access support because of a lack of information, complex administrative procedures, stigma, documentation requirements or other barriers. Member States should simplify access, strengthen outreach and ensure that children's entitlements can be effectively exercised in practice.

The **Child Guarantee needs stronger coordination** across ministries and levels of government, along with **meaningful participation of civil society and children** themselves. This would strengthen accountability for implementation and help ensure that the Child Guarantee moves beyond a policy commitment to deliver measurable improvements in children's access to services, rights and opportunities.

3. Build integrated, preventative support around children and families

Children and families do not experience health, education, social protection, housing and child protection as separate issues, so support should not be delivered through disconnected systems. Effective support requires coordinated responses built around the needs of the child and family. The evidence collected shows that services are most effective when they work together through shared plans, clear responsibilities and follow-up rather than operating in isolation.

The EU and its Member States should **prioritise prevention, early intervention and family support** and invest in permanent **community-based structures and multidisciplinary teams** that connect social services, healthcare, mental health support, education, early childhood education and care, and child protection. Local coordination mechanisms should help families navigate services and ensure that support is provided early, before difficulties escalate. Preventive services are often underfunded, even though late interventions are usually more costly.

Successful community-based approaches such as those highlighted in the country profiles of this report should be scaled up and integrated into public systems rather than remaining isolated initiatives. The objective should be to build a **stable ecosystem of support that helps families**, prevents unnecessary family separation and ensures children can access essential services throughout their childhood.

4. Guarantee every child's right to safe, secure and adequate housing

Housing insecurity and homelessness are key components of child poverty and should become a much greater priority in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee and in wider EU efforts to address poverty. Housing insecurity, homelessness, inadequate housing, overcrowding, excessive housing costs and energy poverty directly affect children's health, education, nutrition, and emotional well-being.

Member States should **increase investment in affordable, public and social housing** and strengthen support for low-income families with children to cover housing costs. Particular attention should be paid to single-parent households and other families facing disproportionate housing burdens. Housing policies should also prevent homelessness and evictions and **address poor housing quality, overcrowding and energy poverty.**

The housing strand of the Child Guarantee should be reinforced so that adequate housing is treated as an essential condition for the fulfilment of other

children's rights. Housing support should therefore be linked to income support, social services, education, healthcare and family support rather than addressed in isolation.

The evidence also points to the value of ring-fenced national funding for affordable public rented housing and housing support for low-income families with children. Such investment can reduce the pressure that housing costs place on families' ability to provide their children with adequate food, education and opportunities for social participation.

5. Make children's mental health a core part of social protection

Children's mental health should be recognised as an integral part of social protection and European Child Guarantee implementation. Financial hardship is closely linked with housing insecurity, reduced access to extra-curricular activities, barriers to quality education and limited access to psycho-social support, all of which can negatively affect children's emotional well-being and sense of stability.

Member States should **ensure timely, affordable and accessible mental health and psycho-social support for all children**, irrespective of income or geographical location. A stronger focus is needed on **prevention and early intervention**, including school- and community-based support that can identify and respond to needs before they become more severe.

Mental health services should also be better integrated with education, healthcare, social services and child protection. Multidisciplinary models that bring together social workers, psychologists, education professionals and healthcare specialists can improve coordination and make support easier to access. The examples in the evidence demonstrate the value of referral systems involving schools, healthcare providers, child protection authorities and social services.

6. Close the digital divide and uphold children's rights in the digital environment

The EU and its Member States should **treat digital inclusion as an issue of children's rights and social justice**, and integrate it systematically into the European Child Guarantee and wider social, education and child protection policies. This requires addressing not only Internet connectivity, but also access to adequate devices, assistive technologies, safe learning environments and the skills needed to benefit meaningfully from digital opportunities. Policies must recognise that poverty, housing deprivation, disability, discrimination, migration status, rural isolation and living in alternative care can shape children's digital access, skills, exposure to risks and ability to obtain support or remedies. Better disaggregated data and research are needed to understand these inequalities, while children in vulnerable situations must participate directly in the design and evaluation of digital policies.

At the same time, responsibility for **children's safety online** must not be placed primarily on children, parents or caregivers. Families should receive accessible guidance, community support and digital literacy education. Digital services must be safe, accessible and privacy-preserving by design, and providers should be required to identify and mitigate risks without exploiting children's developmental or socio-economic vulnerabilities. All children should have access to child-friendly information and effective reporting mechanisms and remedies, so those with the least support offline are not also the least protected online.

7. Recognise and sustainably support civil society organisations

Civil society organisations are essential partners in reaching children and families experiencing poverty, delivering innovations including preventive and specialised services and identifying needs that may not be visible to mainstream systems. However, their contribution is often undermined by short-term, project-based financing and restrictive funding procedures.

The EU and its Member States should **provide more predictable and multiannual funding that reflects the long-term nature of child protection, prevention and family support**. Successful organisations should not be forced to repeatedly rebuild services through short funding cycles, while continuity of support for children and families should be treated as a core funding objective.

Funding procedures should also be simplified. Smaller and community-based organisations often face disproportionate administrative, financial or eligibility barriers, while in some contexts non-governmental organisations (NGOs) cannot access funding independently and must rely on public authorities or competitive tenders. Better guidance, technical assistance and more accessible funding arrangements are therefore needed.

Civil society should also be systematically involved in the governance, implementation and monitoring of the European Child Guarantee, the ESF+ and other relevant EU funds. Its role should be recognised not only as a service provider, but as a strategic partner that contributes evidence, expertise and the perspectives of children and families.

8. Strengthen children's rights monitoring and data

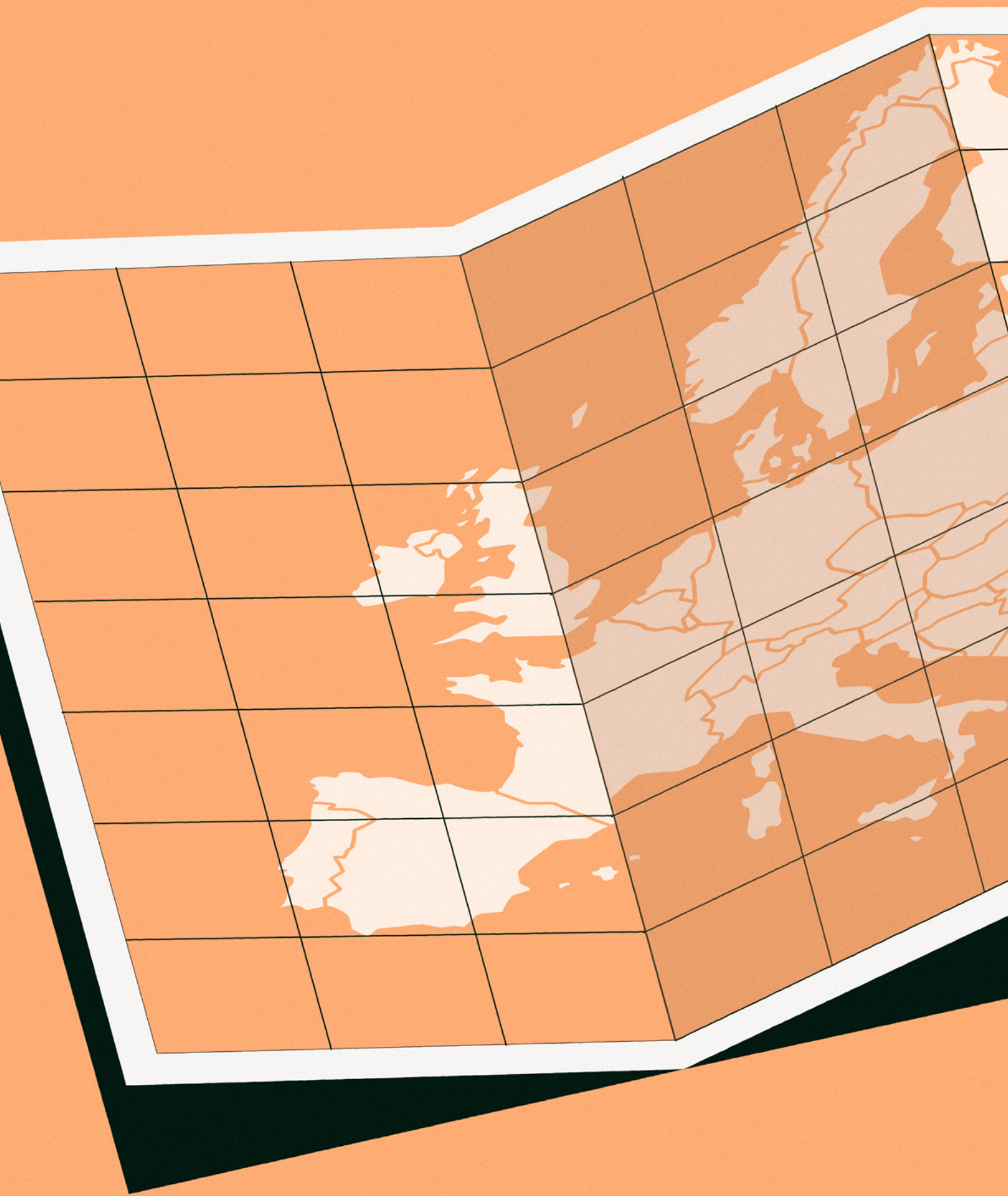
Independent **children's rights monitoring should be strengthened**, alongside the effective incorporation of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC**) into national legislation and the systematic use of **Child Rights Impact Assessments. Independent children's rights institutions**, such as children's ombudspersons, must have the mandate and resources necessary to monitor UNCRC implementation and hold public authorities accountable.

Children, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders should be meaningfully involved in monitoring and evaluation to ensure that implementation reflects children's lived experiences and changing needs.

Data collection and monitoring should also be firmly grounded in the UNCRC and a children's rights-based approach. **Reliable, disaggregated data and independent monitoring** are essential to understand whether policies and investments are reaching the children most in need and delivering tangible improvements in their lives. Yet significant gaps remain, and some countries continue to struggle to identify particular groups of 'children in need'. Particular attention should be given to improving the collection of disaggregated data, where legally and ethically appropriate, including data capable of identifying inequalities affecting children from different ethnic backgrounds. Roma children, in particular, can remain insufficiently visible in conventional data collection systems, making it more difficult to identify inequalities and design effective policy responses.

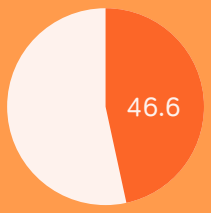
Member States should **improve the quality, regularity and comparability of data** on children experiencing poverty and social exclusion as well as their access to essential services. Data should be sufficiently disaggregated to reveal inequalities between groups of children and geographical areas, including disparities related to family type, disability, migration background, ethnicity and place of residence.

Monitoring must also move beyond measuring inputs and outputs, such as expenditure, number of meals provided or training sessions delivered, towards assessing whether interventions produce meaningful and lasting improvements in children's lives. The European Child Guarantee should therefore be supported by outcome- and impact-oriented indicators, transparent reporting and stronger evaluation mechanisms.



Country Profile 2026

Albania



Child Poverty
46.6% (2023)
▼ -1.8 percentage points compared to 2022

Child Rights Centre Albania

(CRCA - ECPAT Albania)

Poverty Data

Despite economic progress, Albania has not invested sufficiently in children's well-being, education, protection, social care, and access to justice. The clearest indicator of child poverty is the at-risk-of-poverty rate. According to INSTAT's *Income and Living Conditions in Albania 2024 (EU-SILC)* data, 26.6% of children aged 0–17 were at risk of poverty, meaning more than one in four children lived in households below the national poverty threshold.

Poverty in Albania is multidimensional and linked not only to low income, but also to unequal access to quality education, healthcare, social services, psycho-social support, and meaningful participation.

Children living in low-income households are most affected by poverty in Albania, especially Roma and Egyptian children, children with disabilities, children in rural and remote areas, children in single-parent households, and children whose families face long-term unemployment or unstable incomes. These groups are more likely to experience severe material deprivation and to face barriers to quality education, healthcare, early childhood services and social protection, increasing their risk of long-term exclusion.

The Investment Gap

A key concern is the reduced prioritisation of social protection in the 2025 state budget. While overall public expenditure increased, the share allocated to social protection fell from 29.3% in 2024 to 27.8% in 2025, and investment in health also declined slightly. This remains a structural weakness, as Albania has approved important child-related policies and plans, but financing remains insufficient and fragmented. As a result, municipalities lack the resources to expand preventive, community-based and specialised services, and many policy commitments remain only partially implemented.

Measures to address child poverty in Albania are mainly financed through the state budget, social protection schemes, local social services, and public programmes in education, health, and child protection. European Union (EU) and international funding, including the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) and related social inclusion programmes, has supported reform and institutional capacity, but current investment remains insufficient for a fully child-centred system. Civil society organisations are eligible to apply for EU and donor funding, but this support is often project-based and time-limited, which does not match the long-term needs of child protection work. Specialised services such as ALO 116-111, iSIGURT.al, and Barnahus Albania still depend heavily on donor support, raising concerns about sustainability.

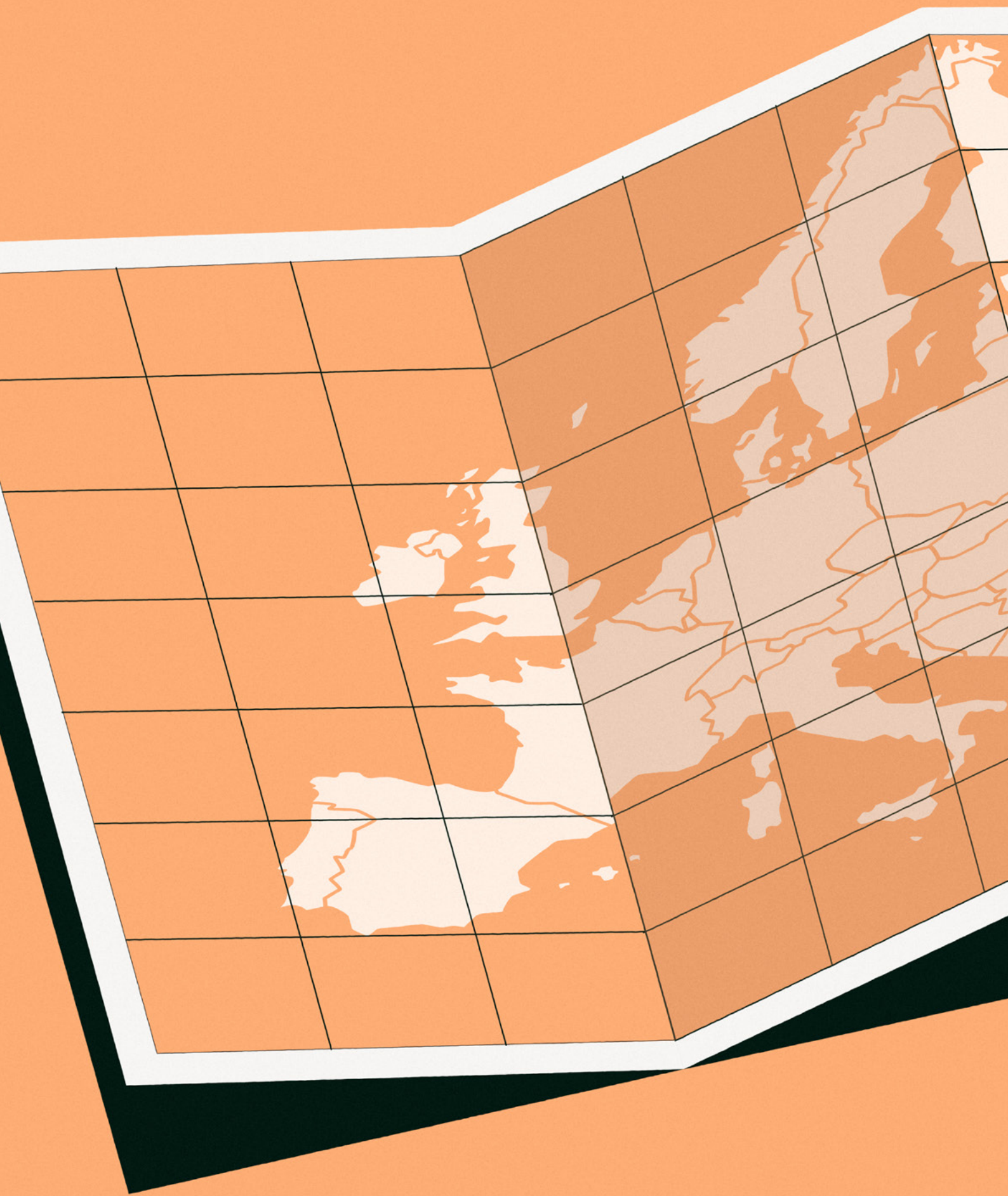
The European Child Guarantee

Albania has adopted the *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee 2026–2030* - an important step towards coordinated and child-centred action for children at risk of poverty and social exclusion. However, implementation is constrained by insufficient funding, uneven local capacity, and significant disparities in the availability of services across municipalities.

To strengthen its impact, a strong national monitoring and accountability mechanism is needed, with disaggregated data by age, gender, disability, ethnicity, and place of residence. This would help identify gaps, improve targeting, and strengthen accountability across all levels of government.

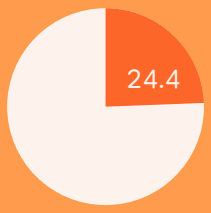
Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Albania does not yet have a true 'gold standard' model of integrated service delivery linking income support, education, healthcare, social care, and child protection. Institutions still tend to work in silos, and families often need to navigate services separately rather than receiving coordinated support. Barnahus Albania is a strong example of progress in bringing together justice, child protection, social services, and psychologists, while EU4SocialCare has supported the development of community-based services. However, these initiatives remain limited in scale and are not yet part of a fully integrated national system. The main need is sustainable public financing, stronger cross-sector cooperation, and shared responsibility for children's needs.



Country Profile 2026

Austria



Child Poverty
24.4% (2025)
▲ +3.5 percentage points compared to 2024

Netzwerk Kinderrechte Österreich – National Coalition

With their members:
Asylkoordination
Bundesjugendvertretung
Katholische Jungschar Österreichs - Catholic Children's Movement of Austria
Volkshilfe Österreich
WIENXTRA - Gemeinsam für junge Menschen in Wien

Poverty Data

According to 2025 *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC) data, 24.4% of children in Austria (around 395,000 children) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 18.6% of the overall population. Around one in five children lives in a household that cannot afford a one week annual holiday away from home, while one in four lives in a household unable to cope with unexpected expenses. These financial constraints limit children's opportunities to participate in education, leisure and social activities, increasing the risk of long-term social exclusion.

Children with a refugee background face particularly high risks, as families relying on basic welfare support (*Grundversorgung*) receive benefits that are often insufficient to meet children's needs.

Child poverty disproportionately affects single-parent households, families with three or more children, households relying primarily on social benefits or with long-term unemployment and low wages, and those with low educational attainment. Poverty rates are also substantially higher among non-Austrian citizens, particularly third country nationals. Children with a refugee background are especially vulnerable because limited access to social protection and low basic welfare benefits increase their risk of material deprivation, social exclusion and reduced educational opportunities.

The Investment Gap

Recent policy decisions have not been sufficient to prevent the increase in child poverty in Austria. The suspension of the indexation of family benefits until 2028 has reduced the real value of key family benefits (despite inflation and the rising cost of living), weakening financial support for families with children. In addition, Austria has not yet introduced a comprehensive child basic income (*Kindergrundsicherung*), despite repeated calls from child rights and anti-poverty organisations. Existing support is fragmented and insufficient to effectively reduce child poverty.

Measures to address child poverty in Austria are financed primarily by the federal government, provinces and municipalities, with additional support from European Union (EU) funding, particularly the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Civil society organisations (CSOs) are generally eligible to apply for both national and EU funding and play a key role in delivering services for children and families. However, much of this funding is project-based and time-limited, making long-term planning, service continuity and preventive work more difficult.

The European Child Guarantee

Austria's National Action Plan for the *European Child Guarantee* aims to halve child poverty by 2030. CSOs believe this target is unlikely to be achieved without structural reforms and are calling for the introduction of an adequately funded child basic income scheme (*Kindergrundsicherung*), which they regard as one of the most important measures to strengthen the Child Guarantee. While the *European Child Guarantee* provides an important policy framework, CSOs argue that current funding levels are insufficient to achieve its objectives and sustainably reduce child poverty.

Progress on other commitments, such as nationwide free school meals, has been limited. No systematic involvement of children or stakeholders in monitoring the *National Action Plan* is publicly documented. Children with a refugee background

remain particularly disadvantaged, as families relying on basic welfare support (*Grundversorgung*) receive benefits that are insufficient to meet children's specific needs. Funding levels for unaccompanied refugee children are significantly lower than for other children in state care.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Austria has several initiatives that demonstrate integrated approaches to supporting children and families. One example is *Frühe Hilfen* (*Early Childhood Intervention*), which provides free, low threshold support for expectant parents and families with young children by linking health, social and family support services. Families receive home visits, counselling and guidance on accessing healthcare, early childhood education and available social benefits, helping them to secure financial and practical support at an early stage. The programme is jointly funded by the federal government, provinces and social insurance institutions, ensuring nationwide implementation and long-term sustainability.

Another example is WIENXTRA, the youth and family organisation of the City of Vienna, which offers free or low-cost educational, cultural and leisure activities in cooperation with schools, youth services and CSOs. Stable public funding by the City of Vienna supports the continuity of these services and promotes equal opportunities for children from low-income families.



CONCORDIA Social Projects

Poverty Data

According to *the Second Progress Report on implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Austria*, 344,000 children in Austria were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024 - 20.9% of all children.

While this represents a decrease of 32,000 from the previous year, it still means that around one in five children in Austria is affected by poverty or social exclusion, with reduced access to adequate housing, educational opportunities, healthy nutrition and social participation. Children in single-parent households are particularly affected. For *Die Armutskonferenz*, Austria's anti-poverty network, these figures underline the continued urgent need to fight child poverty through both adequate income support and accessible services for children and families.

Recent *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC) data shows that single-parent households and families with three or more children are disproportionately represented among households with the lowest incomes in Austria. In addition, poverty risks are markedly higher for people with a migration background. According to Statistics Austria's *Migration & Integration* 2025 yearbook, the risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023 was 36% for people born abroad, compared with 13% for people born in Austria; for people from non-EU countries, it reached 45%. For *Die Armutskonferenz*, this shows that child poverty in Austria is concentrated where low income intersects with single parenthood, larger family size and migration-related disadvantage.

The Investment Gap

Austria's 2025/2026 budget included a policy decision to effectively freeze and reduce family allowances within the social assistance scheme. Civil society organisations (CSOs) note that this austerity package reduces the purchasing power of low-income families. The lack of an integrated national basic child allowance leaves a structural gap.

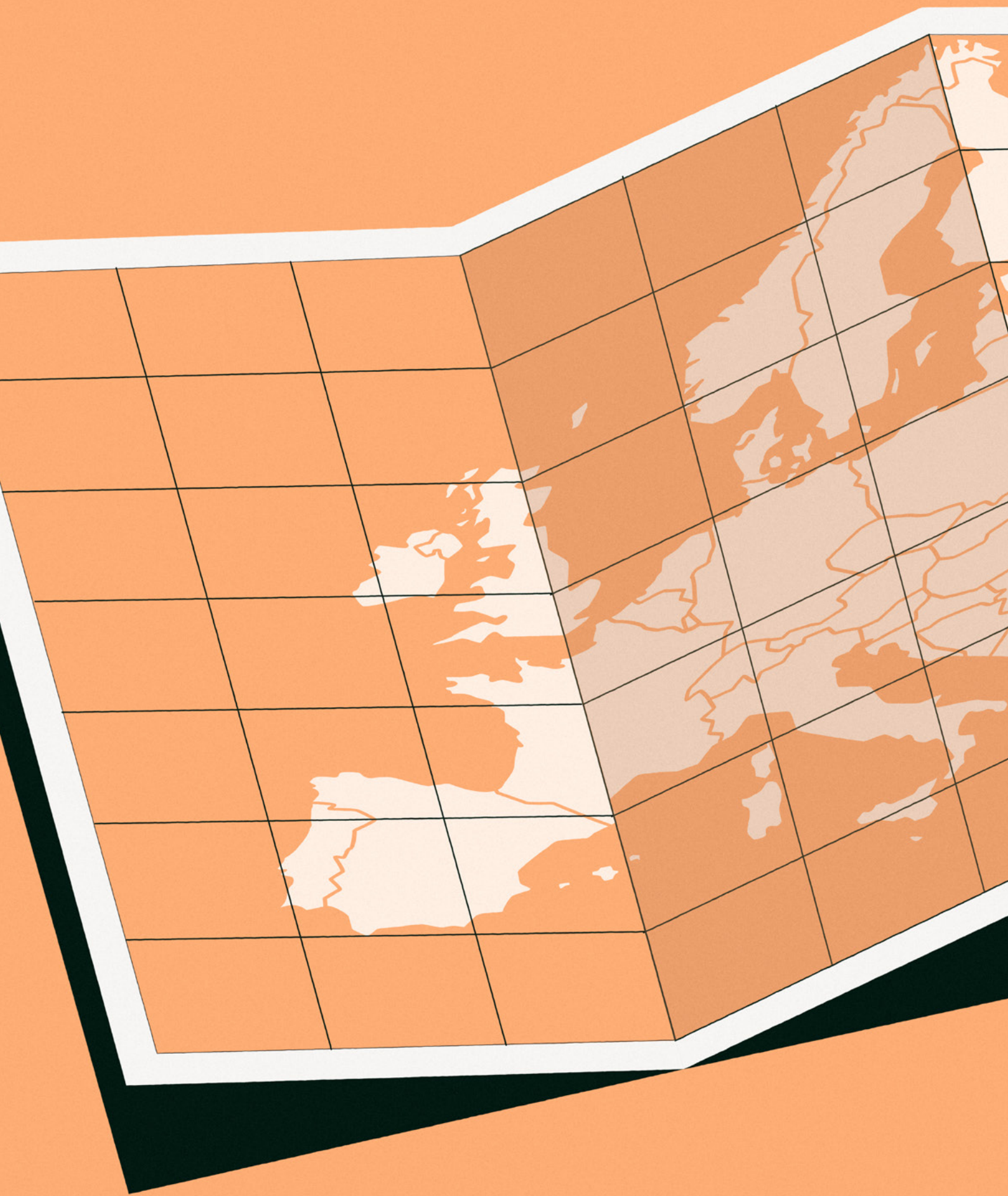
The European Child Guarantee

The *European Child Guarantee* is being implemented through Austria's *National Action Plan* and the progress reports submitted to the European Commission. Its implementation combines federal, state and regional measures across the Child Guarantee's core areas. Current implementation includes measures to expand and improve early childhood education and care, support inclusive education, and strengthen housing-related support for vulnerable families.

One specific measure that could strengthen the Child Guarantee's impact would be the introduction of a binding monitoring and implementation framework with measurable targets to reduce child poverty, disaggregated by family type, migration background and disability, and linked to clear responsibilities at all levels. This would help ensure that the Child Guarantee functions not only as a policy framework but provides accountability for reducing child poverty and improving access to essential services.

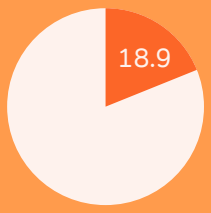
Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

CONCORDIA's LenZ Learning and Family Centre in Vienna supports children, young people and families at risk of exclusion, including many families with experience of migration and displacement. LenZ combines free learning support for children and young people with parent counselling and education, family support, social work, language and digital skills courses for women, childcare, and community-based activities. The service addresses educational disadvantage alongside wider social and family circumstances. LenZ mitigates the effects of poverty by offering free, low threshold services that would otherwise be difficult to access for many families. A key strength of the service is its collaboration with a pool of more than 200 volunteers who support learning and other activities.



Country Profile 2026

Belgium



Child Poverty
18.9% (2025)
▼ -1.3 percentage points compared to 2024

STEKR

Poverty Data

In Belgium, 18.9 % of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Persistent poverty affects one in ten children. 7.9% of children live in severe material and social deprivation The gap in academic proficiency between students from the lowest and highest 20% of socio-economic backgrounds reaches 46 percentage points.

In Flanders, it is estimated that 21,428 people are homeless, of whom 6,606 are children. 42.4% of children from families facing socio-economic disadvantage have access to formal childcare, compared to 82.5% of children who are not from disadvantaged families.

In Flanders, the highest risk of poverty is found among people born outside the European Union (EU), among unemployed individuals, and in single-parent households. In 2025, the proportion of people living below the poverty threshold was highest among the youngest age groups. By household type, the risk of poverty is highest among single-parent families, at 18%. The risk of poverty is also relatively high among couples with three children, reaching 16%.

The Investment Gap

In Belgium, the two-year time limit on access to unemployment benefits is expected to have negative consequences for children. In Flanders, schools' operating funds are not always adjusted to the rate of inflation. The 'schoolbonus', to support children's participation in the education system, is limited to children who are entitled to a *sociale toeslag*, a benefit that some low-income families receive on top of child benefits.

There have also been budget cuts to family care services (*gezinszorg*) which provide professional support, at home, to families who temporarily or permanently need assistance to manage daily life.

Measures to address child poverty and to support children are funded by different policy domains (social security, housing, youth care, education, environment) and at different levels (federal, regional, local). Currently, budget cuts are a reality at all policy levels and in many policy domains affecting children. While in some areas the government does not plan budget cuts, such as in youth care and youth work, the decision not to increase operating funds in line with inflation will in practice result in a reduction in funding in real terms. Funding for children with disabilities remains widely insufficient. In April 2026, the Flemish government was convicted by a Brussels Court for failing to offer much needed specialised support to a child with behavioural difficulties.

The operating funds of the youth care sector will not be adjusted for inflation in the next years, and there have also been budget cuts in the sports sector, including sports for children with disabilities.

The European Child Guarantee

Currently, Belgium's Child Guarantee *National Action Plan* is not based on data on children in vulnerable situations and does not contain a monitoring and evaluation framework. The implementation of the Child Guarantee requires sufficient funding and strong coordinated actions across all government entities, which is currently lacking. The latest mid-term report does recognise the need for a stronger methodology and more impact-oriented measures.

Reducing educational inequalities is crucial. Every child must have access to free, inclusive, high quality education. This requires sufficient and equitable resources for all schools, especially those serving children in vulnerable situations, and increased support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Health policies must also be strengthened. Children affected by poverty need free, inclusive, high-quality healthcare. Greater investment is required in children's and young people's mental health, particularly in prevention and psycho-social support. Health spending on prevention must increase and, critically, Belgium must collect national data on children's health and wellbeing.

Finally, investing in child-friendly housing and neighbourhoods is essential. Improving the living conditions of children most at risk requires affordable housing and environments adapted to their needs, including access to green spaces, playgrounds, and basic services in disadvantaged ne upport. They mediated, coordinated, and negotiated on behalf of families, engaging different services across various areas of life, becoming a central point of contact for both the families and the various organisations in Kortrijk .

Francesca Stuer – Individual Member

Poverty Data

In 2024, over 2.1 million people in Belgium (18% of the population) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. For children specifically, national averages conceal sharp regional differences - 42% of children in Brussels are at risk, compared with 22.3% in Wallonia and 14.5% in Flanders, so a child in Brussels faces roughly three times the risk of poverty compared to a child in Flanders. All three regions have improved slightly since 2019, but the ranking has not changed.
Flemish data shows that child poverty is closely tied to household type. In 2024, the poverty rate was 22% among single-parent families, 47% among children of parents with low levels of education, and 29% among children with a parent born outside the European Union (EU) versus 4% where both parents were born in the EU.

The Investment Gap

Recent federal and regional budget cuts have hit social security and education including early childhood education hardest, areas that particularly affect low-income families. This is in contrast to the real need to expand affordable early childhood education and childcare, which would enable single parents to work. As funding currently runs through community-level based on transfers and subsidies from federal level, this is insufficient funding for early childhood education and childcare as well as education.

Belgium's main mechanism to address poverty is the network of Public Centres for Social Welfare which are present in every municipality. These provide assistance in a range of areas including housing, energy costs, food, medical care, financial aid, debt support and more. In 2024, about 165,000 people (1.41% of the population) received Belgium's guaranteed minimum income through this system. However, the most current research finds that 46.6% of eligible households did not claim this benefit in 2018–2021. This means that close to one in two eligible households miss out, mostly due to confusing processes or lack of awareness rather than due to ineligibility. About 99,000 households were living below the national minimum income, with no support at all, in 2022. Encouragingly, households with children are less likely to fall through this gap than other eligible households.

Flanders' *Groeipakket* (child benefit) system, paid out by FONS and other accredited agencies, works differently - support is automatic, assessed from tax data rather than applied for. This has led to a near-tripling of children receiving the means-tested top-up (to nearly one in three children in Flanders) in five years. However, researchers caution that this has not improved Flanders' child poverty rate, which has stayed around 12.8%, and that current amounts remain inadequate for single-parent and larger families specifically.

The recommendation above can be translated into five areas for action, outlined below:

1. Target support where poverty is highest, particularly in regions such as Brussels, where child poverty is substantially higher than in Flanders.

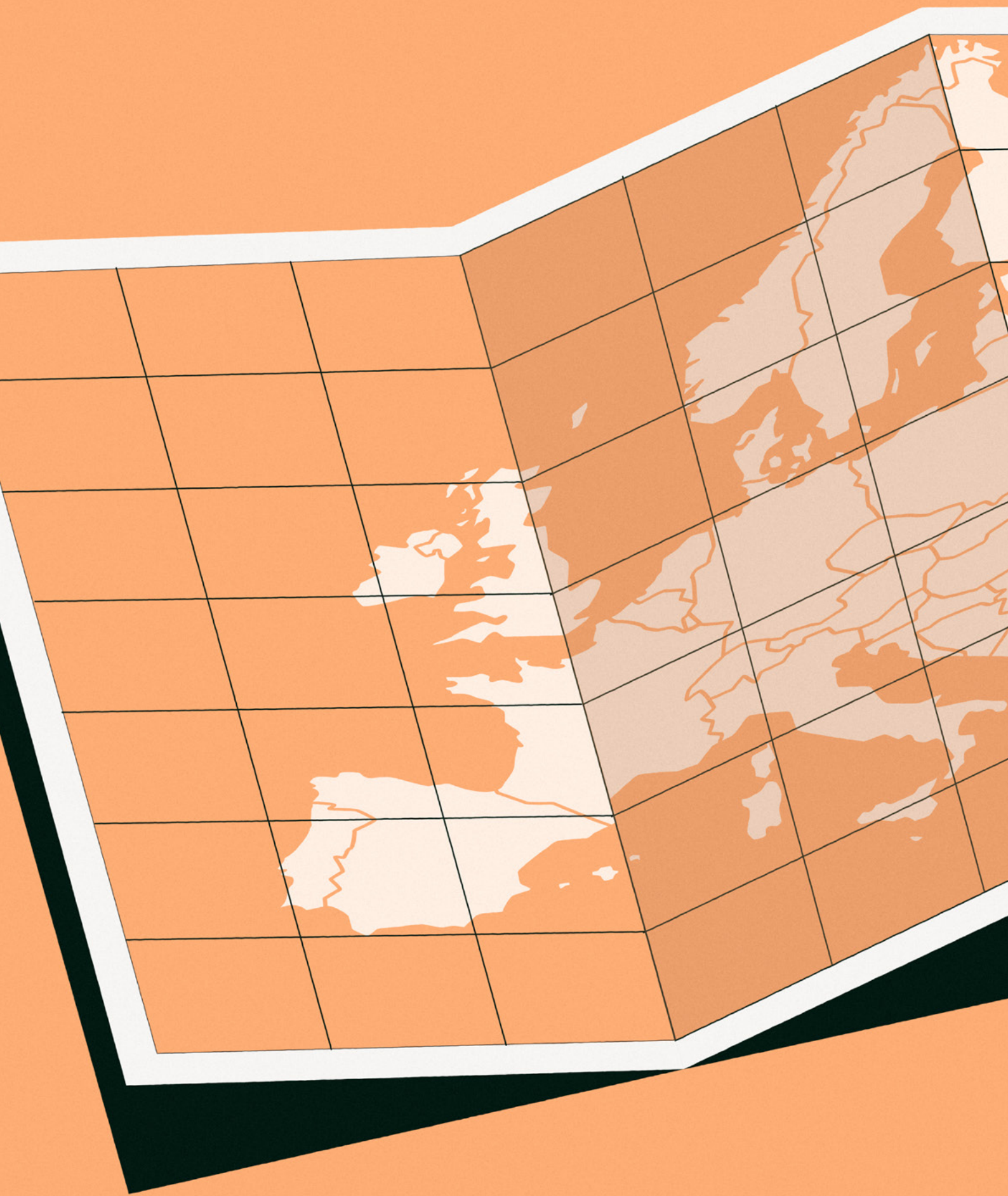
2. Make it easier for eligible families to access benefits, proactively reaching families through existing services and systems.

3. Protect investment in children, including by assessing the impact of budget cuts on children before reducing funding.

4. Connect financial support with child and family services, strengthening coordination so families do not have to navigate separate systems.

5. Ensure benefits are adequate for families who need them most, particularly single-parent and larger families.





Country Profile 2026

Bulgaria



Child Poverty
33.1% (2025)
▼ -2 percentage points compared to 2024

CONCORDIA Social Projects

Poverty Data

Child poverty remains a major challenge in Bulgaria. In 2025, 27% of children aged 0-17 (around 303,800 children) lived below the national poverty line, a higher rate than among working-age adults (18.1%) and the population as a whole (21.2%). Additionally, 33.1% of children (372,100) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, indicating that one in three children experienced poverty, material deprivation, or lived in a household with very low work intensity. Social transfers reduce child poverty from 40.4% to 27%, but remain insufficient. Despite a slight overall improvement in social conditions, child poverty has remained persistently high.

Children, particularly those living in vulnerable families, are those most affected by poverty in Bulgaria. In 2024, single-parent households and families with three or more children were among the most vulnerable, with poverty rates of 40% and 47% respectively. Poverty is also strongly linked to low work intensity, affecting families with limited employment opportunities. Children from Roma communities face particularly severe disadvantage, with 62.5% living below the poverty line, compared with 16% among the ethnic Bulgarian majority.

Measures addressing child poverty in Bulgaria are financed through national resources, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and other European Union (EU) programmes, with national funding as the principal source. Despite increased investment, Bulgaria continues to have the highest child poverty and social exclusion rate in the EU. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a key role in delivering support but face barriers to accessing EU funding, including de minimis restrictions and requirements for guarantees to secure advance payments.

The Investment Gap

A key underfunded policy area in Bulgaria is family and child benefits. Although eligibility thresholds were increased in the 2025 budget, the value of most child benefits remained unchanged despite rising living costs. As a result, family support has not kept pace with the needs of low-income households.

A persistent challenge in Bulgaria is the underfunding and uneven availability of integrated community-based services for vulnerable children and families, particularly in poorer municipalities, among Roma communities, and in rural areas. Civil society organisations and government reviews continue to identify gaps in coordination between social, health, education, and child protection services, which contributes to family separation, unequal access to support, and reduced effectiveness of anti-poverty measures. These service gaps affect those most exposed to poverty, including Roma children, children with disabilities, and children in precarious family situations.

The European Child Guarantee

According to Bulgaria's Deputy Labour and Social Policy Minister, in 2025 family benefits amounted to approximately €327 million, while more than €136 million supported children and families through education and human resources programmes, with ESF+ measures expected to reach over 200,000 vulnerable children.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Bulgaria does not yet have a single 'gold standard' initiative linking income support and services at scale. An emerging example is the use of Integrated Territorial Investments under the *Development of the Regions* programme to support school desegregation and social housing. By combining investments in education, housing, transport and community services, these interventions aim to reduce geographic inequalities and support vulnerable children and families. They contribute to the objectives of the *European Child Guarantee* and are funded through EU cohesion policy and regional development instruments. As implementation is still at an early stage, dedicated monitoring is needed to assess impact and sustainability.

Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University

Poverty Data

One of the most telling statistics regarding child poverty in Bulgaria is its ethnic dimension. According to the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute's 2025 Poverty and Social Inclusion Indicators, the ability to meet children's basic needs in Bulgaria varies sharply by ethnicity. Material deprivation (lacking at least one of 13 basic items) affects 17.3% of children from the Bulgarian ethnic group, 29.6% from the Turkish ethnic group, 17.1% from other ethnic groups, and 73.5% of children from the Roma ethnic group.

Severe deprivation (lacking all 13 items) is nearly non-existent among Bulgarian (0.3%) and Turkish (0.6%) children, but affects 4.6% of Roma children, a rate more than fifteen times higher. Among children already experiencing material deprivation, the share who are simultaneously at risk of poverty is 29% for Bulgarian children and 34% for Turkish children, compared to 75.5% for Roma children. This highlights that, for Roma children, deprivation and poverty overlap and reinforce one another far more than for any other group. Clearly, child poverty in Bulgaria is not evenly distributed but is concentrated and reproduced within specific, historically marginalised communities.

For children from the Roma community, those most affected by poverty in Bulgaria, poverty is not an isolated occurrence but is inter-generational, transmitted from parents to children with very little targeted policy action to break the cycle. This is compounded by residential and social segregation, because Roma families are disproportionately concentrated in marginalised neighbourhoods with restricted access to quality education, healthcare and employment, reinforcing poverty for the next generation. According to the National Statistical Institute's data, 27% of all children in Bulgaria were at risk of poverty in 2025, but while material deprivation affects roughly one in five Bulgarian children, it affects more than two-thirds of Roma children.

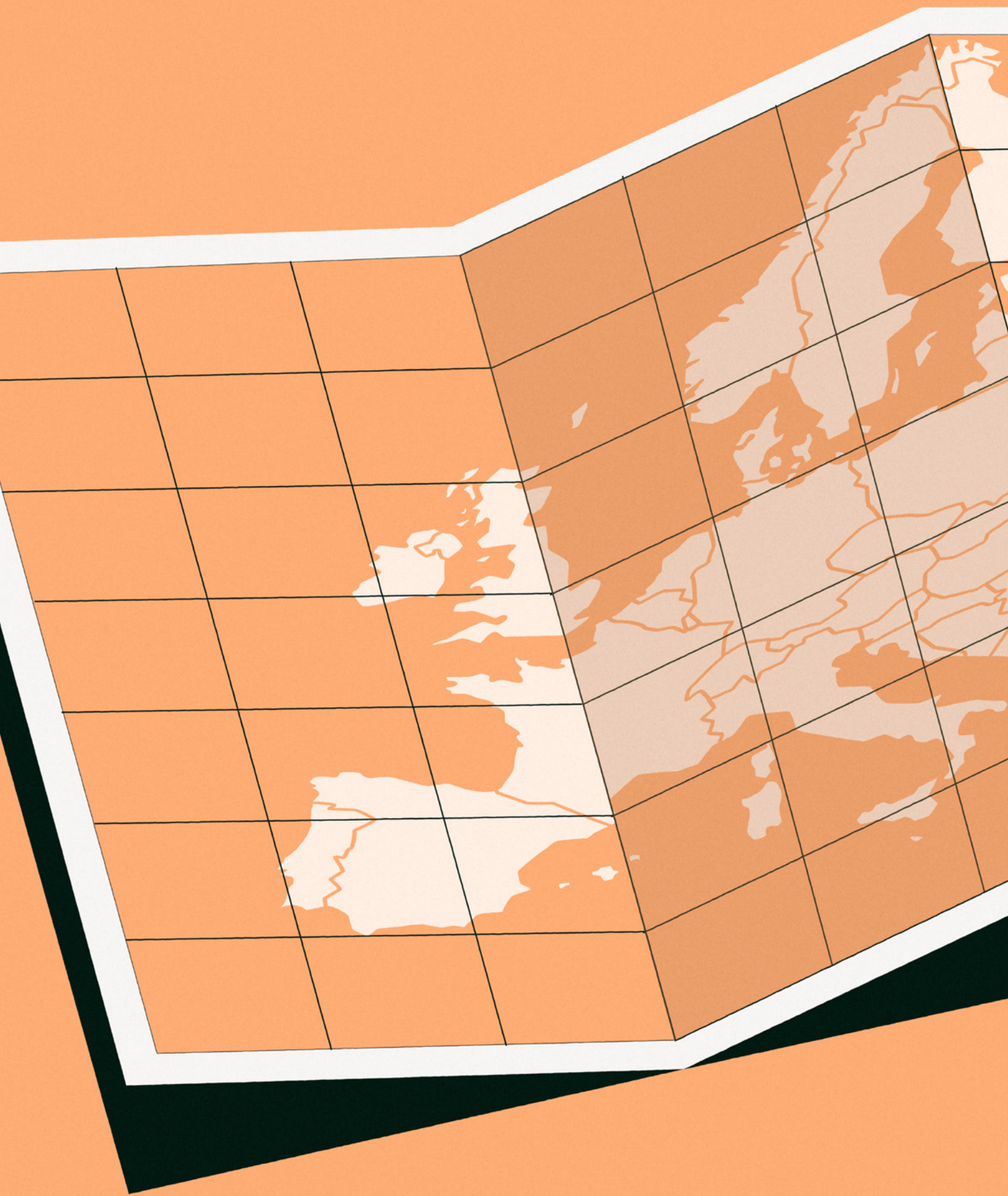
The European Child Guarantee

The *European Child Guarantee* is implemented in Bulgaria through a *National Action Plan* (2022) and biennial *Operational Plans*. However, Roma children are not named as an explicit target group, only implicitly subsumed under the category of 'refugee and migrant children, with a focus on unaccompanied or ethnic minority children'. As a result, measures reported in the second biennial report, such as kindergarten fee exemptions and school desegregation grants, are designed and reported on at the general population level, with no specific disaggregation that takes into consideration the inter-generational poverty and segregation faced by Roma children and families. The Know-How Centre and the Childhood 2025 Coalition have issued an official statement on this report, highlighting this lack of data, among other shortcomings.

One specific measure that would strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee would be for institutions to explicitly acknowledge the specific situation of Roma children within the existing framework, rather than treating them as an undifferentiated subset of children of ethnic minority origin alongside unaccompanied minors and other groups. Most importantly, when assessing effectiveness, institutions should monitor how measures have affected children living in poverty or at risk of social exclusion specifically, rather than relying solely on general population-level indicators. Current legislation should be amended to improve the methodology for

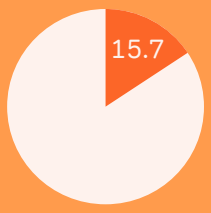
collecting data on children, including the collection of appropriately disaggregated data by ethnicity. Currently, there is a very limited understanding of exactly which children the Child Guarantee is reaching in Bulgaria.

While national budget allocations represent the largest nominal share of financing for policies on poverty and social exclusion, measures specifically targeting child poverty under the *European Child Guarantee* are predominantly financed through European Union (EU) funds, with interventions that build on ones from previous years. National resources reported in the Child Guarantee biennial reports frequently sustain pre-existing services, staffing, and administrative activities rather than constituting new, targeted investment in child poverty reduction. Non-governmental organisations are eligible to apply for EU funds, but current co-funding levels and conditions are restrictive in practice. For example, the de minimis regime limits participation by smaller service providers and municipalities, advance payments are unclear or inadequate, and there is no guaranteed mechanism to ensure the sustainability of funded services once EU financing ends.



Country Profile 2026

Croatia



Child Poverty
15.7% (2025)
▼ -3.6 percentage points compared to 2024

Network of Associations for Children

Poverty Data

According to data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children aged 0–17 was 15% in 2025. Although this represents a slight decrease compared to previous years, it remains significant. Children living in single-parent households are particularly vulnerable, with an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 29.7% for households consisting of one parent with one or more dependent children. Households with two adults and three or more dependent children also face a heightened risk, with an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 23%, compared with 12.8% for all households with dependent children. Children living in households with very low work intensity or whose parents are unemployed or engaged in insecure and low-paid employment are also at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. The Ombudsperson for Children states that between 20.3% and 22.3% of children in Croatia are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which corresponds to an estimated 127,000 children.

According to information presented by the UNICEF Office for Croatia during a session of the Croatian Parliament's Committee on Family, Youth and Sport, persistent child poverty is of particular concern. The proportion of children experiencing long-term poverty has increased in recent years and, although an overall decline in child poverty was recorded in 2025, a substantial number of children continue to live in conditions of prolonged deprivation. Roma children are disproportionately affected, with 29% of Roma children living in severe material deprivation, compared with 5.7% among the overall child population. Children living in rural and less developed areas, children with disabilities or developmental difficulties and their families, children in alternative care, and children on the move are also at heightened risk of poverty and social exclusion.

UNICEF has also noted that public expenditure on children and families in Croatia amounts to approximately 1.8% of GDP, compared with the European Union (EU) average of around 2.3%, while overall social protection expenditure also remains below the European average.

According to additional findings from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics on household income and living conditions, single-parent households with dependent children face relatively high housing costs, with housing expenses accounting for 16.2% of disposable household income.

The Investment Gap

Measures to combat child poverty and provide support to children are financed through the state budget, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. However, the available data on child poverty, and on the implementation of measures and activities aimed at reducing it, indicate that the allocated funding is insufficient.

Non-governmental organisations are eligible to apply for EU and national funding through relevant calls for proposals, particularly for projects promoting social inclusion, supporting vulnerable children and families, and providing community-based services. However, there is a lack of continuity in the publication of funding calls, resulting in interruptions in service provision and limiting the continuity of essential services for children and families in need.

The European Child Guarantee

Croatia is implementing its Child Guarantee *National Action Plan*. However, the latest publicly available implementation report was published in August 2024, and more recent information has not been made available. The main challenge, as in many other policy areas, is not the lack of public policies (laws, strategies and measures), but rather their effective implementation, monitoring, and the public availability of data.

There is still insufficient publicly available data to demonstrate whether children from the Child Guarantee priority groups have equal access to services in practice, and whether the measures set out in the *Action Plan* are improving the living conditions and well-being of children and families at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

To strengthen the impact of the *European Child Guarantee*, systematic monitoring should be introduced through clear indicators that can measure the extent to which children from the priority target groups actually access key services, and to assess the outcomes and impacts of policy measures. In addition, greater involvement of children and civil society organisations should be ensured in the planning, monitoring and use of available funding for the implementation of the *European Child Guarantee*.



Country Profile 2026

Cyprus



Child Poverty
14% (2025)
▼ -0.8 percentage points compared to 2024

Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC)

Poverty Data

Child poverty is slightly higher than adult poverty, 14.9% compared to 13.3%, in 2025. The percentage of the population experiencing material deprivation is 9.7% for the 0-17 age group and 7.7% in the 18-64 age group.
There is no disaggregated data on specific groups of children in poverty. However, single-parent families, large families and families with long-term unemployment seem to be more affected.

The Investment Gap

An underfunded policy area that affects child well-being and puts children at risk is children's educational psychology support. The Finance Ministry has put plans to strengthen Cyprus' Educational Psychology Service on hold, despite growing demand from schools and repeated government pledges to tackle violence, crises and mental health challenges before they escalate. The proposal sought to strengthen a department currently operating with just 52 educational psychologists serving the entire public education system. The Ministry of Education asked for 60 additional educational psychologists over a three-year period, increasing the workforce to 112. According to the Ministry of Education's calculations, once fully implemented, the annual cost would amount to approximately €3 million. The Educational Psychology Service currently has a ratio of one to 1,850 students. The gap between existing resources and actual needs is substantial given that international benchmarks are closer to a ratio of one for every 500 students.

The European Child Guarantee

With respect to the *European Child Guarantee*, the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC) is concerned about its long-term sustainability, given that key interventions such as *ΔΡΑΣΕΙΣ ΣΧΟΛΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗΣ ΕΝΤΑΞΗΣ (ΔΡΑ.Σ.Ε.)* (School and Social Integration Actions) are scheduled to end in 2027. The programme aims to mitigate the negative consequences of the economic crisis on education and on students, and to support students with a migrant background to learn the Greek language. The priority now must be to design and implement durable, continuous measures rather than short-term, project-based initiatives.

European Union (EU) funding underpins Cyprus's approach to child poverty. The Child Guarantee *National Action* Plan blends national budgets with European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) financing, funding from the Recovery and Resilience Plan, from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Technical Support Instrument, and Erasmus+, from 2022 to 2030, to strengthen key services across the Child Guarantee.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee has not improved the ability of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to access EU funding, which is still poor.

In July 2026, the government launched a disability benefit reform package under the new Law on Social Participation, Inclusion, and Independent Living for Persons with Disabilities. It decouples monthly welfare support from family income criteria, secures a €106 million funding boost through to 2028, and introduces specialised education and healthcare assistance for children with disabilities.

There will be an expansion of school-based support specifically for children with disabilities, through the creation of 290 new positions for school assistants and support workers. All major disability allowances no longer apply income criteria. Eligibility is now based on the specific functional disability, assessed directly by the state.

In its first phase, the reform includes a 10% increase in the Home Care and Personal Assistance allowance, a doubling of the Day Centre Participation allowance and a 33% increase in Transport Allowance. New services to support families with children with disabilities and independent living are being introduced, including access to early family support consultants, decision-making advisors, personal assistants and sign language interpreters.





Country Profile 2026

Czechia



Child Poverty
15.4% (2025)
No change compared to 2024

Asociace Dítě a Rodina

Poverty Data

13.7% of children in Czechia were at risk of income poverty in 2025. According to Eurostat data, children living in single-parent households are among those most affected by income poverty in Czechia. According to Czechia's *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee*, other children at risk of poverty and social exclusion include children in larger families, children in households facing housing deprivation, Roma children, children from migrant backgrounds, Ukrainian refugee children, and children with disabilities.

Social services and support services for vulnerable children and families in Czechia are financed through a combination of the state budget, regional and municipal funding, and European Union (EU) funds, especially the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are generally eligible to apply for these funding opportunities, but may face a significant administrative burden connected with the projects.

The Investment Gap

An underfunded policy area that is of great concern is the unstable and fragmented financing of services for vulnerable children and families. These services are often funded through EU projects or national grants, which usually cover only one or two years. As a result, organisations struggle to plan for the long term, to retain qualified staff, and to provide continuous support. Preventive services are often underfunded, while the system faces higher costs later when family situations escalate.

The European Child Guarantee

Czechia has adopted a *National Action Plan* for implementing the *European Child Guarantee* for the years 2022-2030, focusing on access to key services such as education, healthcare, housing, nutrition and support for children in need.

The impact of the Child Guarantee could be strengthened by ensuring stable and long-term funding for services supporting vulnerable children and families, as mentioned above. Another key issue is ensuring access to affordable and adequate housing for children and families at risk. New legislation in this area was adopted in 2025, but this is just a first step.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Good practice can be seen in NGO services that combine social work, therapeutic support or cooperation with schools, healthcare providers, municipalities and other actors. One example is SOFA, which supports vulnerable children through case management and cooperation with schools, regions and municipalities. There are also many other organisations that could be mentioned as examples of good practice.

Centrum LOCIKA – Child Advocacy Centre is an example of multidisciplinary and coordinated support for children affected by violence. It cooperates with child protection authorities, the police and other relevant services, and uses case management and joint case meetings to coordinate support around the child and family.

Zahrada pro duši works with children and their families through multidisciplinary teams composed of social workers, psychologists, education professionals and healthcare specialists. It also includes a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Centre, to which children can be referred by healthcare providers, child protection authorities, schools, counselling services or social services.





Country Profile 2026

Denmark



Child Poverty
14.8% (2025)
▼ -1.1 percentage points
compared to 2024

Børnesagens Fællesråd - Joint Council for Child Issues

Poverty Data

Denmark does not have an official national poverty line, but national data shows that 48,600 children lived in relative poverty in 2024, defined as those in households living below 50% of median income. The figure has remained largely unchanged since 2022, highlighting the persistence of child poverty even within a strong welfare state.

The children most affected by poverty and social exclusion in Denmark are those living in low-income households, particularly families with incomes below the minimum budget required to cover basic living expenses. Poverty disproportionately affects children in single-parent families, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children in out-of-home care.

Civil society organisations have also identified children affected by parental mental illness, substance abuse, or imprisonment as particularly vulnerable. These groups often face overlapping disadvantages, including poorer housing conditions, reduced access to services, greater risks of mental health challenges, and material and social deprivation. Geographic disparities further increase the risk of poverty, with the highest concentrations of affected children found in parts of West and South Zealand and the western suburbs of Copenhagen.

The Investment Gap

Despite high overall welfare spending, social protection remains insufficient for many low-income families due to restrictive eligibility criteria, benefit caps, and underfunded services. The 2025 cash benefit reform reduced disposable income for vulnerable households, including around 2,400 children, with some households losing up to approximately €400 per month, increasing the risk of child poverty, housing instability and social exclusion. At the same time, bureaucratic barriers limit access to compensatory measures such as the Danish leisure allowance, a municipal benefit that helps cover children's participation in sports and other leisure activities, which many eligible families fail to receive.

Key services also remain under pressure. Long waiting times in children's mental health services, shortages of specialised staff in inclusive education, and persistent workforce challenges in early childhood education limit access to timely support for vulnerable children.

Together, these developments highlight a gap between income support and access to essential services, reducing the effectiveness of Denmark's child-focused social protection system.

Measures to address child poverty in Denmark are primarily financed through national and municipal budgets, with European Union (EU) funding, including the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), playing a limited supplementary role. Denmark receives around €120 million in ESF+ funding in the current programming period (2021–2027), but access for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) remains limited in practice. Funding is mainly allocated to municipalities and larger institutions, while civil society organisations face barriers such as complex procedures, limited transparency, and a lack of targeted calls. As a result, EU funding rarely reaches organisations working directly with the most vulnerable children.

In this perspective current funding levels are widely considered insufficient to meet growing needs, particularly in mental health, inclusive education, and early intervention.

Improving access to funding for NGOs would require simplified procedures, better guidance and technical assistance, earmarked funding for child-focused initiatives, and stronger involvement of civil society in the governance of the ESF+ and the Child Guarantee.

The European Child Guarantee

In Denmark, the *European Child Guarantee* is primarily implemented through existing welfare structures, including early childhood initiatives and subsidised services, rather than through targeted national reforms. While these measures support the Guarantee's objectives, there is no comprehensive national strategy or coordination mechanism to ensure a child-centred approach. Strengthening implementation would require a national coordination framework with clear targets, monitoring, accountability, and meaningful involvement of civil society.

Implementation is further weakened by the absence of key child rights safeguards.

Denmark has not incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into national legislation, does not systematically conduct child rights impact assessments, and lacks an independent children's ombudsman.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

The *First 1000* Days initiative supports vulnerable families from pregnancy until children reach age two, through enhanced home visits, parenting support, and coordinated health, education, and social services. By intervening early, it helps reduce inequalities in child development and access to services. Funded nationally and implemented by municipalities, the initiative is embedded in existing welfare structures, supporting its long-term sustainability.





Country Profile 2026

England



Child Poverty
29% (2025)
▼ -2 percentage points
compared to 2024

Children's Rights Alliance for England, part of Just for Kids Law

Poverty Data

29% of children in England live in poverty (3.4 million children), which means going hungry, wearing unsuitable or worn clothes, living in poor homes and having poor sleeping conditions, or being excluded from activities at school or in the community. 14% of children live in deep material poverty – defined as those living in households which lack at least four of 13 essential goods or services.
Seven out of 10 children living in poverty have at least one parent in paid work.

Children from certain racialised groups are more likely to live below the poverty line - for example, Bangladeshi (63%), Pakistani (52%) and Black (47%), compared to white children (22%).

Other groups of children more likely to live in poverty include children living in a family where someone is disabled (40%) and children living in single-parent families (41%).

There are higher rates of child poverty in London (38%), the North-West and the West Midlands (32%) and the North-East (30%).

The Investment Gap

The United Kingdom (UK) government officially removed the two-child limit on Universal Credit (implemented in 2017) on 6 April 2026, allowing eligible families to receive financial support for a third or subsequent child and removing 350,000 children from poverty.

From September 2026, free school meals have been expanded to include all children in households receiving Universal Credit, thus benefiting an additional 500,000 children.

However, despite these positive developments, concerns remain.

Removing the two-child limit will not benefit all families, as large families will still be restricted by the overall benefit cap. Child benefit is insufficient, yet is extremely effective in reaching families. An increase of £20 per child per week would pull 600,00 children out of poverty.

Nearly half of newly eligible parents are not aware that their children are entitled to free school meals.

There is no explicit target for ending child poverty, beyond aiming to reduce it.

Financial constraints on local government funding have reduced the provision of early intervention by children's services and their ability to mitigate the impacts of child poverty, neglect and abuse. Local government is dealing with families already in crisis, with late intervention funding, typically financing private providers of children's homes. This is expensive, ineffective and is not meeting children's needs.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

The New Horizon Youth Centre provides caseworkers, therapists and legal support to children and young people at risk of serious violence and homelessness.

The centre provides a 'frontline' service and employs dedicated caseworkers to act as 'advocates' on behalf of children and young people to assess, plan and meet their urgent needs. The casework often involves requesting services (including a home) and challenging local authorities' refusal

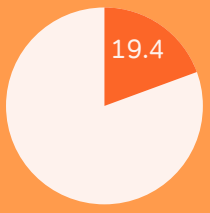
to provide services. The young people are often care-experienced and suffering trauma, along with other undiagnosed mental health conditions. Working with the National Health Service London Vanguard Community team based at the centre, assessments can quickly ascertain risk, needs and vulnerabilities, and young people can be helped to access appropriate services. Where public bodies are unlawfully refusing support, the centre provides a free legal clinic through Just for Kids Law's public law team, who provide advice and, if appropriate, take on the young person's legal case (funded, in part, by the Legal Aid Agency).





Country Profile 2026

Estonia



Child Poverty
19.4% (2025)
▲ +2.9 percentage points
compared to 2024

Estonian Union for Child Welfare

Poverty Data

According to Statistics Estonia, the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased from 16.5% in 2024 to 19.4% in 2025. Absolute child poverty also nearly doubled, rising from 2.3% to 4.6%. Rising housing, food and transport costs, together with recent tax increases, are placing growing pressure on families with children. As a result, children's opportunities increasingly depend on their family's financial situation, limiting equal access to education, mental health support, extra-curricular activities and other services essential for healthy development.

Children living in single-parent families, in large families, children with disabilities, children in alternative care, and children with migrant or refugee backgrounds are disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion. These children are more likely to experience cumulative disadvantage, where financial hardship is accompanied by unequal access to quality education, to mental health services, extra-curricular activities and other essential services. Single-parent families are particularly vulnerable, around 40% are at risk of relative poverty.

The Investment Gap

Financial support for vulnerable children has not kept pace with the actual cost of living. This is particularly evident in alternative care, where the statutory minimum intended to cover children's personal expenses has remained unchanged since 2018, despite substantial inflation and rising living costs. In practice, some municipalities are only able to provide the legal minimum, limiting children's equal opportunities to participate in everyday life.

Preventive family support and timely mental health services also remain insufficiently funded, resulting in long waiting times and unequal access which is dependent on where children live and their family's financial situation. In addition, shortcomings in the child maintenance system leave many children without regular financial support due to insufficient maintenance and lengthy court and enforcement procedures.

Measures that support children are financed through a combination of the state budget, local government budgets and European Union (EU) funds. While EU funding has enabled the development of several important services and pilot initiatives, many preventive and family support services remain project-based, and their long-term sustainability is uncertain once external funding comes to an end. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are generally eligible to apply for EU funding and play an important role in developing innovative services, reaching vulnerable children and families and contributing to policy development. However, sustainable core funding for NGOs remains limited, making it difficult to ensure continuity of successful interventions.

The European Child Guarantee

Estonia has taken important steps to implement the *European Child Guarantee*, but its impact remains uneven. In practice, children's access to quality education, extra-curricular activities, preventive services and timely mental health support still depends too heavily on their family's socio-economic situation and the municipality where they live. The single most important measure that would improve the impact of the Child Guarantee would be to ensure equal access to these services for every child, regardless of family income or place of residence. This should be accompanied by regular reviews of child-related financial support, so that benefits keep pace with the actual cost of living and continue to protect children's equal opportunities.





Country Profile 2026

Finland



Child Poverty
17.1% (2025)
▼ -0.2 percentage points
compared to 2024

Central Union for Child Welfare

Poverty Data

The number of children in low-income families has increased, and is expected to rise further due to recent social security cuts.
There are several indicators used to measure the prevalence of child poverty:

- The rate of relative low income (affecting 13.8% of children residing in Finland in 2024).
- The receipt of social assistance (in 2025, of the total number of households receiving basic social assistance, around 18% were families with children, corresponding to 46,420 households).
- The risk of poverty or social exclusion based on experienced material and social deprivation (10% of children experienced material deprivation in 2024).

Low income is most common in single-parent families. As the number of children increases, low income also becomes more common. The number of children in low-income families has increased (from 123,100 in 2023 to 137,400 in 2024). The proportion of children with a foreign background among those on low incomes has increased (the share, whether born abroad or in Finland, was 35.3 % in 2023 and 40.3% in 2024).

In 2024, 50.6% of children living with a single adult experienced material deprivation in at least one dimension. This share has increased since 2021, when it was 48.5%. Among children living with two adults, 25.7% experienced deprivation in at least one dimension, compared to 15% in 2021.

The Investment Gap

During 2023 and 2026, the Finnish government made several cuts to social security. As a result, child poverty has increased and is expected to continue to do so.

Cuts to social security benefits, together with reductions in services and increases in health and social care user fees in 2024 and 2025 have had a detrimental impact on particularly vulnerable children and the adults who care for them.

Income security expenditure (benefits) is financed primarily through state funding.

Counties organise social and healthcare services, with funding provided by the government. State funding is provided as a non-earmarked allocation (counties themselves can decide how, and for what purposes, the funds are used).

Municipalities organise early childhood education, pre-primary and primary education, and leisure services. The funding system is based on municipalities' own revenues, including tax income, and state funding.

Between 2023–2026, there have been cuts to both income security expenditure and service expenditure. Additionally, during the term of the current government, funding for non-governmental organisations working in social care and health will decrease from just over €380 million to €190 million. The member organisations of the Central Union for Child Welfare have expressed great concern about

the effects on services for their client groups - namely children, young people, and families – and the impacts on advocacy on their behalf.

The European Child Guarantee

In Finland, the *European Child Guarantee* is implemented as part of the *National Child Strategy*. Finland has set a national target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 100,000 by 2030. One third of these should be children. However, since the adoption of the Child Guarantee *National Action Plan*, child poverty has increased - based on all three indicators mentioned above.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

The Nordic welfare state model can be seen as a holistic approach to preventing child poverty. Finland has been a Nordic welfare state where the state guarantees the conditions for a decent life for all its inhabitants. Many key services, such as healthcare, education and early childhood education, have been affordable or free of charge. Additionally, the state has provided financial support for those who would otherwise not be able to manage e.g. due to illness or unemployment. However, the sustainability of the welfare state is being debated, particularly given the ageing and declining population.

On a smaller scale, there are a few examples of integrated approaches and/or cross-sector cooperation. One is the Finnish model for leisure activities (in force since 2023). The purpose of the model is to increase the well-being of children and young people by providing them with free activities during the school day. The programme is organised by municipalities, but the activities are provided by several different actors such as sports clubs, art educators or youth associations.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has granted municipalities a total of €14.5 million in special funding for the school year 2025–2026. The funding will make it possible to organise more than 10,000 groups for various leisure activities in about 2,000 schools. The aim is to make the Finnish model for leisure activities a permanent practice in these municipalities.





Country Profile 2026

Germany



Child Poverty
23.5% (2025)
▲ +0.6 percentage points
compared to 2024

Child and Youth Welfare Association - Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe - AGJ

Poverty Data

An illustration of the current reality of child poverty in Germany is not based on a single statistic, but rather on comprehensive and different sets of data. These show that, in recent years, the rising cost of living (particularly for housing, energy and food) has outpaced the disposable income of many low-income families with children. Although wages and family-related benefits have also risen, many households experienced a decline in real purchasing power, particularly during the period between 2022 and 2024.

In 2023, households with a monthly net income below €1,300 spent around 64% of their expenditure on housing and food, leaving limited resources for education, leisure, social participation and unexpected expenses. This shows that children in low-income families remain at risk of poverty even where parents are employed and/or receive social benefits. In line with this development, the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) increased from 20.4% in 2020 to 21.3% in 2023. Since then, it has remained relatively stable, fluctuating around 21.2% in 2024 and 2025.

These developments are particularly relevant for families relying on social benefits such as the former 'citizen's benefit' *(Bürgergeld)*. Although benefit levels were adjusted in response to inflation, many families continued to struggle to cover basic living costs, especially in regions with high housing prices. Single-parent households are particularly affected. In 2025, 28.9% were at risk of poverty compared to 16.1% of the total population. Their situation provides an important indication of how effectively wages, family benefits and income support protect children from poverty. The effects of the 2026 reform replacing *Bürgergeld* with a new 'basic support' *(Grundsicherung)* scheme for jobseekers should therefore be monitored closely for their impact on the economic situation of vulnerable families.

The Investment Gap

In Germany, there is insufficient funding in key areas affecting child poverty, including in early support for children and income protection for families, as well as child and youth welfare services, early childhood education, primary education and family benefits. While public expenditure has increased, resources have not always kept pace with rising costs, growing demand and increasing social needs. At the same time, many municipalities face financial pressure, putting preventive services at risk. The idea of a Child Basic Income *(Kindergrundsicherung)*, intended to simplify existing benefits and improve access, has not been pursued by the current government, leaving the existing fragmented system in place. This can contribute to non-take-up of benefits and reduce the effectiveness of income support.

Education is another key area. Germany has introduced programmes such as the *Startchancen-Programm* to support schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils. However, educational outcomes remain strongly linked to social background. Children from low-income families are still more likely to experience educational disadvantages. For children to grow up in reasonably good circumstances, with both private and public support, there is a need for better infrastructure and more money for households with children.

The European Child Guarantee

Germany implements the *European Child Guarantee* through the *National Action Plan - New Opportunities for Children in Germany (Neue Chancen für Kinder in Deutschland)*, primarily by strengthening and coordinating existing services. Many key responsibilities lie with municipalities, which are already under considerable financial pressure due to increasing social expenditure and underfunding. As implementation has not been accompanied by a dedicated and substantial additional funding mechanism, there is a risk that the Child Guarantee will rely mainly on existing resources, without the additional investment needed to close gaps in children's access to services and their quality.

Several European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) programmes in Germany contribute indirectly to the objectives of the *European Child Guarantee*, by supporting vulnerable children and young people and parents facing barriers to labour market participation. Examples include the ESF+ programme *ElternChanceN – mit Elternbegleitung Familien stärken* (2022–2028), which supports families in disadvantaged situations; *JUGEND STÄRKEN: Brücken in die Eigenständigkeit* (2022–2027), which assists vulnerable young people and care leavers in their transition to independent adulthood; *Integrationskurs mit Kind Plus: Perspektive durch Qualifizierung* (2023–2027), which enables parents with young children to participate in integration courses; and *AKTIV PLUS* (2022–2028), which supports people facing multiple barriers to labour market participation.

These programmes are co-financed through ESF+ and national public funding. While they provide important support, project-based and time-limited funding is not sufficient to sustainably reduce child and family poverty. In addition, given the substantially reduced budget for ESF+ projects currently being negotiated by the European Union, the future funding of such measures remains highly uncertain.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

A notable example of integrated approaches is the *Mo.Ki – Monheim für Kinder (Monheim for Children)* initiative in the city of Monheim am Rhein. This links child and youth welfare services, health services, early childhood education, schools, family counselling, and support to access social benefits through a coordinated local 'Prevention Chain'. The aim is to reduce the effects of child and family poverty by providing continuous, low threshold support from early childhood onwards. The initiative is funded through municipal resources and has been integrated into the city's regular service structures, supporting its long-term sustainability. However, not all municipalities have the necessary staff or financial resources.

From AGJ's perspective, such initiatives cannot by themselves replace a comprehensive national strategy against child and family poverty. In a 2022 paper, AGJ highlighted the importance of local, integrated, comprehensive strategies to effectively link and coordinate the diverse support provided by public and independent services. This involves a comprehensive and integrated social planning policy approach that is tailored to people's realities and life stages, as well as collaboration between the federal government, the federal states, local authorities and civil society.

Bertelsmann Stiftung

Poverty Data

In 2025, 23.5% of those under 18 in Germany were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Consequences are visible in both housing and participation opportunities. 19% of minors lived in overcrowded dwellings in 2025 and child-specific deprivation affected 11.3% of those under 16 in 2024. Children from low-income families have fewer chances of attending Gymnasium (school leading to university). While there are several state benefits for low-income-families, they are complicated to access and therefore often do not reach eligible children. For example, the participation amount[1] of the Education and Participation Package reached only around 18% of children aged 6-14 and 12% of those aged 15-17 in 2025.

The National Education Report notes that access to early childhood education and care services, as well as their quality, systematically vary according to social background, exacerbating existing inequalities. The participation rate for children under three varies between 20% and 39%, depending on whether their parents have a low or high level of education.

Children are most affected when several structural risks overlap: single parenthood, immigration history, having many siblings, low income, and low parental education. In 2024, 41.8% of children whose parents had low educational attainment were at risk of poverty, compared with 7.2% of children with highly educated parents. Children with an immigration history had a 31.9% risk of poverty, compared with 7.7% among those without. 41% of single parents were at risk of poverty.

Parent surveys show that one third of families at risk of poverty and with children under three have unmet childcare needs, compared to about one fifth of all families.

Child poverty measures are financed mainly through federal social benefits, Länder and municipal services, and European Union (EU) funds. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) supports social inclusion, poverty reduction, young people and civil society capacity, and Germany receives around €6.56 billion for 2021-2027. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can apply where specific federal or Länder calls allow this. However, funding is fragmented across legal systems and budgets.

The Investment Gap

The planned Basic Child Allowance was meant to make support for children faster, simpler and more direct, but it was not adopted. This has left Germany without a new national policy focus on preventing child poverty. The Social State Reform Commission, which is under discussion at the moment, could represent an opportunity in this regard. It proposes a more unified benefit system, combining basic income support, housing benefit and child supplement, with digital access and local contact points. However, reducing child poverty and enhancing opportunities for young people are not explicit aims of this reform. Moreover, due to budget constraints, severe cuts in family support benefits and social benefits are under discussion. This includes the possible abolishment of an additional child allowance (€25 per month) for low-income families, cuts to housing benefit, and a reduction of the number of years that single parents

1 *The participation amount is part of the Education and Participation package in Germany, a social benefit package for children in low-income families that helps to finance school materials, school meals, school trips, and leisure activities with the so-called participation amount. This amount is up to €15 per month and can only be used for specific leisure activities such as sports clubs or music classes.*

can receive the benefit to compensate for missing alimony, as well as the amount of time parents can benefit from parental allowance after the birth of a child.

Germany also lacks comprehensive data on eligible children, take-up, expenditure and administrative costs for key benefits.

The European Child Guarantee

Germany implements the *European Child Guarantee* through a *National Action Plan - New Opportunities for Children in Germany*. This has improved coordination between ministries and governance levels, but implementation has lost political attention and needs renewed urgency. In addition, Germany still lacks an ambitious, measurable and reliably financed strategy, clear targets, binding responsibilities, needs assessments with young people and robust impact monitoring. Moreover, the *National Action Plan* committee of experts, made up of representatives from public administration, government, academia and civil society, and charged with overseeing the implementation of the Child Guarantee and advising the government, did not meet in 2026 and still does not include an academic partner.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Some federal states provide funding for family centres which serve as low threshold, one-stop shops offering a wide range of support services for children and families, particularly those facing difficult circumstances. However, Germany needs a comprehensive strategy against child poverty with less fragmentation, a needs-assessment with young people, better monitoring of all funding streams, and the meaningful participation of children.

Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk e.V. (DKHW) - German Children's Fund

Poverty Data

In Germany, there are various socially and academically accepted approaches to quantifying child poverty. One of these defines child poverty based on the national subsistence level. The subsistence level refers to the financial resources which, in the state's view, are necessary for a life in dignity and, in the case of children, for a suitable upbringing. If individuals or households are unable to meet the legally defined subsistence level from their own resources, they are entitled to social security benefits. In this approach, children are considered poor if they are part of a so-called 'benefit community', i.e. if they live in a household receiving social security benefits.

According to the latest calculations by DKHW, based on official figures provided by the Federal Employment Agency, in 2025 32.5% of those receiving social security benefits were under the age of 18. Put differently, around 1.81 million of the approximately 5.59 million people in households receiving benefits were children and young people.

However, these poverty figures assume that the state-defined subsistence level truly reflects what children need to grow up well. Critics argue that the standard rates are based on a minimum level of provision, but do not necessarily include the resources required to ensure equal opportunities in education, development and participation. For instance, under the current system, children aged 6-13 are allocated only €5 a day for nutrition, and it is doubtful that this amount is enough to ensure a balanced and healthy diet. Another problem is that the extent of child poverty is systematically underestimated (and with it, hidden child poverty) when the subsistence minimum is set too low.

Children living in households receiving benefits are unevenly distributed across the population. Those particularly affected include children of single parents, children from families with three or more children, and children from families with a migrant background. There are also significant regional differences in the uptake of benefits.

The Investment Gap

In Germany, the national subsistence level and the respective standard benefit rates are too low and do not take sufficient account of the actual realities of children's lives and their developmental needs. Consequently, they merely guarantee a minimum standard of living but are insufficient to enable all children to grow up well and to participate in society on an equal footing.

The European Child Guarantee

In Germany, the *European Child Guarantee* is being implemented through the *National Action Plan - New Opportunities for Children in Germany*. The Action Plan asks: What do children need to have equal opportunities for development and participation, regardless of their social background? It brings together existing and planned measures in the areas of early childhood care, education, nutrition, healthcare, and adequate housing, and identifies the need for action in each area. However, the plan does not currently include associated funding mechanisms for its implementation. Allocating financial resources could therefore enhance its impact and meet a demand from the European Parliament calling for a separate budget for European Union (EU) countries to implement the Child Guarantee.

During the first phase of the *National Action Plan*, municipal prevention of child poverty was a key focus. A white paper defined poverty prevention as a national task — a shared responsibility of the federal government, the federal states, and municipalities. According to DKHW however, a uniform, financially sustainable approach will only be possible once municipal 'Prevention Chains' (*Präventionsketten*) are legally enshrined in Germany. These are integrated municipal strategies aimed at promoting children's health and social participation and at preventing the negative consequences of child poverty.

According to the first progress report, the implementation of the *European Child Guarantee* is currently lacking quantifiable, timebound and verifiable targets set by policymakers, both for reducing poverty and exclusion and for improving access to key services for affected children and young people. In addition, continued robust monitoring of data on poverty is essential for further implementation.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Municipal Prevention Chains provide cross-sector networks that bring together different services to support children and families.

Eight federal states have programmes aimed at establishing Prevention Chains, but these do not reach all municipalities and local communities. DKHW is currently supporting eight rural municipalities to help them establish such networks. A key problem is that Prevention Chains are not enshrined in law and are therefore not a mandatory government responsibility.



National Coalition Germany - Network for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Poverty Data

23.5% of children in Germany are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This figure has remained relatively stable over recent years, indicating that high levels of child poverty have become structurally entrenched.

Poll results show that high inflation and the rising cost of living have had a huge impact on low-income families. In a poll from winter 2024/25, 25% of low-income parents with children under 18 reported that, for financial reasons, they often or fairly often went without purchasing healthy food. In the summer of 2025, 23% of low-income parents reported that their children experienced emotional stress because of their family's financial situation.

The groups most at risk of poverty and social exclusion are single-parent households (44.3% in 2025); children with parents with little formal education (62% in 2025); families with three or more children (31.7% in 2025) and children with at least one parent born outside the European Union (EU) (41.8% in 2022).

The Investment Gap

As part of its fiscal consolidation efforts, the German federal government (as of July 2026) is planning a number of cuts to social benefits that are likely to place an additional burden on low-income families. These include the abolition of the €25 per month child supplement (*Kindersofortzuschlag*) for low-income families, as well as restrictions on advance child maintenance payments (*Unterhaltsvorschuss*) for single parents. Further cuts in the social sector, particularly in child and youth welfare services (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*), are also under discussion.

The European Child Guarantee

In Germany, the *European Child Guarantee* is being implemented through the *National Action Plan - New Opportunities for Children in Germany*, supported by a national coordinator, a multi-stakeholder committee, monitoring processes, and child participation. However, civil society organisations argue that implementation lacks ambition, measurable targets and a comprehensive strategy to reduce child poverty.

One specific measure that could significantly strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee would be the adoption of binding, timebound and quantifiable national targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion by 2030, combined with regular evaluation and accountability mechanisms. This would turn monitoring into a genuine driver of policy change.

Germany has no single ring-fenced budget for implementing the *European Child Guarantee*. Relevant measures are financed across federal, Länder and, in particular, municipal budgets. EU funds provide only complementary programme funding. More than 80% of child and youth welfare expenditure is borne by municipalities. Net expenditure increased from €34.93 billion in 2014 to €74.25 billion in 2024, while municipalities recorded a financing deficit of €31.9 billion in 2025. Municipal associations forecast annual deficits of around €30 billion until 2029, and warn that many municipalities are reaching the limits of their financial capacity. Consequently, substantial cuts are already being planned or implemented in many municipalities.

Municipalities are legally required to fund certain statutory services, regardless of their financial situation, such as alternative care when a child is at risk. Other services, such as family centres, are not subject to the same legal obligation and are therefore often considered 'voluntary services' that municipalities can reduce or discontinue. While municipalities have traditionally been reluctant to cut these services completely (for political reasons) growing budgetary pressures may now lead to reductions or closures. As statutory entitlements must continue to be met, budget consolidation is likely to place greater pressure on preventive, voluntary and low threshold services, including youth work infrastructure, staffing and project funding.

Independent child and youth welfare organisations may continue to receive municipal grants or enter into service, fee and quality agreements. However, it is currently unclear whether the planned budget cuts will affect their ability to access or maintain this funding.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

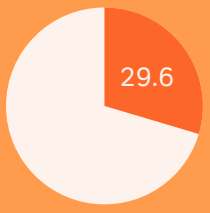
Strong examples of integrated approaches to support for children and families are Early Childhood Intervention Services (*Frühe Hilfen*) and municipal 'Prevention Chains' (*Präventionsketten*). These initiatives bring together healthcare providers, youth welfare services, childcare centres, schools, employment services, and civil society organisations to support children and families from pregnancy through key life transitions. While income support is mainly provided through national social security systems, these local networks help families access benefits and services in a coordinated and proactive way, with a low threshold approach.

They are funded through a mix of federal, state, and municipal resources, with *Frühe Hilfen* receiving long-term support from the Federal Foundation for Early Childhood Intervention Services. Their sustainability depends on permanent local coordination structures, cross-sector partnerships, and integration into regular municipal planning rather than short-term pilot projects.



Country Profile 2026

Greece



Child Poverty
29.6% (2025)
▲ +1.7 percentage points
compared to 2024

ALMA - Panhellenic Association of Adapted Activities

Poverty Data

Based on the available evidence from Greece, the groups most affected by child poverty include children growing up in single-parent families, those in large families (with three or more children), households with unemployed or underemployed parents, as well as children from migrant or refugee backgrounds and Roma children.

Poverty and social exclusion also disproportionately affect families raising children with disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders, as families face substantial additional costs related to therapeutic interventions, support services, and education, and often face barriers in accessing appropriate services and social support. These factors increase the risk of financial hardship and social exclusion.

In Greece, nearly half of working-age people with severe disabilities are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, reflecting the challenges faced by these families. Beyond lower incomes, they incur substantial costs for therapy, special education, transportation, and support services, limiting children's access to timely interventions, education, and social participation.

The Investment Gap

Special education, early intervention, and rehabilitation services for children with disabilities remain among the most underfunded sectors in Greece, contributing to child poverty. During the economic crisis, disability benefits were reduced by approximately 50% and have not returned to pre-crisis levels, increasing the financial burden on families facing high costs for therapy, education, and specialised support.

The system of services continues to rely primarily on a medical model of disability, emphasising diagnosis and certification rather than tailored, multidisciplinary, and community-based interventions consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Although innovative approaches such as social and cultural prescribing have been introduced to promote well-being and inclusion, their implementation remains limited due to poor dissemination, inadequate professional guidance, and unclear referral pathways. Consequently, effective interventions that could improve participation and quality of life remain under-utilised.

Although disability benefits and publicly funded services exist, important structural weaknesses remain. Greece lacks a standardised national protocol to guide evidence-based service selection, coordination, and monitoring according to individual needs. Overlapping services and the absence of systematic quality and cost-effectiveness evaluations raise concerns about inefficient resource allocation. Another significant gap is the lack of structured psychoeducation programmes for parents. Early parental psychoeducation can strengthen parenting skills, improve the management of challenging behaviours, enhance family well-being, and reduce the need for more intensive and costly interventions in the future.

In Greece, child poverty policies are funded through the national budget and European instruments, including the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). These support early childhood education, school meals, child protection, social inclusion, and services for children with disabilities.

However, funding remains fragmented and heavily dependent on short-term European programmes, creating uncertainty about service continuity and limiting long-term planning. In addition, cash benefits and voucher-based schemes lack systematic monitoring, quality assurance and outcome evaluation, reducing transparency and accountability.

Although investment in child welfare has increased, it remains insufficient to meet growing needs. A sustainable national strategy based on stable public funding, evidence-informed policy-making, systematic evaluation, and strong accountability is essential to ensure equitable access to high-quality services and reduce child poverty effectively.

The European Child Guarantee

The *European Child Guarantee* in Greece aims to ensure equitable access to healthcare, education, early childhood services, nutrition and housing for vulnerable children, particularly those with disabilities, children in alternative care, Roma children, and refugee and migrant children. Although the *National Action Plan* promotes inclusive education, deinstitutionalisation and community-based services, major barriers remain. Limited public capacity, geographic disparities, long waiting lists, and high out-of-pocket costs restrict timely access to diagnosis, early intervention, and therapeutic support.

Establishing a universally accessible, publicly funded, national early intervention system would strengthen the Child Guarantee by providing free, evidence-based assessment and intervention regardless of socio-economic status or residence. Sustainable public funding, standardised protocols, quality assurance, and equitable service distribution are essential to ensure equal opportunities for all children.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

As part of efforts to strengthen mental health services through the Regional Operational Programmes, new community-based mental health facilities are being developed, including Mobile Mental Health Units, Day Centres, and Supported Living Apartments. These services aim to improve access to mental health support, particularly for individuals living in remote or under-served areas and for vulnerable populations. By expanding community-based care, they support the transition from institutional to community care, promote deinstitutionalisation, and foster social inclusion and independent living for people with mental health conditions and disabilities.

Network for Children's Rights

Poverty Data

According to Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) data on the risk of poverty or social exclusion, based on the 2025 *European Union Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)*, 29.6% of children aged 0–17 in Greece were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024, an increase of +1.7 percentage points from 27.9% in 2023. This data does not include families who move or do not have a stable residence (e.g. Roma families, refugees, asylum seekers), so the actual percentages should be higher.

Based on a 2024 ELSTAT report, and other data, 10.4% of people living in households with at least one child under the age of 15 could not afford to provide at least one meal with meat, chicken or fish daily, while 24.6% could not afford their children's regular participation in leisure activities and 26% could not afford a one week vacation. The corresponding statistics for families with three or more children over 15 years of age are: 11.3%, 20.8% and 30.9%.

In Greece, based on the most recent UNICEF survey from 2022, child poverty and material deprivation disproportionately affect children living in large families, children in single-parent households, children with migrant or refugee backgrounds, Roma children, children living in rural areas, and children with disabilities. These groups of children experience significantly higher risks of income poverty, material deprivation and social exclusion than the general child population.

The Investment Gap

Evidence shows a clear chronic underinvestment in measures to address child poverty by the Greek state, and a reliance on temporary funding. A key concern in Greece is the continued underfunding of social protection for families and children, especially for the most vulnerable. Moreover, Greece still lacks a child budgeting system that tracks whether sufficient resources reach children, particularly the most disadvantaged.

In Greece, measures to address child poverty are financed through the *European Child Guarantee* and a combination of national public funding and EU funds, particularly the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Recovery and Resilience Facility under the *NextGenerationEU* programme and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). These funds are managed centrally by the Greek state, through the competent Ministries and Managing Authorities, yet they remain insufficient and do not cover actual needs. There is no dedicated mechanism allowing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to access Child Guarantee funding directly. Instead, NGOs may participate only as implementing partners.

The European Child Guarantee

Greece is implementing the *European Child Guarantee* through a *National Action Plan*, with the National Centre for Social Solidarity (E.K.K.A.) as the National Child Guarantee Coordinator. The *Action Plan* addresses the multiple dimensions of child poverty through actions across education, health, nutrition, housing and child protection, with an emphasis on vulnerable groups. However, its long-term success depends on effective implementation, sustained funding and improved coordination across sectors.

In order to strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee, there is a need to collect and disaggregate data on child protection and violations

of children's rights, to ensure meaningful child participation, monitor the effectiveness of actions taken and identify children and families in need.

The Smile of the Child

Poverty Data

The latest data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), collected as part of the *European Union Sta tistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)* survey, shows that 29.6% of children in Greece aged 0-17 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025. This percentage is higher than that of the total population (27.5%), indicating that almost one in three children in Greece is growing up in conditions of economic insecurity.

Financial difficulties are often linked to limited access to psycho-social and mental health support, reduced participation in extra-curricular activities, housing insecurity and barriers to high-quality early childhood education. Financial insecurity often affects children's emotional well-being and their sense of stability at home and at school, and is associated with increased anxiety, adjustment difficulties and limited access to appropriate support services.

Child poverty disproportionately affects certain groups, including children growing up in single-parent or large families, refugee and migrant children, Roma children, and children with disabilities, who often face multiple barriers when trying to access essential services and opportunities.

The children and families most affected include single-parent families who are particularly vulnerable as they often have to meet increased financial and caregiving demands with limited resources, large families, and households where parents are unemployed, underemployed or in insecure and low-paid work. Also, children who experience multiple forms of disadvantage - poverty along with disability, displacement or social exclusion - often encounter additional barriers in accessing services (education, healthcare, housing, social protection). Children living in remote rural or island areas with limited access to high-quality public services, specialised care and mental health facilities face particular disadvantage.

The interaction of several factors creates conditions of multiple vulnerabilities for many children and their families. There is a need for comprehensive public policies which combine income support with equitable access to high-quality education, healthcare, welfare, and child protection services.

The Investment Gap

Despite recent efforts, families in many parts of Greece continue to face difficulties in accessing affordable childcare, specialised mental health support and community-based services for children. One of the most pressing issues is access to high-quality early childhood education and care services, especially for children under three, children with disabilities, those living in remote areas and those growing up in poverty or experiencing social exclusion. The limited availability of facilities and services poses particular challenges for families facing financial hardship. The housing crisis and rising cost of living are placing a considerable strain on families, reducing the resources they can allocate to their children's education, health, and development.

The European Child Guarantee

In Greece, the *European Child Guarantee* is being implemented via the *National Action Plan* which includes policies that link education, healthcare, child protection and psycho-social support.

Important steps have been taken recently to improve children's access to essential services. However, there are persistent challenges in coordinating these services, significant disparities between different regions of the country, and significant shortages of specialised mental health services and personnel.

The Child Guarantee could be substantially strengthened by the establishment of permanent, community-based structures and multidisciplinary teams that link health, mental health, education and social protection services.

Funding is available for municipalities, which can then collaborate, if they wish, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as co-beneficiaries. NGOs are not eligible to apply on their own, so the funding scheme is neither sufficient nor supportive.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

One of the strongest examples of an integrated approach in Greece is the work of Smile, a nationwide child protection organisation that provides coordinated, holistic and multidisciplinary support to children, families and professionals. It combines child protection, healthcare, education on mental health and well-being, social welfare, psychological support and crisis management plans under one operational framework, though its 10 Action Centres, operating 24/7.

Through close cooperation with public authorities, schools, hospitals, prosecutors, police and social services, and with its own specialised services (including the European helplines, mobile medical units, psychoeducation in schools and family support services) it ensures that children at risk receive timely and comprehensive support. Families dealing with poverty, violence or social exclusion can receive emergency assistance, social support, counselling, healthcare services, psychoeducational support and referrals to relevant benefits and services. This holistic model helps address the multiple and interconnected needs of children, carers and the community. Smile is funded and supported mainly by the private sector, but also by public sector entities.

ThinkOnception Education Hub

Poverty Data

Data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), based on the 2025 *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)* survey, shows that 29.6% of children aged 0–17 in Greece were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, up from 27.9% in 2024. The consequence is visible in children's living conditions: 42.9% lived in overcrowded households in 2025, rising to 56.3% among children in households below the poverty threshold. These figures show that child poverty is not only a lack of income, but also affects whether children have adequate space, stability and conditions for learning and development.

The highest risk of child poverty is among single-adult households with dependent children, 36.1% compared to 22.1% for households with two adults and one dependent child. The rate is also higher among people living in rented housing (30.6%). Children whose families already face barriers in reaching services are especially exposed, including Roma children, refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities and children living in remote areas. Greece's *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee* identifies geographical distance, administrative obstacles, uneven availability of services, lack of information and accessibility constraints among the barriers affecting these groups.

The Investment Gap

There is structural underinvestment in family and child support, particularly in services. Eurostat reports that Greece spent €264 per inhabitant on family benefits in 2022, compared with an EU average of €830, one of the lowest levels in the Union. In 2023, 57.6% of family/child benefits were means-tested. This points to a system heavily reliant on targeted financial assistance, while affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC), inclusive learning support, children's mental health services and local referral capacity remain unevenly available.

The European Child Guarantee

In Greece, the *European Child Guarantee* is being implemented through measures covering early childhood care, education, health, nutrition and housing, coordinated by the National Centre for Social Solidarity and increasingly monitored through a dedicated information system. However, the 2026 progress report shows that Greece still cannot consistently identify children in need as specific target group, compare the number who are eligible with the number actually accessing services, or adequately map local barriers to access. Assigning a Child Guarantee access coordinator in every municipality, linked to community centres, schools, ECEC providers and local civil society organisations, would improve its effectiveness.

Measures linked to the *European Child Guarantee* in Greece are financed mainly through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), notably the thirteen regional programmes and the *Human Resources and Social Cohesion Programme* - at least 8% of ESF+ resources are earmarked for its implementation. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Recovery and Resilience Facility and national resources provide complementary financing. For ThinkOnception, the most relevant measures are those supporting pre-school participation and creative activities, remedial teaching, educational inclusion and socio-emotional support in schools. These are areas directly related to the education work of ThinkOnception. Non-governmental organisations can be eligible, but this depends on the specific call.

Greece's *2nd Biennial Progress Report on the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee (March 2026)* notes that demand for social protection services is rising faster than available resources, particularly in non-urban and remote areas. For ThinkOnception, funding therefore cannot yet be considered sufficient to secure equal access everywhere.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

A national example of an integrated model is the network of municipal Community Centres, which help residents access benefits and connect them with employment, health, education and social services. The model continues under ESF+ financing through 13 regional programmes for 2021–2027. It is a useful foundation but its effectiveness depends on municipal staffing and on working links with ECEC, schools and specialist services. Sustainability requires permanent core funding, common child-focused referral procedures and outcome monitoring, rather than dependence on successive funding cycles.





Country Profile 2026

Hungary



Child Poverty
23% (2025)
▲ +0.1 percentage points
compared to 2024

Hungarian Child Rights NGO Coalition

Poverty Data

In Hungary, one in five children live in poverty or social exclusion. The proportion of children aged 0–17 living below the poverty threshold has decreased over the past 15 years. However, the proportion of children living in severe poverty has increased significantly.

The rate of child poverty was significantly underestimated by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office between 2019 and 2024. In September 2025, the Statistical Office revised its data, revealing that the child poverty rate for 2020 had been 20.9%, effectively more than double the previous figures.

The number of children living in severe deprivation is steadily increasing. In 2023, it reached 13.1% (224,000 children). Family allowance (€33-47) and benefits for parents raising children (€80) remained unchanged for 17 years and there is a lack of effective cash support based on children's actual needs. In parallel, the price of basic food items increased by 83.45% between 2021 and 2025. It is also worth noting the phasing out of the normative housing maintenance allowance in 2015, which affected the most disadvantaged, low-income households, and those with several children living in deep poverty.

In Roma settlements, family allowance is often lost due to school non-attendance. Families can even be fined when their children do not attend school, and children may also miss free school meals. According to a 2017 report by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, at least 33% of the more than 23,000 children taken into state care are separated from their families primarily due to poverty and poor housing conditions, violating Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration.

Children of Roma origin are highly over-represented among those who are removed from heir families due to deep poverty. Institutional prejudice continues - in some child protection facilities up to 80% of the children are of Roma origin.

The Investment Gap

Instead of addressing the structural causes behind the problems, institutions mainly respond to crises after they have already developed. All sectors serving children and families in need are underfunded. Inter-agency case coordination is effectively not funded. Prevention, community-based support, cross-sector cooperation, and long-term family strengthening programmes remain inadequate.

Protecting children living in extreme poverty requires a much stronger child welfare system, adequate professional and financial support for child protection workers, and meaningful access to benefits and support. This requires at least 3% of GDP allocated to child protection services. Hungary also needs a child rights-based budget and a financing model that rewards municipalities for keeping high-quality child welfare services in place, rather than creating incentives for children to be placed into state care.

The European Child Guarantee

The *Child Guarantee National Action Plan 2030* was adopted too late and gives insufficient attention to specific goals and concrete objectives, despite the urgent needs in child welfare and child protection. Compulsory kindergarten from age three has not helped children catch up before school. Instead, it has often contributed to earlier segregation, while professionals still lack the skills to support children and families early enough. Health services also

remain hard to access for many children in deprived areas because of shortages of general practitioners and health visitors.

There is no information on the availability and use of any Child Guarantee funding – only non-governmental organisations considered 'loyal' to the former government received funding, with no transparency on their use of it.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Gatherings organised by the civil society organisation Bagázs bring together relevant professionals across sectors to provide coordination and create a forum where professionals can share their specific experience. However, this is an emerging practice and not a fully realised model that links income support with service provision.

Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation

Poverty Data

A reliable measurement of poverty is itself a major concern in Hungary. Following serious concerns about *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)* data, a 2025 revision raised the 2020 child at-risk-of-poverty rate from 9.5% to 20.9%. However, researchers still consider the revised series unsuitable for robust analysis. Available evidence shows that children in disadvantaged regions, segregated communities and in families with low educational attainment face the greatest risks of poverty.

Inequalities begin at birth: low birth weight affects 11.8% of babies born to mothers with no more than eight years of schooling, compared with 3.6% among babies born to mothers with tertiary education. These disadvantages are reinforced by a family support system that disproportionately benefits higher income groups (through tax and contribution-based measures) while many means-tested child protection and family benefits remain tied to the HUF28,500 social reference base, a fixed benchmark formerly linked to the minimum old-age pension and used to determine eligibility for several means-tested social and child protection benefits. As a result, both benefit values and eligibility thresholds have steadily eroded in real terms.

The children and families most affected are those living on low incomes, Roma and single-parent households, and families living in regions facing persistent socio-economic disadvantage. These groups face the greatest barriers to adequate income support, quality services and inclusive education, while child welfare services often lack the capacity to respond to their complex needs.

Pre-school enrolment has increased by more than 1,300 children, with 93% of children aged 3-5 attending, a rate that has remained unchanged in recent years and is still below the EU target of 96% by 2030. While capacity expanded by more than 2,500 places in 2024/2025, and there are only 83 children per 100 places nationally, local shortages persist, and 30% of children still cannot access pre-school in their own municipality.

A 2025 study found that primary schools have disappeared from already disadvantaged peripheral areas, where closures may further reinforce social and geographic inequalities. At the same time, local schools can contribute to the segregation of Roma children. However, closing segregated schools does not, in itself, lead to desegregation, adequate transport and integration support are also necessary.

The European Child Guarantee

Hungary implements the *European Child Guarantee* through its *National Action Plan 2030*, targeting children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including Roma children, children experiencing homelessness, children with disabilities or mental health problems, children in alternative care, and vulnerable children from third countries. The Ministry of Interior was designated to coordinate implementation, but this responsibility may be reassigned following the 2026 elections, as the ministerial structure is reorganised. The prompt publication of the overdue monitoring report, followed by regular, transparent and independent progress reviews, would strengthen the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

The *Family Assistant Pilot Programme (Családasszisztensi mintaprogram)* was launched in October 2025 across 57 health visitor (*védőnő*) districts in 27 municipalities in north-eastern Hungary to support disadvantaged families expecting or raising children. Publicly employed family assistants, many from disadvantaged Roma communities, support health visitors in improving access to maternal and child healthcare, prevention and health education, while also creating local employment opportunities.

Under the *Green Heating* scheme, 1,430 households in 130 of Hungary's poorest villages receive HUF120,000 in pre-paid electricity, with priority given to families with young children or with at least three children. This includes renewable energy from 20 social solar power plants operated by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, and replacing polluting stoves (sometimes fuelled by waste) with reusable electric heaters. The programme is financed through HUF12.9 billion in EU and national funding.

Sure Start Children's Houses (Biztos Kezdet Gyerekházak) provide services for parents and children not yet attending kindergarten, primarily those aged 0-3 (since kindergarten attendance became compulsory, older pre-school children are no longer covered). They work closely with family and child welfare services, health visitors, kindergartens, other local service providers and, where necessary, members of the child protection referral system.

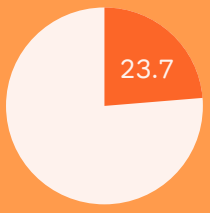
Hungary's *Catching-up Settlements Programme (FETE)* expanded from 31 municipalities and eight implementing organisations in 2019 to 300 locations and 28 partner organisations in 2025, making it the country's largest integrated development programme for highly disadvantaged communities. Co-financed by the EU, it is implemented primarily by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, together with major church-based charities - including Reformed, Baptist, Catholic and Ecumenical organisations - and some foundations.





Country Profile 2026

Ireland



Child Poverty
23.7% (2025)
▲ +2.8 percentage points
compared to 2024

Children's Rights Alliance

Poverty Data

The issue of child poverty is pervasive in Ireland, with children shouldering the worst burden when we examine this issue by age group.
The official data on poverty in Ireland is captured by the Central Statistics Office through the annual *Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC)*. The most recent data from *SILC* was published in March 2026. It showed that, in 2025, children were over-represented in all three measures of poverty. While children make up 22.8% of the entire population, they comprised 30.7% of those deemed to be at risk of poverty; 29.7% of those experiencing enforced deprivation (i.e. unable to afford two or more items on a list of 11 essentials) and 37.8% of those experiencing consistent poverty.

When examined by age group, the rates of all three measures of poverty experienced by children are higher than in the general population and the highest across all age groups.

In 2025, almost one in five children in Ireland were experiencing enforced deprivation. This meant that there were 239,146 children living in a household unable to afford some of the most basic necessary items.

One in six children were living in households with incomes that were 60% below the median in Ireland. This amounted to 206,202 children in households below the poverty line. One in twelve children were living in the worst form of poverty in 2025, with 95,170 children experiencing consistent poverty.

Over the last five years, the trend has remained the same, with children having the highest rates of poverty compared to all other age groups.

The housing crisis in Ireland is having a profound and disproportionate impact on children and families experiencing poverty. The official poverty statistics show that the rates of income poverty are much higher for children, one-parent families and those renting from local authorities and with other forms of social housing support. The data on individuals in Emergency Homeless Accommodation shows that children and families are becoming trapped for years in unsuitable living conditions, affecting their ability to access nutritious food, their development and their participation in education.[1]

Finally, research from the Economic and Social Research Institute shows there are strong links between childhood poverty and the risk of deprivation in adulthood. The analysis highlights that the proportion of adults experiencing deprivation was 35 percentage points higher for those who had very bad financial circumstances during childhood, versus those reporting very good financial circumstances when they were younger. Factors such as educational attainment, in particular, but also presence of disability or ill health and family structure were found to explain some of these disparities in deprivation levels. It is therefore unsurprising that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has found that it will take Ireland four to five generations to break the cycle of poverty and bring those on lower incomes on par with the median income.

1 *Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Homeless Quarterly Progress Reports (various years). Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Monthly Homeless Reports (various years).*

According to *SILC* 2025, higher levels of poverty are recorded in households consisting of one adult with children under 18 years of age, in contrast to the overall rates and those experienced by other households with children. Almost half of all households containing one-parent families are living in deprivation (48.7%). This is over three times higher than the deprivation rate for the population as a whole (15.1%) and four times higher than households of two adults with children (12.3%).

However, it is perhaps the children that are not captured in the *SILC* data that are of most concern for the Children's Rights Alliance. This includes Traveller and Roma children and children and families living in International Protection Accommodation. The Children's Rights Alliance knows, from its members, that these children can be exposed to high levels of poverty, discrimination and exclusion.

The Investment Gap

Additional targeted income support for children living in Direct Provision:

In 2021, the Irish Government committed to the introduction of a monthly International Protection Child Payment that would be provided at the same rate as Child Benefit.[2] The government made provision for this payment in two budgets, yet it has still not been implemented. Children in Direct Provision currently receive a Daily Expense Allowance (DEA) weekly payment of just €29.80. The DEA rate has remained unchanged since 2019, despite increases being applied to the Child Support Payment paid to social welfare recipients. The failure of the government to increase the DEA payment is extremely disappointing and it must be increased as a matter of urgency.

Increased support for one parent families:

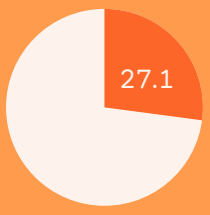
There is a need for the government to increase the amount of money lone parents can earn each week while still maintaining their full social welfare payment. The earnings disregard, that is, the amount lone parents can earn from employment before it impacts their social welfare payment, for the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transitional Payments was last increased by €15 (a weekly rate of €165) in 2020. However, since then, the National Minimum Wage has increased by €4.05 to €14.15. This means that while the disregard equated to 16.3 hours of the National Minimum Wage in 2020, it now only equals 11.7 hours. This erosion in value means a lone parent working full-time on the National Minimum Wage would qualify for €19 less per week in the One Parent Family Payment personal rate in 2025 compared to 2020. Increasing the earnings disregard in line with the National Minimum Wage would contribute to the commitment in *Investing in Children* to remove disincentives to work for lone parents, and help ensure that targeted support avoids stigmatisation and poverty traps.

2 *Government of Ireland, A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service (Government Publications 2021).*



Country Profile 2026

Italy



Child Poverty
27.1% (2025)
No change compared to 2024

Agevolando APS

Poverty Data

According to Italy's national institute of statistics, ISTAT, around one in four children in Italy is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. More than 1.2 million children live in households experiencing absolute poverty. According to UNICEF Italy's 2025 child poverty monitoring report, almost 748,000 households with children (12.4% of all households with minors) live in absolute poverty. Furthermore, a 2025 report by CISMAI, Terre des Hommes and the Italian Independent Authority for Children and Adolescents identifies 113,892 children (30.4% of those supported by social services) as victims of mistreatment, highlighting the strong relationship between poverty, vulnerability and child protection.

Children living outside their family of origin and care leavers are among the groups most exposed to the long-term consequences of child poverty. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, around 41,683 children were in out-of-home care in 2022 and approximately 3,000-3,600 young people leave care each year without family support. Evidence from Agevolando and recent research shows they are at significantly higher risk of early school leaving, insecure housing, precarious employment, poor mental health and being classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET). Only 1% of care leavers obtain a university degree. Recent evidence also confirms that inadequate support after leaving care contributes to the persistence of poverty across generations. Earlier studies reach similar conclusions.

Ensuring continuity of care and support for young people leaving care beyond the age of 18 not only helps care leavers in practical ways, it also provides them with emotional and psychological support and helps break the inter-generational transmission of disadvantage. Ultimately, it also provides a sense of security and stability for society as a whole, by ensuring that young people are given the support and opportunities they need to build stable and independent lives.

The Investment Gap

In 2018, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies launched the Care Leaver Project *(Sperimentazione Care Leavers)*, supporting young people leaving care up to age 21 through individual mentoring and financial assistance. In Decision No. 95/2024/G, the Italian Court of Auditors concluded that the programme had produced positive outcomes and recommended making it a permanent national measure. Despite this recommendation, funding for the scheme ended in December 2025.

Italy does not invest sufficiently in affordable housing, supported independent living and services for care leavers. Access to support for care leavers varies considerably between regions and often depends on temporary projects or private foundations. In addition, immigration legislation currently under consideration in Parliament *(DDL Immigrazione)* reduces the maximum age at which unaccompanied migrant care leavers can access support, from 21 to 19, limiting their transition opportunities and their access to social and education support.

Eligible care leavers can receive support through a personal mentor *(Tutor per l'Autonomia)*, financial support (the *Assegno di Inclusione*) or an independence grant. However, eligible income thresholds and benefit levels are often insufficient for young people without family support who are studying or entering employment. If they work, they lose most of the benefits they would be entitled to receive. The system fails to take into account the

full burden of the costs that care leavers have to bear without family support, including in cases of emergency.

Third sector organisations can access European, national and regional funding. However, complex administrative procedures, fragmented funding and limited long-term sustainability reduce their capacity to provide continuous support. More predictable funding is needed to ensure stable services for children as they prepare to leave care and for care leavers in the first phase of their transition to adulthood.

The European Child Guarantee

Italy has adopted a *National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee*, focusing on early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing. However, leaving care, as a transition faced by all young people in care, is still not explicitly recognised as a crucial stage. As a result, many young people from the age of 16-17 and approaching adulthood experience uncertainty and limited opportunities, despite facing some of the highest risks of poverty and social exclusion. Expanding the Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee to explicitly include care leavers (18-21) would provide them with support and opportunities in their transition from adolescence to adulthood, enabling them to reach their potential, thus ensuring that the progress achieved during their time in care is not lost when they reach adulthood.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

The *Care Leaver Project (Sperimentazione Care Leavers)* - twice renewed through sustained advocacy by Agevolando and the Care Leavers Network - has been a good example of an integrated approach combining financial support, personalised mentoring, social services, housing, education and employment pathways. It has been built together with the third sector and Agevolando, bringing the voices of care leavers into the monitoring system. National evaluations, including by the Italian Court of Auditors, have demonstrated its effectiveness in supporting young people's transition to independent adulthood. Making this a permanent model would reduce regional inequalities and strengthen social protection for care leavers.

Rosalba Mirci – Individual Member

Poverty Data

In 2024, almost 1.3 million children in Italy lived in absolute poverty (13.8% of residents under 18), the highest incidence since 2014. The consequences are visible: among those under 16, 11.7% experienced child-specific material and social deprivation and 4.9% experienced food insecurity, rising to 8.9% in Southern Italy. Poverty was also more intense in households with children than among poor households overall, increasing risks to health, learning and future opportunities.

The children most affected are those living in Southern Italy and the Islands (where 43.6% of children under 16 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024); children with foreign citizenship (43.6%); those in single-parent households with at least two children (53.3%); and children whose parents have no more than lower-secondary education (51.8%).

Absolute poverty rises with family size, affecting 20.7% of couples with three or more children.

The Investment Gap

Early childhood education and care for children under three remains insufficient, reflecting geographically uneven investment and services. In 2023-24, Italy had about 378,500 authorised places, covering 31.6% of children, below the target of 33% to be achieved by 2027. Coverage averaged only 19% in the South and 19.5% in the Islands. These gaps limit disadvantaged children's early learning and parents' employment, particularly mothers', reinforcing geographic and inter-generational inequalities.

The European Child Guarantee

Italy adopted its *National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee* in 2022, covering early childhood education and care, education and school meals, healthcare, nutrition, housing and measures against poverty. Implementation draws on national measures and European Union (EU) programmes, but access to services remains uneven because provision and administrative capacity differ widely between regions.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee would be strengthened by achieving the 33% target for childcare coverage in every local area by 2027, backed by permanent funding, disaggregated monitoring and systematic participation by civil society organisations and children.

In Italy, measures to address child poverty are financed through national resources —including the Single and Universal Allowance, the National Social Policy Fund and the Fund to Combat Child Educational Poverty— and EU funding, particularly the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Italy's Child Guarantee *Action Plan* earmarks approximately €710.9 million for measures to address child poverty, amounting to at least 5% of the country's ESF+ allocation. However, current funding and implementation arrangements have not yet ensured equitable access to essential services across all regions and local areas.

Civil society organisations may apply for ESF+ funds directly or participate as partners or providers, but complex procedures and short cycles limit access and continuity.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Italy lacks a consolidated 'gold standard' integrated approach that links adequate income support with services for children and families. However, the *P.I.P.P.I.* programme is one of Italy's strongest integrated service models for vulnerable families.

Led by the Ministry of Labour and the University of Padua, through local districts, it coordinates social services, schools, health professionals, educators and community networks around a family plan. Income benefits are managed separately but may be coordinated as part of the family plans. Its sustainability is helped by the fact that preventing family separation (implemented through the *P.I.P.P.I.* model) is considered part of Italy's essential social provision. The programme is sustained by dedicated resources from the National Social Policy Fund and from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, and by workforce training and systematic monitoring of implementation and outcomes.

Fondazione S.O.S. Il Telefono Azzurro ETS

Poverty Data

In 2024, more than 1.28 million children (13.8%) lived in absolute poverty in Italy, the highest level since 2014. Poverty ranged from 12.1% in Central Italy to 16.4% in Southern Italy, and was highest among children aged 7-13 (14.9%).

Access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) remains insufficient, with 59.5% of services reporting waiting lists in 2023-24.

Education and socio-economic conditions are also associated with inequalities in digital skills: 86.1% of adults aged 25-54 with tertiary education have at least basic digital skills, compared with 33.5% of those with lower education levels.

In 2024, 12.3% of households with children (almost 734,000) lived in absolute poverty. The risk increased for couples with three or more children (20.7%), single-parent households (14.4%), households with complex living arrangements (23.9%), unemployed households (23.2%) and households composed only of foreign nationals (40.5%, compared with 8% among Italian households). ECEC shortages remain particularly severe in Southern Italy and the Islands.

The Investment Gap

Italy established the Fund to Combat Child Educational Poverty in 2016, managed by the social enterprise Con i Bambini. Public financing for the fund has progressively declined year on year - from €100 million (2016-2018), to €55 million (2019-2022), to €45 million (2023), to €25 million (2024), and €3 million (2025-2027) - despite having financed around €500 million in projects benefiting approximately 650,000 children and young people.

The European Child Guarantee

Within the strategic framework of its *National Action Plan* for the Child Guarantee Italy continues to implement the *Child Guarantee* through a broad set of national policies and investments aimed at improving children's access to essential services, with particular attention to those at risk of poverty, social exclusion, and vulnerability. These include the *National Programme for Inclusion and the Fight Against Poverty 2021-2027*, the *National Plan for Social Services and Interventions 2024-2026*, and expanded local educational services. In 2025, Italy also adopted three new strategic frameworks: the *National Family Plan 2025-2027,* the *6th National Action Plan for the Rights of Children and Adolescents 2025-2027*, and the *National Plan for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation 2025-2027*.

Despite this comprehensive policy framework, important challenges remain. There is a need for stronger coordination, monitoring, and data collection, together with a multidimensional approach to child poverty.

Italy finances child poverty measures primarily through its *National Programme for Inclusion and the Fight Against Poverty 2021-2027*, with €4 billion, co-financed by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). €734 million are allocated to the Child Guarantee, including €494 million for children's access to services and €240 million for the social inclusion of children in poverty. Non-governmental organisations are eligible to apply, with €2.3 million specifically allocated to programmes which are co-designed with third sector organisations.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

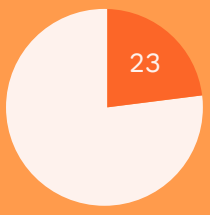
The *P.I.P.P.I. Programme* prevents unnecessary family separation through integrated family support, combining social, health, educational and third sector services. Since 2018, it has received dedicated funding through the National Social Policy Fund, while resources from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan have expanded it nationwide since 2022. As it is officially recognised as an essential social service, its ongoing sustainability is protected.





Country Profile 2026

Kosovo



Child Poverty
23% (2019)
Latest available data: 2019

CONCORDIA Projekte Sociale

Poverty Data

The most recent available estimates (UNICEF's *2022 Kosovo Programme Annual Report,* and *Social Protection Budget Brief 2024*) indicate that 23% of children in Kosovo live in poverty and 7% in extreme poverty, while the Social Assistance Scheme coverage remains very limited and is estimated to cover approximately 5–8% of families living in poverty.

Service access is also unequal: only 19.5% of children aged 0–6 attended early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities in 2023-2024, according to Kosovo's education statistics, falling to 3% among the poorest children and about 10% among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children. Affordability is a major barrier: for a single-income household with two young children, private childcare can consume approximately 80% of household income, compared with about 17% for public ECEC facilities, where places are scarce.

Only 10% of eligible families initially applied for Kosovo's 2025 ECEC voucher programme, but by July 2026 the programme covered 313 children, had expanded from three to 15 municipalities and included transportation support. Recognising this gap, CONCORDIA licensed its ECEC unit at the Tranzit Centre in Prizren and enrolled two children from families benefiting from the pilot.

The children most affected by poverty are children in low-income households or in households which receive social assistance, children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, children living in rural areas, those in single-parent or single-income families, and children with disabilities or special needs. They face overlapping barriers to education, nutrition, healthcare and specialised support. For example, ECEC participation among children from rural areas aged 3–4 is 7.9%, compared with 25.5% in urban areas. These disadvantages contribute to poorer nutrition and learning outcomes, to greater risk of school drop-out, and to reduced access to health, disability and protection services.

The Investment Gap

Social assistance and essential child protection services remain seriously underfunded. In 2023, only 1.6% of Kosovo's social protection budget was allocated to social services. Limited and uneven municipal financing, together with delayed implementation of child protection legislation, restricts access to family support, psycho-social care, disability services and protection from neglect, violence and exploitation. CONCORDIA helps to address this gap through integrated community-based services in its Prizren and Gjakova day centres, combining educational support, social assistance, counselling, meals, healthcare, parental education and community strengthening.

The European Child Guarantee

Kosovo has taken initial steps towards implementing the principles of the *European Child Guarantee* as part of its alignment with the European Union (EU) acquis under Chapter 19. It responded positively to the European Commission's invitation, established a contact structure, and further steps should include the preparation of a fully costed national action plan. Existing measures include child allowances, ECEC vouchers and inclusive education, but access remains unequal. A fully costed national action plan - with dedicated, predictable funding for municipalities and licensed community providers - is necessary for the Child Guarantee to be effective.

Since their establishment, CONCORDIA's centres have applied the core principles of the Child Guarantee by integrating education, nutrition, health, psychological and social support for vulnerable children and families.

Measures to address child poverty are financed by national and municipal budgets, the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), international institutions and donors. EU funding is often channelled through partners such as UNICEF. For example, a €2.2 million EU–UNICEF programme expanded access to services for around 10,000 vulnerable children and their families between January 2022 and June 2025. However, funding remains insufficient and fragmented, with essential services dependent on short-term projects. Non-governmental organisations may apply for national and municipal grants and relevant EU funding calls, including IPA III and the Civil Society Facility, subject to eligibility rules, but this does not ensure continuity. The Child Guarantee action plan should therefore combine predictable public financing for licensed providers, with EU and donor support.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

CONCORDIA Kosovo's integrated community day centre model:

The centres in Prizren and Gjakova support children experiencing poverty, social exclusion, other vulnerabilities and with special needs, particularly from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Through their integrated, child-centred model, the centres are already putting the core principles of the *European Child Guarantee* into practice by promoting effective access to education, basic health support and referrals to healthcare services, adequate nutrition and social services for children in need. Multidisciplinary teams, including social workers, psychologists, teachers, nurses and community workers, provide education, social assistance, counselling, meals, health advice, referrals to healthcare services, material support, assistance for families to access benefits, and also parental education, family empowerment and mobile outreach to families in remote or difficult situations.

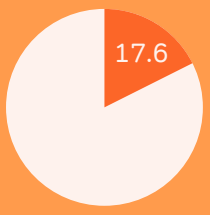
Operating in two shifts, aligned with school schedules, each centre reaches around 110 participants daily, aged 3–15/16, while older young people join life skills activities. Individual development plans link families, schools, healthcare and municipal services, ensuring coordinated and tailored support.

Funding comes from donors, the CONCORDIA network, government grants and municipal contributions. Licences, partnerships and diversified funding support sustainability, but predictable public financing is still needed.



Country Profile 2026

Latvia



Child Poverty
17.6% (2025)
▼ -0.3 percentage points
compared to 2024

Latvian Child Welfare Network

Poverty Data

The reality of child poverty in Latvia is highlighted by the fact that 28.7% of single-parent families are at risk of poverty, which is nearly double the national average for children, which is 14.7%. This economic vulnerability has direct, severe consequences for a child's development and quality of life.

Over half of all children in Latvia (50.8%) live in overcrowded housing, and 20% reside in homes with significant problems, such as damp walls or leaking roofs. Furthermore, 15% of all families — increasing to 27% for single-parent households — struggle to provide a healthy diet each day. These challenges are exacerbated by declining social protection spending, which has strained access to services.

In Latvia, single-parent families and large families are most disproportionately affected by economic vulnerability. Families raising children with disabilities or special needs report significantly lower satisfaction with essential services and higher financial stress.

Highly vulnerable groups include children in alternative care, those from low-income households, and children whose parents work abroad, who face elevated risks of social exclusion and bullying. Furthermore, adolescent girls are most affected by declining mental well-being, reporting much higher levels of loneliness and psychosomatic health complaints.

The Investment Gap

A critical underfunded policy area in Latvia is social protection for families with children, where spending significantly declined from 2.2% of GDP in 2021 to 1.6% in 2024. This fiscal contraction is compounded by a 10% reduction in the number of social workers dedicated to families since 2019. This has resulted in a reactive approach focused on crisis management.

Specifically, underfunding in healthcare has caused average waiting times for paediatric specialist consultations to increase to 84 days. This creates a two-tier system: wealthier families bypass delays by turning to private care, while children from low-income or single-parent households face worsening health and developmental outcomes while waiting for public services. Ultimately, the system fails to provide early intervention, often reacting only after families are already in a deep crisis.

The European Child Guarantee

In Latvia, the implementation of the *European Child Guarantee* is a mere formality. There is no unified strategy to combat child poverty.

Latvia has produced a *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee* but has not put in place the new measures, dedicated resources, meaningful participation, comprehensive targeting or strong governance needed to turn the Guarantee into tangible improvements for children.

Key concerns are:

- No new action: the *National Action Plan* largely compiles existing sectoral policies, without new targeted measures, clear timelines, measurable objectives or assessment of effectiveness.
- No dedicated funding: no new national funding is allocated to deliver the Child Guarantee commitments. Implementation relies heavily

on temporary European Union-funded projects, municipalities and charities, raising concerns about sustainability.

- Vulnerable children are overlooked: several groups identified by the European Commission as particularly vulnerable — including homeless children, children with mental health difficulties and children from minority backgrounds — are not explicitly included, with a risk that their needs may not be adequately addressed.

- Limited participation: non-governmental organisations and affected children and families were reportedly not meaningfully involved in developing the *Action Plan*, with consultation taking place only after the document had largely been completed.

- Weak coordination: responsibility sits with a senior official within the Ministry of Welfare, rather than a high-level inter-ministerial structure, potentially limiting the Child Guarantee Coordinator's ability to influence other ministries, budgets and implementation.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

While many support services in Latvia remain fragmented and often operate in a reactive 'firefighting' mode, *Bērna māja (Barnahus)*[1] can be recognised as a 'gold standard' example of an integrated, holistic response to children who are victims of violence. Managed by the Child Protection Centre, this initiative successfully links social protection, healthcare, and legal services under one roof.

The *Bērna māja* project coordinates different sectors to support children who have been victims of, and witnesses to, violence, particularly sexual abuse. By bringing law enforcement, forensic specialists, medical doctors, and psychologists together in a single, child-friendly environment, it ensures that the child is not re-traumatised by interacting with multiple institutions. It provides a seamless 'service basket' tailored to the child's recovery and legal protection.

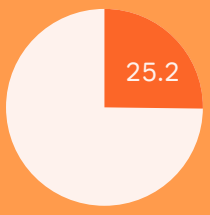
Initially established with support from international and European Union funding, *Bērna māja* has transitioned to become a permanent, state-funded scheme. Its sustainability is anchored in national legislation and strategic development plans, ensuring that this integrated model provides a standardised level of care and fulfils the requirements of the *European Child Guarantee* to protect the most vulnerable children.

1 *Barnahus is a place where a multidisciplinary and inter-agency team of law enforcement, criminal justice, child protection services, and medical and mental health workers cooperate to provide streamlined child protective services and child-friendly justice.*



Country Profile 2026

Luxembourg



Child Poverty
25.2% (2025)
▼ -0.4 percentage points
compared to 2024

Ombudsman fir Kanner a Jugendlecher in Luxembourgish - The Ombudsman for Children and Youth (OKAJU)

Poverty Data

According to data from STATEC, UNICEF, the *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC), and OKAJU, around 22%-25% of children in Luxembourg live in households at risk of poverty. This represents approximately 30,000 children. This rate is higher than the poverty rate of the overall population, which is around 19%. Around 130,000 people are affected by poverty or social exclusion (out of a total population of 690,000). The poverty rate has increased from about 9.5% in the 1980s to more than 18% today. This trend has been rising steadily since the 1990s, despite social spending accounting for around 47% of public expenditure.

Around 1 in 4 children live in poverty or are at risk of poverty, and about 8% experience material deprivation. Certain groups are particularly vulnerable. These include single-parent families - between 40%-48% are at risk of poverty – which are mostly women-headed households and are often affected by unpaid child support. Families with three or more children have a 36.7% risk of poverty. Poverty also affects people in employment - around one in seven workers cannot live decently from their income, demonstrating that poverty is not only linked to unemployment.

The Investment Gap

Several structural factors explain poverty in Luxembourg – an inter-generational transmission of poverty, the housing crisis (some families spend up to 47% of their income on housing) and youth vulnerability (mental health issues, institutional care history, risk of unemployment). Care leavers who lived in residential care as adolescents are particularly at risk, with a poverty risk four times higher than average, and more than 300 young people are on waiting lists for supported housing

Luxembourg has a strong welfare system. This includes a minimum income scheme (*REVIS*), housing subsidies, support with energy bills, childcare and social assistance. About 8,394 children live in *REVIS* households.

Social transfers reduce poverty significantly, from 26.5% without transfers to 14.8% after transfers. However, challenges remain. Policies are often focused on adults rather than children. Recovering child support when parents are divorced can be difficult, especially if the other parent is not living in the country. Non-take-up of benefits is also a problem - many eligible families do not access support due to a lack of information, administrative complexity, stigma and shame, and complicated procedures.

Child poverty in Luxembourg is not a marginal issue, it is a structural and persistent reality in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Addressing it requires not only financial support, but also structural reforms, better coordination, and stronger inclusion of children in policy-making.

The European Child Guarantee

Luxembourg has a *Child Guarantee National Action Plan 2021-2030*, and several additional national action plans: a plan for children's rights, a plan for tackling poverty, and two forthcoming plans on affordable housing and homelessness. From OKAJU's perspective, the national plan on poverty is missing measurable child poverty targets, stronger monitoring mechanisms and regular evaluation.

Since the establishment of the *Child Guarantee National Action Plan*, Luxembourg has taken quite a few initiatives (even if not directly linked to the Child Guarantee), including reforms on inclusive education, improvements in early diagnosis and intervention, financial support for renters and support with energy bills.

In Luxembourg, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) 2021–2027 has a revised total budget of €41 million and 5% of the overall budget is allocated to the Child Guarantee.

€2.1 million was set aside for projects that contribute to the Child Guarantee implementation between 2021 and 2027, 40% of which – €800,000 – from EU funds. It is hoped that these projects will reach 522 direct beneficiaries.

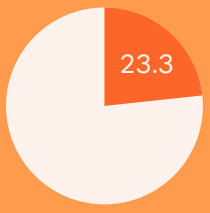
Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

An inter-ministerial commission was established in 2024 to draft the national action plan against poverty, under the supervision of the Ministry for Family Affairs. Civil society was also consulted. Many of the measures in the plan are cross-cutting actions that involve several Ministries, including those responsible for digitalisation, housing, education, health, social protection and employment. There is a monitoring group with representatives from all the various ministries, from civil society, from human rights institutions such as the national Ombudsman, the Ombudsman for Children, the Consultative Commission on Human Rights, OKAJU and people with lived experience of poverty.



Country Profile 2026

Malta



Child Poverty
23.3% (2025)
▼ -3.2 percentage points
compared to 2024

Office of the Commissioner for Children (Malta)

Poverty Data

In 2023, around 50% of children whose parents had a lower secondary education level or less education were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In contrast, less than 15% of children born to parents with higher levels of education faced the same risk.

This is a clear manifestation of the poverty trap faced by many vulnerable children. It is very hard for parents to improve their education, and therefore their income, while continuing to work, and their children risk having only lower secondary education due to pressure on them to enter the workforce early and supplement family income. These children may also lack the educational support that parents with higher education levels can offer their children. Children from low education backgrounds have a 50% chance of attaining the same level of education, creating a cycle of low education and an increased risk of poverty.

Lower education levels are concentrated mostly among children and families from working-class backgrounds, in single-parent families, and among children and families from immigrant backgrounds.

The Investment Gap

According to a recent study by Caritas, there has been an increase in rental prices. The current rent benefit rates need to be revised in light of the overall cost of living for Maltese families. It is reasonable to assume that the inflation in rental prices has had an adverse impact on child poverty.

Although the €400,000 allocation, part of *Malta's National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030*, is a positive step, it may be necessary to determine whether additional investment is needed to deliver meaningful and sustainable reductions in education drop-out rates among vulnerable groups.

Means-testing the student maintenance grant and stipend system for those aged 16+ (students in post-secondary and tertiary education) would allow for stronger support for students from low-income families to enter and stay in post-secondary education, while preserving the sustainability of the system.

The European Child Guarantee

The *European Child Guarantee* is implemented through Malta's *National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030* and focuses on children in families experiencing economic vulnerability.

Measures to address child poverty and support children, including through the *European Child Guarantee*, are financed through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Non-governmental organisations in Malta can also apply for ESF+ funds.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Malta provides an example of integrated financial and educational support by combining free post-secondary and tertiary education with the student maintenance grant and stipend system, for those aged 16+ (students in post-secondary and tertiary education).

While free education removes tuition fees, grants and stipends provide additional financial support to help students from economically disadvantaged

backgrounds meet the wider costs of participating in education. Together, these measures help reduce financial barriers and make continued education more accessible to children and young people from lower-income families.



The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS)

Poverty Data

Based on data from 2018, Malta's *National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2025-2035* suggests that around 33% of children who have at least one parent who is a foreign citizen are likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE).

According to the *2025 European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)* around 109,300 (19.4%) individuals are estimated to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with single-person households with one or more dependent children and households with two adults and three or more dependent children (i.e. large households) most likely to experience poverty or exclusion.

Around 17,000 children faced income poverty in 2025.

The strongest factors affecting child poverty in Malta include having a single or disabled parent, having parents with lower educational attainment, and living in a family facing housing insecurity.

The *Wellbeing INDEX* – a collaboration between The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the University of Malta – also considers poverty in terms of time use, where materially deprived individuals report low time use satisfaction and lower financial satisfaction.

Child poverty is addressed through several measures, across sectors:

- Social benefits and social welfare services, including children's allowance, foster care allowance, widows' pension, disabled child allowance, orphan's allowance.
- Free and accessible education systems. Malta's education system is accessible and free for anyone. Other initiatives include childcare services, breakfast clubs, after-school services, student maintenance grants from 16 onwards, and a €10,000 fund for vulnerable students.
- Accessible healthcare, including free periodic screening, vaccinations, medications and treatment of chronic conditions.
- Social housing, with financial assistance for low-income families who are renting, and specific housing units for people at risk.

The European Child Guarantee

Malta's *National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social* Inclusion is based on several other policies and strategies: Malta's mental health strategy, the *National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030,* and the *Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030* (which aims to contribute towards Malta's national target to reduce the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 6%).

Malta's Child Guarantee *National Action Plan* focuses on social protection (allowances, bonuses, benefits), access to education (free education up to tertiary level), physical and mental healthcare, and social housing allocation to ensure secure and stable accommodation for children in need.

Malta's allowances tend to focus on the individual, therefore, NGOs are often not eligible to apply for funds.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

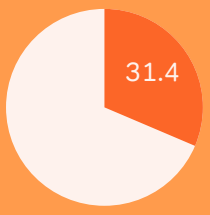
While education is free in Malta, hidden expenses can create barriers for some children and families.

The Malta Trust Foundation demonstrates integrated working by bringing together educational, social, psychological, financial and specialist support around the needs of children and families. It has various initiatives which promote integrated approaches to tackle poverty. *E-CUBED* provides assistive technology for children and young people with communication needs. *Your Device Your Right* provides children and young people with refurbished laptops and tablets to support digital inclusion. The *IDEA Education Project* broadens access to quality education for students with learning difficulties. *Tbissima* is a licensed non-formal education programme which addresses social inequalities among children and young people. *Adopt-a-family* provides financial and psychological support for vulnerable families.



Country Profile 2026

Moldova



Child Poverty
31.4% (2025)
▼ -2.2 percentage points
compared to 2024

A.O. CONCORDIA. PROIECTE SOCIALE

Poverty Data

According to 2025 data, the rate of absolute poverty among children is 31.4% (compared to 33.6% in 2024). The poverty rate is higher in rural areas than in urban areas - 40% and 21.1% respectively. Family composition is also a determining factor: the poverty rate increases with the number of children in the family, from 26.4% for families with one child to 41.5% for families with three or more children.

Only 23% of children under the age of three have access to daycare or early childhood services, hindering parents' integration into the labour market.

Approximately 17,400 children in Moldova were identified as being at risk in 2025. Under Moldovan law, this category includes children experiencing violence or neglect, lacking parental care or supervision, living in vulnerable circumstances, or otherwise requiring protection. Poverty may contribute to children's vulnerability and the risk of family separation. The most severely affected groups are children living in rural communities (where absolute poverty reaches approximately 47% in the south of the country), large households with three or more children (facing a 41.5% poverty rate), and vulnerable single parents or mothers with children under three who are excluded from the labour market due to the acute shortage of public early childhood education and care services. These compounding geographical and economic vulnerabilities directly drive the risk of children being separated from their family, leaving over 17,400 children registered 'at risk' primarily due to poverty-induced material deprivation and neglect.

The Investment Gap

The Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund was significantly reduced for the 2025-2026 winter, from 760,000 beneficiary households for 2024–2025 to 620,000 beneficiary households for 2025–2026, thereby limiting eligibility for support. For families living with economic vulnerability, with several children and those living in rural areas, this drop in financial support creates an immediate 'heat or eat' dilemma. Skyrocketing utility costs drain the limited household budget needed for children's basic nutrition, clothing and education.

There is insufficient funding for preventative services and for the social protection workforce.

While the national 'RESTART' reform attempts to restructure social assistance, localised, community-based preventative services — such as mobile outreach teams, specialised day centres, and foster care — remain severely underfunded. Additionally, low salaries lead to a high staff turnover among local social workers.

Financial support alone cannot break the poverty cycle. Chronic underfunding of local preventative services and social workforce investment prevents timely early intervention, increasing the risk of crisis and child separation in families experiencing poverty.

The European Child Guarantee

CONCORDIA Moldova believes there has been significant progress. The Child Guarantee was launched in 2025, and the Republic of Moldova is currently in the final stages of developing the national plan for its implementation. This strategic document will strengthen measures aimed at

reducing child poverty, preventing family-child separation, and improving access to essential services for vulnerable children.

To strengthen its impact, CONCORDIA Moldova believes that greater emphasis should be placed on early identification and intervention mechanisms for families at risk of poverty. By detecting economic and social vulnerabilities at an early stage starting from pregnancy and throughout the first years of a child's life – families can receive timely financial support, counselling, and tailored services. Such a preventive approach would help reduce the long-term risk of poverty, prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families, and contribute to ensuring equal opportunities for every child.

Child poverty measures and the *European Child Guarantee* are financed through a combination of state and local budgets and external funding from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations.

However, funding is insufficient, with chronic shortages that affect rural communities and preventative services (e.g. mobile outreach, day centres). Rigid resource allocation fails to match real family needs and prevents resources from being effectively allocated based on locally identified family crises.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can access international and EU funding, but domestic public contracting remains underdeveloped. National funding mechanisms for NGOs are limited and lack the diversity needed to provide sustainable and reliable funding for civil society organisations.

To maximise the Child Guarantee's impact, CONCORDIA Moldova recommends expanding public procurement to increase opportunities for NGOs to access domestic funding and leverage their expertise at community level.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

The CONCORDIA Day Centre model provides integrated social services at community level, including nutrition, educational support, psycho-social assistance, life skills development, parenting education, hot meals and food packages, and hygiene services. These aim to prevent family violence, the separation of children from their families, and the marginalisation of vulnerable children and families. Project funding is provided through a hybrid mechanism that combines international funds with co-financing from local public authority budgets and private donations. Long-term sustainability is ensured through strategic public-private partnerships focused on the adoption of the model by local authorities, state accreditation for eligibility for public funding, and the mobilisation of community resources.





Country Profile 2026

Netherlands



Child Poverty
12.7% (2025)
▼ -3.1 percentage points
compared to 2024

Het Kinderrechtencollectief (Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights)

Poverty Data

After five consecutive years of declining poverty rates, overall poverty in the Netherlands increased again in 2024, with approximately 93,000 children (2.8% of all children) living in poverty. An additional 245,000 children lived in households that were considered 'near poor', indicating that more than 10% of all children were growing up in circumstances of financial vulnerability. Together, this means that more than 338,000 children grow up with financial vulnerability. Children in poor or 'near poor' households are less likely to have access to holidays, to new clothes, healthy meals, and to have good health outcomes.

Children living in single-parent households, families dependent on social assistance, households with insecure or low-paid work, and families with a migration background are disproportionately affected by poverty. Housing costs and the rising cost of living put particular pressure on single-parent families. Existing research and data also highlight that children experiencing poverty often face multiple and interconnected challenges affecting their development, education, health, and participation in society.

The Investment Gap

A key concern is the continuing shortage of affordable housing and insufficient investment in integrated support for vulnerable families. High housing costs leave many low-income families with less money available for children's basic needs and for their participation in leisure and play activities. In addition, municipalities face financial pressures in delivering youth services and preventive family support services, limiting their ability to address the root causes of child poverty.

Measures addressing child poverty are financed primarily through national and municipal budgets, complemented by European funding instruments such as the European Social Fund Plus. Non-governmental organisations can participate in projects supported through European Union funding mechanisms, often in partnership with municipalities or other organisations. However, many civil society organisations report that funding remains project-based and fragmented, making long-term planning and sustainable support difficult. Current funding levels are generally insufficient to tackle the structural causes of child poverty and inequality.

The European Child Guarantee

The Netherlands implements the *European Child Guarantee* mainly through existing policies on income support, education, healthcare, childcare, and social inclusion. However, implementation is fragmented and often not explicitly framed around children's rights. One measure that would strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee is the adoption of a comprehensive national child poverty strategy with measurable targets and mandatory child rights impact assessments, ensuring that all policies affecting children contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

De Gelijke Kansen Alliantie, 'The Equal Chances Alliance', is a government initiative that aims to address inequalities in education. The scheme works together with schools, municipalities, and social partners to improve opportunities in education with a particular focus on children's home, school and broader environment. This 'story bundle' presents

examples of local good practices that take an integrated approach to improving equal opportunities for children, bringing together schools, municipalities and social partners.

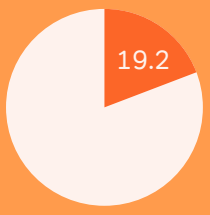
Different municipalities can have different approaches. An example is the municipality of Amersfoort, which has started employing social workers in primary schools, to help address issues or concerns in the home environment. This makes it easier for families that need support to ask for help. The social workers are specifically being deployed in schools with families living in vulnerable circumstances.





Country Profile 2026

Portugal



Child Poverty
19.2% (2025)
▼ -1.5 percentage points
compared to 2024

Fundação Bom Sucesso

Poverty Data

Data on access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) at district level does not include information on households' economic status, but contains information on the coverage of childcare facilities, i.e. the number of places available in relation to the number of children aged 0–3 in the district. The data refers to the 18 districts of Portugal - the Oporto district has the lowest coverage rate (45%), followed by the Lisbon district with almost 52%. In practice, this means that childcare places are available to only 45% of children aged 0-3 in the Oporto district, compared with almost 52% in Lisbon. The Guarda district has the highest rate with almost 93%.

The Investment Gap

In Portugal, health and education are underfunded. These are two sectors with a chronic lack of human resources. Overall, the government is not investing enough, and where it does invest, this is not where the need is greatest. It does not invest in prevention, whether in health or in education, despite the evidence on the positive return on this type of investment. This affects children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in particular, as their families are not able to pay for private services.

Instituto de Apoio à Criança - Child Support Institute

Poverty Data

2023 saw the lowest rate of child poverty since 2019, however one in six children lived in poverty, and one in five families with children lived in overcrowded housing.

In 2023, 17.8% of children (298,259) were at risk of poverty.

Single-parent families with children (women, in particular) continue to be the most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion - almost one in three live on less than €632 per month. They are closely followed by people living alone, who saw their risk of poverty increase by almost four percentage points (from 24.9% in 2022 to 28.6% in 2023), an increase which is only surpassed by families with two adults and three or more children.

There is also a housing crisis in Portugal, and the number of households has been growing faster than the supply of housing since 2011.

The European Child Guarantee

Portugal's *National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee (PAGPI) 2022–2030* was approved in 2023. Portugal has since published two progress reports.

Local Child Guarantee Hubs *(Núcleos Locais de Garantia para a Infância - NLGPI)* have been in place since 2023, with the involvement of local entities. The latter is crucial, as it ensures the application of public policies and local actions, especially those that respond to the particularities of each area and the needs of the local population.

In 2024 there were 67 *NLGPI* hubs; rising to 165 in 2026, with 20 more being set up.

The 2026 biennial progress report on the Child Guarantee sets out operational objectives that illustrate this local focus. This includes an objective to develop local support networks for children and young people, and an objective to strengthen the role of Local Social Development Contracts in pursuing the strategic aims of the Child Guarantee. These objectives reflect the importance placed on collaboration and development at the local level.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Portugal's *Action Plan for the Unified Strategy for the Rights of Children and Young People 2025-2030*, approved in 2025, aims to put the promotion of children's rights and the protection of children and young people at the centre of public policies.

PAJE – Plataforma de Apoio a Jovens (Ex)acolhidos

Poverty Data

In Portugal, child poverty remains a structural challenge, despite improvements in recent years. According to the latest data from Statistics Portugal (INE) and Eurostat, around 19.2% of children and young people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025, corresponding to approximately 351,000 children. Although this is the lowest figure ever recorded in the country, around one in five children continue to be exposed to conditions that compromise their development and well-being.

Children living in single-parent households, large families, low-income households, and families affected by unemployment or precarious employment face a significantly higher risk of poverty. Children from migrant and Roma communities, as well as children with disabilities, are also at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion due to persistent barriers in accessing housing, education, healthcare and other essential services and in securing an adequate income. Rising housing costs have further increased financial pressure on vulnerable families, reducing the resources available to meet children's basic needs and support their development.

Although social transfers continue to play a key role in reducing poverty, the available evidence shows that inequalities in access to resources and opportunities persist. This highlights the need to strengthen child-focused social protection policies, improve support for the most vulnerable families, and ensure equitable access to essential services, including early childhood education and care (ECEC), adequate housing, and integrated social support services.

In Portugal, measures to prevent and reduce child poverty are financed through a combination of national public funding and European Union (EU) resources.

The Investment Gap

One of the main underfunded policy areas affecting child poverty in Portugal is affordable housing. Although recent national budgets have increased investment in housing programmes, the level of funding has not kept pace with the sharp rise in housing costs and demand, particularly in urban areas. As a result, many low-income families continue to face housing insecurity and overcrowding, or spend a disproportionate share of their income on housing, leaving fewer resources available for children's nutrition, education, healthcare, and participation in social and recreational activities. This situation disproportionately affects single-parent households, large families, and families experiencing poverty or precarious employment, increasing the risk of child poverty and social exclusion.

The European Child Guarantee

Portugal is implementing the *European Child Guarantee* through its *National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee (PAGPI) 2022–2030*, which aims to ensure that children in vulnerable situations have effective access to key services, including ECEC, education, healthcare, healthy nutrition, and adequate housing. The *Action Plan* adopts a cross-sector approach involving national, regional, and local authorities, with particular attention to children at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion, such as those living in low-income households, single-parent families, Roma communities, migrant families, and children with disabilities.

One measure that would enhance the impact of the *European Child Guarantee* in Portugal is improved access to affordable and adequate housing for vulnerable families with children. Housing affordability remains one of the main drivers of child poverty, and expanding the supply of affordable housing, while strengthening integrated social support services for families, would help ensure that children can fully benefit from the other services promoted under the Child Guarantee.

The implementation of the *European Child Guarantee* is supported by several EU funding instruments, particularly the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Recovery and Resilience Facility and, where relevant, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). These funds support investments in ECEC, education, social inclusion, healthcare, housing, and services for vulnerable children and families.

While these funding streams have enabled important progress, current funding levels are not sufficient to fully address the structural causes of child poverty. Persistent challenges such as the shortage of affordable housing, increasing living costs, unequal access to services, and the need for more integrated family support require sustained and long-term investment beyond the current funding framework.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are eligible to apply for a range of EU-funded programmes, particularly under the ESF+, either as lead applicants or project partners, depending on the specific funding call and eligibility criteria. NGOs play a key role in delivering services, reaching vulnerable children and families, and complementing public interventions.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

In Portugal, the *National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee (PAGPI) 2022–2030* is a good example of an integrated approach, as it brings together social protection, education, healthcare, housing, and child protection services to improve access to essential services for children in vulnerable situations. The initiative promotes coordination between public authorities, municipalities, schools, health services, social security institutions, and civil society organisations, ensuring a more holistic response to child poverty.

The *Action Plan* is funded through a combination of national public resources and EU funding (particularly the ESF+ and funds allocated to the Recovery and Resilience Plan). Its sustainability depends on its integration into Portugal's long-term anti-poverty strategy, continued cooperation between stakeholders, and sustained political and financial commitment.

Sérgio Costa Araújo - Individual Member

Poverty Data

A study published in December 2025 *Portugal desigual: Um retrato das desigualdades de rendimentos e da pobreza no país*, portrays the situation of child poverty in Portugal.

Data on family incomes in Portugal in 2024 showed that 15.4% of the total population was at risk of poverty. This represents a significant number of people living with an equivalent income of less than €723 per month. 17.6% of children were at risk of poverty - about 300,000 – only 0.2 percentage points lower than the previous year.

In 2023, the poverty rates by age group were: 17.6% (0-6 years); 16.2% (7-11 years); 19.2% (12-17 years).

From 2023 to 2024, the poverty rate increased from 31% to 35.1% among families with children.

It is noteworthy that 75% of children living in poverty in Portugal live in families whose main source of income comes from work, but where low-wage employment does not guarantee a sufficient income for a dignified life.

In 2024, about 25% of poor children lived in single-parent households. More than 20% were in large families, with three or more dependent children.

The poverty rate among children whose parents did not have Portuguese nationality was 38.1% in 2023, in contrast with 15.8% among children of Portuguese citizens. This highlights inadequate integration systems for such families, namely integration in the labour market and access to social services.

In 2024, poverty rates were higher in families where parents only have primary education (34.3%) than among those where parents have secondary education (19%) or higher education (8.9%).

In 2025, 20.8% of families with children lived in homes with insufficient space, compared to 5.7% of families without children. 10.2% lived in conditions of severe housing deprivation, compared to 2.5% of families without children.

In 2024, one-fifth of children lived in households unable to afford at least one week of vacation per year away from home, and one tenth of children could not regularly participate in extra-curricular or leisure activities.

The Investment Gap

In Portugal, social transfers have quite a small impact on reducing the risk of child poverty.

Another concern is low-wage employment, which exacerbates the phenomenon of the ‘working poor’.

The European Child Guarantee

The European Commission’s assessment of the Portuguese Child Guarantee highlights some important progress in areas such as free daycare and pre-school, and emergency housing support, but also notes difficulties in accessing social housing, the lack of places in daycare and pre-school facilities, and in access to leisure activities.

Promoting the systematic participation of all stakeholders — children, civil society organisations, experts, academics, activists — would strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee in Portugal.

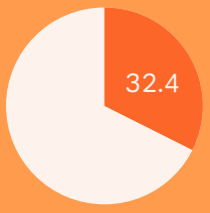
The *European Child Guarantee* benefits from Recovery and Resilience Plan funding allocated to housing, through the *Estratégias Locais de Habitação* and the *Bolsa Nacional* de *Alojamento Urgente e Temporário*. It also benefits from European Social Fund Plus funding for Portuguese programmes such as *CLDS* (for social inclusion, combating poverty and strengthening territorial cohesion) and the *Programa Escolhas* (promoting social inclusion and equal opportunities and combating school failure/drop-out among children and young people aged six to 25 from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds). Both finance projects implemented by non-governmental organisations, municipalities and consortia.





Country Profile 2026

Romania



Child Poverty
32.4% (2025)
▼ -1.4 percentage points
compared to 2024

CONCORDIA România

Poverty Data

Romania has the third highest child poverty rate in the European Union (EU). In 2024, 33.8% of children (1.25 million) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This means that one in three children still grows up in households affected by low income, material deprivation or very low work intensity. Poverty limits access to education, healthcare, adequate housing and community services, increasing the risk of school drop-out and inter-generational disadvantage.

In Romania, child poverty disproportionately affects children living in rural areas, Roma children, children with disabilities, children from large families, single-parent households, children left behind by parents working abroad, and children living in deprived communities.

Data from Eurostat's *EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)* consistently shows that the risk of poverty is higher among people living in rural areas, single-parent households and households with three or more dependent children, and is strongly associated with low educational attainment and low work intensity.

The Investment Gap

Preventive community-based services for children and families remain significantly underfunded in Romania.

Law No. 100/2024 introduced a new approach to financing social services. It establishes the principle that 'the money follows the beneficiary', providing for public funding to be linked more closely to the beneficiaries receiving social services. The law seeks to support a more needs-based and beneficiary-centred approach to the financing of social services. However, its nationwide implementation was postponed to January 2027 due to fiscal constraints and limited administrative capacity. As a result, access to preventive services still depends largely on local financial resources, leaving rural and disadvantaged communities underserved. This prolongs geographic inequalities and increases the risks of school drop-out, family separation and social exclusion among vulnerable children.

The European Child Guarantee

Romania adopted its *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee (2023–2030)*, which prioritises children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including Roma children, children with disabilities, children living in rural areas, children left behind by parents working abroad, and children in alternative care. The *Action Plan* includes measures to improve access to early childhood education and care (ECEC), education, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing, while promoting integrated community services.

Implementation has progressed through the expansion of community-based services and reforms supported by EU funding, including the development of integrated community services and the introduction of a new financing framework for social services. However, implementation remains uneven due to insufficient sustainable public funding, shortages of qualified professionals and significant geographic disparities.

To strengthen the impact of the *European Child Guarantee* there is a need for a sustainable and predictable financing mechanism for preventive community-based services, particularly daycare centres for children, and for integrated social

services. Ensuring multiannual national funding and the full implementation of Law No. 100/2024 would enable local authorities to provide continuous, high-quality support to vulnerable children and families, helping to prevent family separation and reduce child poverty, in line with the objectives of the Child Guarantee.

Measures to prevent child poverty and implement the *European Child Guarantee* in Romania are financed through a combination of the state budget, local authority budgets and EU funds. Key EU funding sources include the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). In Romania, the ESF+ and ERDF are implemented, among other programmes, through the *Programme for Inclusion and Social Dignity (POIDS) 2021–2027*, which finances integrated community services, ECEC, education, social inclusion interventions and investments in social infrastructure.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Romania's integrated community services model builds on UNICEF's *Minimum Package of Services* pilot programme in Bacău, demonstrating the value of coordinated health, education and social support for vulnerable children.

Romania's network of accredited daycare centers is an example of integrated preventive support which combines educational assistance, counselling, meals, health referrals, parenting support and access to social benefits. Many centres are operated by non-governmental organisations in partnership with local authorities, and play a key role in preventing school drop-out, family separation and institutionalisation. Their sustainability, however, depends on stable public financing. Romania should fully implement Law No. 100/2024 and establish predictable multiannual funding to expand integrated preventive services nationwide.

Florina Balint - Individual Member

Poverty Data

The most alarming indicators in Romania remain the disparities in educational opportunity and material deprivation. According to data from Eurostat and the National Institute of Statistics, 29.4% of families with children are at risk of poverty, and an overwhelming 75.8% of children in Romania whose parents have a low level of education face severe material and social deprivation. This reality creates a vicious cycle: because local infrastructure for early childhood education and care (ECEC) is missing or underfunded in deprived areas, these children cannot access early years services, reinforcing generational exclusion before they even start school.

The most affected are children in rural communities, Roma families, and large households with three or more children. These groups face overlapping crises - substandard housing, lack of running water, limited access to primary healthcare, and high rates of school drop-out, because essential services are not distributed evenly across the country.

The Investment Gap

While Romania has passed solid legislation, the system breaks down at the local level due to severe funding shortages for community-based preventative services. Municipalities lack the budget to hire and retain essential professionals like school counsellors, speech therapists, and community nurses.

Local social workers are completely overwhelmed by huge workloads. Instead of focusing on prevention, a single social worker is frequently forced to manage hundreds of cases involving very different vulnerabilities - ranging from child protection cases and families in crisis to people with disabilities and the elderly. Without specialised continuous training or professional clinical supervision to handle complex cases, staff quickly burn out, leaving vulnerable children without consistent support. Because prevention is underfunded, small issues escalate, forcing the state to spend its budget on expensive, late-stage crisis interventions, such as removing children from their homes, rather than supporting families early on.

The European Child Guarantee

Romania's *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee* aims to lift 500,000 children out of poverty by 2030 by focusing on free education, healthcare, and nutrition. However, implementation is highly unequal, leaving deep disparities between wealthy urban areas and impoverished rural municipalities. To make a real impact, the government must introduce a mandatory, ring-fenced salary structure, systematic professional supervision, and specialised training pipelines for rural social workers, to stem the huge staff turnover in the communities where they are most needed.

Funding for the Child Guarantee is largely secured through a €19 billion budget framework combining national funds with the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the EU's Cohesion Fund. While the funding available is at a historic high, it does not reach the local level efficiently, due to bureaucratic hurdles and low administrative capacity. Non-governmental organisations are fully eligible for these funds, but complex application processes, strict co-financing requirements, and delayed state reimbursements make it incredibly difficult for smaller, grassroots organisations to navigate the system or survive the financial strain.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

The *Minimum Package of Services (MPS)* programme, developed by UNICEF Romania alongside civil society partners, is a national flagship model for integrated care. It places a dedicated team - a social worker, a community nurse, and a school counsellor - directly into municipalities with deprived communities. Instead of addressing issues in isolation, the multidisciplinary teams act as a single point of contact to ensure that families receiving cash benefits are also directly linked to health checks, vaccinations, and school attendance support.

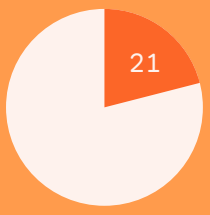
What started as a pilot project funded by the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants has now been incorporated into Romania's national social assistance legislation. This ensures its long-term survival through regular state budget funding and targeted ESF+ financing.





Country Profile 2026

Scotland



Child Poverty
21% (2025)
▼ -1 percentage points
compared to 2024

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Poverty Data

Real progress has been made to reduce child poverty in Scotland, not least through the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment which will keep approximately 50,000 children out of poverty in 2026-27. Despite this, however, data published in March 2026 shows that 21% of Scotland's children continue to live in relative poverty. Single-parent families are disproportionately affected by relative poverty, especially with the rising cost of living. A survey of 260 single parents by One Parent Families Scotland found that most struggle to pay for basic necessities, reporting that 61.1% of respondents could not afford electricity, while 58.1% and 43.7% said the same about gas and food, respectively. This has serious implications for children's rights to health and to an adequate standard of living, enshrined in Articles 24 and 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Scottish Government data from June 2026 reveals that in addition to children of single-parent families, 30% of whom live in relative poverty, other groups of children may also be disproportionately affected by poverty. Of all children in Scotland living in relative poverty, 40% are of minority ethnic backgrounds, 23% have at least one disabled family member, 39% are in families with a child under the age of one, and 38% are in families with three or more children. Children of young parents are also more likely to face relative poverty - research by One Parent Families Scotland has found that children with a mother under the age of 25 are disproportionately represented in poverty statistics.

The Investment Gap

Efforts to eradicate child poverty are primarily financed by the Scottish Government's core budget, which comes from a block grant by the United Kingdom (UK) Treasury and Scottish tax revenues. The 2026-27 Scottish Budget indicates that resources previously allocated to the now-scrapped Two Child Limit in Scotland remain directed towards anti-poverty measures in 2026-27.[1] These include a £111 million investment in the Tackling Child Poverty Fund and Whole Family Support. While these initiatives are commendable, there are concerns that the already-stretched Scottish Budget does not sufficiently account for inflation, and takes for granted that earnings in Scotland will outpace the rest of the UK. This means that available funds could fall short of government projections and thus necessitate greater spending cuts in the longer term.

While the Scottish Government has provided local authorities in Scotland with an additional 2% in real-terms funding, there remains a significant budget gap of £529 million for 2026-27 as the increases struggle to keep pace with inflation. This will affect the delivery of crucial public services and the construction of housing and other public infrastructure that communities rely on, likely leading to cuts in these areas. Council expenditure mainly goes towards social care for children and adults alike, support for low-income families, homelessness prevention efforts, and day-to-day services such as refuse collection and street lighting. For families facing socio-economic insecurity, reductions in such forms of assistance may mean that parents struggle to meet their children's basic needs for food, water, shelter and clothing, giving rise to potential physical

1 *The Two Child Limit was a policy that meant that families could only receive Universal Credit for the first two children in the family born on or after 6 April 2017. As part of the UK Government's efforts to tackle child poverty, this measure was scrapped on 6 April 2026, thus allowing eligible families to claim benefits for their third and/or subsequent children born on or after 6 April 2017.*

and mental health-related consequences, and that the standard of living in local communities may further decline across the board.

Greater investment in the Scottish Child Payment has enabled progress in tackling child poverty in recent years. However, research shows that long-term progress demands investments in foundational public services such as housing, childcare, and other types of family support, as well as boosts to family incomes through social security and better employment opportunities.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

While Scotland is still working towards a 'gold standard', engagement with Together's members shows emerging examples of promising practice. For instance, some organisations deliver family support in the form of support groups and home visiting volunteers, among other schemes.

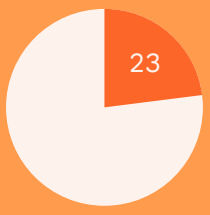
To name a few initiatives by Together's members, Save the Children gives grants to families in need through family support providers; Aberlour offers Urgent Assistance Grants to families; and Children First provides financial support for bills, fuel, and food.

More long-term investment in whole family support is needed to turn these promising efforts into a 'gold standard'. The Scottish Government's child poverty delivery plan must account for secure, multi-year funding to make this a reality.



Country Profile 2026

Serbia



Child Poverty
23% (2025)
▼ -0.9 percentage points
compared to 2024

The Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia

Poverty Data

In Serbia, 20.4% of children aged 0–17 were at risk of poverty in 2025, indicating that approximately one in five children lived in a household with an income below the national relative poverty threshold. Although this represents a decrease from 21.1% in 2024, children remain more exposed to poverty than the overall population (19.6%).

At the same time, access to income support is narrowing. According to the A11 Initiative, more than 60,000 of the poorest people lost entitlement to financial social assistance during the first four years of Serbia's Social Card system (a digital registry used to assess eligibility for social assistance), including 2,756 people between March 2025 and March 2026. While this data is not disaggregated by age, it indicates a weakening safety net for low-income households, including families with children. This is compounded by a 10% decrease in the number of users of licensed community-based social services in 2024, instead of the 18% increase envisaged under Serbia's Reform Agenda.

The Investment Gap

Community-based social services and local material support are significantly underfunded. Local authorities spent only 0.08% of GDP on social services in 2024, or an average of 1.6% of their budgets. Earmarked transfers from the national budget fell by almost 18% in real terms, while local expenditure on material support declined by 11.6% compared with 2021 and fell from 0.14% to 0.11% of GDP. This contributes to unstable services, geographic inequalities and low coverage, while the Social Card system has simultaneously reduced access to financial social assistance.

Roma children, children with disabilities, children living in poverty or in rural and less-developed areas, children in street situations, children in alternative care and care leavers are particularly affected by gaps in income support and community-based social services. Access also depends strongly on place of residence.

In 2024, individual support for children with disabilities reached only 25.2% of children aged 6–14 receiving education under an Individual Education Plan, while daycare services reached only 10.3% of children and young people with disabilities. More specialised community-based services, including those needed by children and families with more complex and diverse needs, remain concentrated in a limited number of larger cities.

Local social protection services are financed predominantly from general local budget revenues, 90.8%, while 6.2% comes from earmarked transfers and 1.8% from donations. This model makes the availability of services dependent on the fiscal capacity of local government and is not sufficient to ensure equal access to services at the national level.

Non-state service providers play an important role, but funding for civil society organisations is often short-term, while procedures for the allocation of funds are not always transparent.





Country Profile 2026

Slovenia



Child Poverty
12.5% (2025)
▲ +0.7 percentage points
compared to 2024

Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth

Poverty Data

In 2025, 11.6% of children in Slovenia were at risk of poverty - 43,000 children according to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.
In 2025, the income threshold below which a household with two adults and two children under the age of 14 was considered at risk of poverty was €2,144 per month.

For children living in poverty, limited household income can restrict access to adequate housing, healthy food, school supplies, digital equipment, extra-curricular activities, school trips and holidays. It can affect not only their material living conditions, but also their educational opportunities, well-being, social inclusion and ability to participate in activities with their peers.

The data underlines the importance of effective and accessible family benefits, social transfers and public services in preventing children from falling into, or remaining in, poverty.

Children growing up in single-parent families and in households with very low work intensity or insecure employment are among those most affected by poverty in Slovenia. These households often rely on a single or unstable source of income and struggle with the costs of housing, energy, food, education and other child-related expenses. This vulnerability is also reflected in energy poverty: in 2025, 11.9% of single-parent households with at least one dependent child were energy poor, compared with less than 5% of all other household types with dependent children.

The Investment Gap

In Slovenia, the provision of affordable and public rented housing is a persistently underfunded policy area. The supply of affordable housing has not kept pace with demand, while rents and property prices have risen sharply, particularly in urban areas. Low-income households are affected disproportionately - around 15% of households in the lowest income quintile spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing. For families with children, high housing costs reduce the income available for food, education, healthcare and participation in extra-curricular and social activities, increasing the risk of deprivation and housing instability.

The European Child Guarantee

Slovenia is implementing the European Child Guarantee through its *National Action Plan 2022–2030* (adopted in April 2023). The plan combines universal services with targeted measures in early childhood education and care, education and school meals, healthcare, healthy nutrition, housing, digital inclusion and support for particularly vulnerable groups of children. The first progress report identified delays in several measures, partly due to late European Cohesion Policy funding, and highlighted the need for more clearly earmarked resources.

The Child Guarantee could be strengthened by a ring-fenced national budget for affordable public rented housing and housing cost support for low-income families with children, with priority for single-parent households. This would reduce the impact of housing costs on children's access to adequate nutrition, education and social participation.

In Slovenia, measures to address child poverty and the implementation of the Child Guarantee are financed primarily through the national budget and public social protection, education and healthcare systems, supplemented by municipal budgets and European Union (EU) co-financing.

According to Slovenia's 2024 progress report on the Child Guarantee, EU funding represented an estimated 12.76% of financing during the first three years of implementation. The main EU funding sources include the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and funding for material assistance to the most deprived.

Despite this investment, funding cannot yet be considered sufficient or fully transparent. Some measures in the *Action Plan* have not yet been financially assessed, and their funding requirements and corresponding budget allocations remain unclear. Funding plans and budget lines are still being coordinated under the EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027. The report also identified continuing gaps, including insufficient support for single-parent families.

Slovenia's Cohesion Policy selection criteria explicitly include non-governmental organisations (NGOs) among eligible beneficiaries for funding for social inclusion, vulnerable children and support for families. However, eligibility depends on the conditions of each funding call, and NGOs do not have automatic access to all funding connected with the Child Guarantee.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

A very good example of an integrated community-based approach is the *Eno srce (One heart)* humanitarian programme, implemented by the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth through its nationwide network of 110 local associations. The programme combines immediate financial and material assistance with support for children's access to essential services and opportunities. Depending on families' needs, it may cover basic household bills, food and hygiene products, school supplies, scholarships, the costs of music or sports activities, as well as psycho-social support and medical or specialist equipment for children with special and additional needs.

Applications are assessed through established procedures, and local networks help to identify families in difficulty and to ensure that support reaches children across Slovenia. In 2025, 14,480 children received support through the programme.

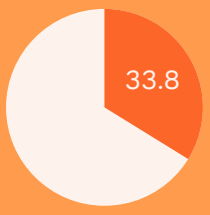
The programme is financed mainly through donations from individuals and companies, fundraising campaigns and material contributions. Its continuity is supported by ongoing fundraising, partnerships with businesses and the media, purpose-specific funds and transparent allocation procedures. However, as funding is largely dependent on donations, the programme's long-term sustainability remains reliant on continued public and corporate support which cannot replace stable public investment in services and social protection for children.





Country Profile 2026

Spain



Child Poverty
33.8% (2025)
▼ -0.8 percentage points
compared to 2024

FEDAIA - Federació d'entitats d'atenció a la infància i l'adolescència

Poverty Data

In 2025, 36.5% of children under 18 in Catalonia — approximately 490,900 children — were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), compared with 24.8% of the total population. The income poverty rate after social transfers was 30.3% of children under 16.
Child poverty in Spain, and in Catalonia, is structural rather than cyclical. The OECD finds that social benefits reduce child poverty in Spain less than in any other European Union (EU) country that is an OECD member. It estimates that aligning Spain's tax-and-transfer system with the ten best-performing OECD countries would reduce family poverty from 28% to about 11%.

Housing insecurity intensifies child poverty. In a 2025 FEDAIA survey of 109 professionals across Catalonia, respondents identified mental health impacts (89%), school failure (74%) and physical illnesses (63%) as its most common effects on children and adolescents.

Poverty disproportionately affects children and adolescents. In 2025, 36.5% of those under 18 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion—11.7 percentage points above the rate for the population as a whole (24.8%).

The rate of income poverty reached 47% in single-parent households and 30.8% in households with dependent children. Risk is further compounded by unemployment, job insecurity, migration status, disability and housing insecurity. Among people aged 16 or over, 48.6% of non-EU nationals and 55.2% of unemployed people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, highlighting structural disadvantages that are transmitted to children.

The Investment Gap

Chronic underinvestment in family income protection is a key issue in Catalonia. Spain still has no universal child benefit and the existing Child Support Supplement *(CAPI)* is means-tested. The OECD describes family support as insufficient and fragmented, while complex procedures contribute to low take-up: it estimated that only 25% of the eligible population in Catalonia received the Minimum Living Income. This helps explain persistent income poverty among families with children even after social transfers.

Measures to address child poverty are financed through Catalan and Spanish public budgets, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) Catalonia 2021–2027 programme and other EU instruments. The programme's total planned expenditure is €986.4 million: €400.9 million in EU ESF+ funding and €585.5 million in Generalitat de Catalunya public co-financing. Within the EU allocation, €20.049 million is earmarked for the Child Guarantee specific interventions. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may access specific grants, contracts or partnership arrangements, but not all programme funding is directly available to them. Community organisations need stable, multiannual core funding.

The allocation of €20,049 million of ESF+ resources for the Child Guarantee aims to reach 24,939 children under 16 by 2029. Against the 490,900 children under 18 currently at risk of poverty or social exclusion, FEDAIA considers this coverage insufficient to meet existing needs.

The European Child Guarantee

Implementation of the *European Child Guarantee* in Spain is governed by the *2022–2030 State Action Plan*. In Catalonia, related measures are supported by the *Catalonia Strategy against Child Poverty 2025–2030* and by a dedicated priority in the ESF+ Catalonia programme. These frameworks emphasise access to education, healthcare, housing, nutrition and social services. However, the latest AROPE data does not yet show a reduction in child poverty: the rate among children under 18 rose from 34.7% in 2024 to 36.5% in 2025 (+1.8 percentage points).

The single measure that would have the greatest impact on reducing child poverty is a universal child allowance, given automatically to every child and complemented by targeted services for families facing additional needs.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

CaixaProinfància is an example of integrated support to families. In Catalonia, FEDAIA coordinates local networks that combine family assessments and case management with educational support, school materials, food and hygiene assistance, leisure activities, family support, psychological care, and access to glasses and hearing aids. The programme is privately financed by the "la Caixa" Foundation and delivered through community networks and NGOs. Its continuity relies on sustained funding from the Foundation, and on established local partnerships. Its long-term sustainability would be stronger with complementary public co-financing and secure multiannual agreements.

FEDAIA also leads the *Programa d'Atenció Integral per Prevenir la Institucionalització (PAIPI). PAIPI (Comprehensive Care Programme to Prevent Institutionalisation)* is a 2026–2028 pilot co-financed by the EU. Through 32 services in more than 21 Catalan municipalities, it supports around 490 families using preventive, community-based and evidence-informed socio-educational, family and psychotherapeutic interventions. *PAIPI* strengthens parenting capacities and protective environments, and provides coordination between services to prevent family separation and institutionalisation.

Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia

Poverty Data

The official measure of childhood economic vulnerability in Spain is the *Living Conditions Survey (LCS)*. This provides annual data on severe poverty or severe material deprivation, among other measures, serving as a benchmark for evaluating the real impacts of social exclusion on households with children.

Spain continues to have the highest child poverty rate in the European Union (EU), with 28.4% of children and adolescents at risk of poverty. More than 2.2 million children and adolescents are affected. In contrast, the poverty rate among adults is 17.8%, highlighting a difference of 10.6 percentage points between poverty among children and poverty among the adult population.

However, for the first time in several years, in 2025, some indicators of child poverty have shown some improvement since 2024. The child poverty rate has declined by 0.9 percentage points. Severe poverty currently affects 12.5% of children, representing a decrease of 1.6 percentage points. In 2025, severe material deprivation affected 12.5% of children. Following two consecutive years at record-high levels, this indicator has fallen by 1.6 percentage points.

Despite the overall improvement in child poverty indicators, the situation has worsened for some of the most vulnerable groups. Among children living in single-parent households, the severe poverty rate has increased by 0.9 percentage points, reaching 22.3%, while the overall poverty rate for these households has risen by 1 percentage point, to 43.4%

Children and adolescents with parents who are foreign nationals remain disproportionately affected by poverty. In 2025, 61.7% were living in income poverty, 1.1 percentage points higher than the previous year. Roma children and children with disabilities are also disproportionately affected by poverty.

The Investment Gap

In 2025, social transfers reduced the child poverty rate by 6.6 percentage points. In 2024, the reduction was greater, at 7.4 percentage points.

However, only 9.4% of households with children received some form of social support. Of these households, 24.8% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This represents a decline in coverage compared with previous years, when social support reached around 28% of families at risk.

The European Child Guarantee

One of the main challenges identified in the implementation of the *European Child Guarantee* is ensuring that programmes effectively reach the most vulnerable children living in poverty. More targeted interventions and more tailored projects are crucial for improving the impact of the Child Guarantee and maximising the effectiveness of public investment.

The Child Guarantee includes an estimated investment of €1 billion, financed through various European funds. These include the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), providing approximately €560 million over seven years, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are eligible to apply.

Funding for Spain's Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan, from the Next Generation EU package, while not directly linked to the Child Guarantee, provides an estimated investment of €3.115 billion. In this case, NGOs can also access funds, but only by responding to competitive public calls or public tenders for timebound projects focused on digital transformation, infrastructure modernisation, and social innovation.

Coordinadora Estatal de Plataformas Sociales Salesianas

Poverty Data

In Spain, children are persistently at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to the population as a whole. According to a 2025 survey on living conditions, by Spain's Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 33.9% of children under the age of 16 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 25.7% of the total population. Plataforma de Infancia estimates that 33.2% of children and adolescents under the age of 18 (around 2.6 million) are living in this situation. This limits their access to adequate housing, healthy food, educational opportunities and safe and stable environments.

According to Plataforma de Infancia, child poverty is particularly concentrated among children and adolescents living in single-parent households, in large families and in households with a migrant background.

The rate of those at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) stands at 50.8% in single-parent households, 68.2% in families with more than three children, and 67.5% among children with parents of foreign origin. Based on the experience of the Salesian Social Platforms, this vulnerability is exacerbated by other factors including unstable housing, precarious employment, migration processes, residential care and educational exclusion.

Measures to tackle child poverty are funded through national, regional and local budgets, alongside European funds, particularly through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) *Social Inclusion, Child Guarantee and Fight Against Poverty* programme. It is a national multiregional programme co-financed by the European Union (EU). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can access part of this funding through public calls for proposals and intermediary bodies, but this entails co-financing, fulfilling technical requirements and managing significant administrative burdens.

The Investment Gap

There is insufficient funding for child support, and low coverage. Although the Child Support Supplement *(CAPI)* is key, the Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility (AIReF) estimates that in 2024 55% of households entitled to the minimum income scheme did not apply for it, and that the non-take-up rate for the *CAPI* stands at 72%. Furthermore, the amounts paid (between €57.50 and €115 per month per child in 2026) are insufficient to cover the actual cost of raising a child. This reduces the system's capacity to prevent hardship, excludes families entitled to support and places pressure on social services and NGOs.

Current levels of investment do not appear to be sufficient. The persistence of high rates of child poverty and the high non-take-up of the national minimum income scheme and of child support show that these measures are falling short and not reaching all those who need them.

The European Child Guarantee

In Spain, the *European Child Guarantee* is implemented through the 2022–2030 *National Action Plan*, which aims to guarantee six basic rights: education and care, education and out-of-school activities, one healthy meal per school day, healthcare, adequate housing and a healthy diet. It has driven progress in areas such as new places in early years education, school canteens, oral health, mental health and deinstitutionalisation. However, its impact continues to be constrained by regional inequalities and by financial support that does not

reach all families. To strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee it is necessary to streamline and extend the CAPI so that every child or young person living below the poverty line can access it without having to go through complex procedures.

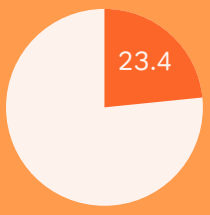
Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

CaixaProinfancia is a long-standing programme of the "la Caixa" Foundation. It is delivered through networks of social organisations in coordination with local public services, providing personalised pathways for children and families living in poverty. It does not replace public income support, but combines indirect material and financial support (food, hygiene materials and school supplies) with social support, educational support, leisure activities, family support, health promotion and psychotherapeutic care. Separately, *+Infancia* is an ESF+ co-funded initiative managed by the "la Caixa" Foundation as an intermediate body under Spain's ESF+ *Social Inclusion, Child Guarantee and Fight Against Poverty* programme. Both initiatives depend on multiannual funding and stable partnerships with social organisations, such as the Salesian Social Platforms, a network of social organisations run by the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Salesian Sisters in Spain.



Country Profile 2026

Sweden



Child Poverty
23.4% (2025)
▲ +2.5 percentage points
compared to 2024

Bris - Barnens rätt i samhället

Poverty Data

The economic downturn of recent years, with high unemployment and rising electricity and food prices, has worsened the financial situation of many families with children. Those with the lowest incomes are the hardest hit. Bris has seen the effects of economic vulnerability on children.
According to Save the Children's estimates, approximately 276,000 children (nearly 13%) live in situations of economic vulnerability in Sweden, which is more than earlier estimates. This figure is based on an updated methodology that takes into account the actual costs faced by families with children.

Economic vulnerability among children declined between 2019 and 2022, but increased again in 2023, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of all children, due to inflation, rising living costs, and declining real wages. Previous calculations from SCB Statistics Sweden were based on the national standard for social assistance and did not fully account for the substantial increases in expenses for food, housing, and leisure activities. As a result, many children experiencing economic hardship were not reflected in the statistics.

The Swedish statistics agency has official data on children and their families. However, the agency and Save the Children Sweden use different approaches to measuring child poverty, despite relying on the same statistics on household incomes, thus, getting different results.

The new measure used by Save the Children Sweden, which is based on current consumer prices, therefore provides a more accurate and equitable picture of the economic reality faced by families with children in Sweden today.

Child poverty is addressed primarily through the financing for the objectives of the *European Child Guarantee*, within national and municipal budgets - including publicly funded and free-of-charge services such as education, healthcare, and social services – and through financial support schemes and social benefits. However, given the current proposed changes to the social benefits system, access to these essential services is likely to be significantly reduced in the future. Bris is calling for stronger national leadership and systematic monitoring of child poverty, rather than changes to existing welfare systems.

The European Union (EU) funding that is available complements broader national welfare investments. One example is the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which includes a programme specifically aimed at reducing child poverty. Reducing the risk of economic vulnerability is one of its specific objectives, and a significant part of this is aimed at preventing and minimising the risk of child poverty. This includes support measures targeting individuals who are economically vulnerable within the definition of relative poverty. The objective is to create incentives for economically disadvantaged individuals to increase their self-sufficiency. For children, the support is directed towards creating the conditions for meaningful leisure activities and a secure educational environment. These measures, in turn, promote social inclusion and participation while also reducing the risk of school drop-out.

However, a key limitation of this funding is its temporary nature. The programme's duration is limited, so it represents a comparatively minor contribution in relation to overall national expenditure.

The Investment Gap

While economic vulnerability is increasing, the previous government in Sweden proposed a reform of the social benefits system, which is due to enter into force on 1 January 2027.[1] Under the current proposals, fewer families arriving in Sweden (from 1 January 2027) will gain access to social assistance such as child support and housing allowance. The proposal includes qualification requirements to get social benefits from 2027[2], a benefit cap, and restrictions on access to child support starting from the fourth child. For some of these families, the child-related components are significantly reduced, by 75% for cohabiting couples and 40% for single parents.

Research shows that these proposed changes risk contravening a child rights-based approach, and may lead to increased poverty, segregation, and social problems. The reform is described as a paradigm shift aimed at increasing incentives to work, but in practice it risks having a disproportionate effect on the children who are already the most vulnerable.

The proposal of a benefit cap and the stricter national standard mentioned above also imply a shift in how social assistance is viewed. Previously, the system was based on individual needs and allowed municipalities some flexibility. With this reform, the focus would shift toward state control and incentives, which may limit municipalities' ability to adapt support to children's actual needs and thereby make it more difficult for social services to ensure adequate living conditions for children.

The European Child Guarantee

In Sweden, the *European Child Guarantee* is largely implemented through existing welfare structures, but Bris sees a need for clearer national leadership and more systematic follow-up. To strengthen implementation, the government should develop a national, standardised model for measuring and monitoring child poverty and economic vulnerability over time. Such a model would enable more targeted interventions and provide a better basis for policy priorities.

Bris is also calling for the introduction of a child rights-based budgeting process, where child rights impact assessments are systematically conducted to evaluate how the state budget affects children and their ability to fulfil their rights. Such an approach would strengthen transparency, ensure that children's rights are considered in economic decisions, and help Sweden meet the ambitions of the *European Child Guarantee*.

1 *Elections were held in Sweden on 13 September 2026. At the time of writing, no new government had been formed.*

2 *For individuals who settle in Sweden from 2027 onwards, eligibility will generally require either having been resident in Sweden for a total of five years within a fifteen-year period, or qualifying through employment. The employment-based pathway requires a sufficiently high income from work for either six consecutive months or twelve months within a two-year period.*

Erikshjälpen - ERIKS Development Partner

Poverty Data

The latest data from SCB Statistics Sweden on the number of children living in low-income families shows that there has been a decrease from 10% in 2014 to 6% in 2024. This means that in 2024 there were approximately 130,000 children living in low-income families.

The typical threshold income for single parents with one three-year-old child is SEK17,240 per month, and SEK27,294 per month for a couple with two children aged three to six.

A 2025 report by Save the Children, on child poverty, takes into account low income, social assistance (welfare support) and updated calculations of the real cost of living and children's needs.

Save the Children criticises SCB's approach to measuring child poverty as it is based on an outdated measure of income, from 2017. Instead, Save the Children has used the Swedish Consumer Agency's yearly calculations of household costs to make adjustments for the actual cost of living, and this reveals a very different picture. By this measure, the number of children living in economic vulnerability was 276,000 in 2023, approximately one in eight, and between 2022 and 2023 the number increased by 17,000 children.

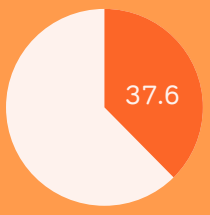
According to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency *(Försäkringskassan)* single mothers face the highest levels of economic vulnerability, especially those with several children. In 2024 approximately 22% were on low incomes. However, according to Save the Children's calculations 39.3% of single mothers faced economic vulnerability.





Country Profile 2026

Türkiye



Child Poverty
37.6% (2025)
▼ −1.9 percentage points
compared to 2024

Association for Social Development and Aid Mobilisation

Poverty Data

The latest data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) from 2025 (published in 2026) shows that 36.8% of children aged 0–17 in Türkiye are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 27.9% of the total population, making children the most vulnerable age group. The rate is slightly higher for girls (37.8%) than for boys (36%). UNICEF Türkiye also reports that more than 30% of children experience monetary poverty, increasing the risk of child labour and limiting access to education, healthcare, adequate nutrition, and protection services. These findings highlight the need for stronger child-centred social protection systems to ensure equal opportunities for all children.

Refugee children are also among the most vulnerable, facing higher risks of poverty, social exclusion, and limited access to essential services due to socio-economic disadvantages. It can be said that girls and refugee children, in particular, are disproportionately affected by poverty in Türkiye.

Measures to address child poverty are funded primarily through the national budget, with additional funding from the European Union (EU) Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and international organisations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and the World Bank, particularly for support to refugee and vulnerable children.

The Investment Gap

Declining international humanitarian funding has significantly affected refugee children in Türkiye. According to UNICEF's 2025 *Humanitarian Action for Children* appeal, funding shortfalls have reduced the scale of education, child protection, cash assistance, and mental health services for refugee children, particularly children affected by the 2023 earthquakes. As a result, many refugee children face increased risks of school drop-out, child labour, poverty, and limited access to essential services, further deepening social exclusion.

In addition, early childhood education and care (ECEC) remains an underfunded policy area in Türkiye and is not part of compulsory education. Although pre-primary education has expanded, access to affordable, high-quality ECEC remains limited, particularly for low-income families and refugees. This limits children's early learning opportunities, reduces mothers' labour market participation, and contributes to persistent child poverty.

Current funding is insufficient to meet growing needs. Declining humanitarian funding has reduced education, child protection, and cash assistance programmes for refugee children, while inequality in access to services persists.

The European Child Guarantee

Although Türkiye is not an EU Member State, it has started implementing the Child Guarantee framework as part of its EU accession and policy alignment process. Türkiye has appointed a national Child Guarantee Contact Point and is working on a national action plan to pursue its objectives through national social assistance, education, healthcare, and child protection policies, supported in part by EU and international programmes.

Improved inter-institutional coordination and the equitable allocation of public resources and child-focused services would strengthen these efforts. Stronger collaboration between national and local authorities and civil society would help ensure that all children have equal access to quality education,

healthcare, ECEC and social protection, reducing regional and socio-economic inequalities and ensuring that no child is left behind.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

A good example of an integrated approach in Türkiye is the *Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE)* programme. This links income support with education and child protection by providing cash transfers to low-income families, conditional on school attendance. For refugee children, it also offers outreach and referral services to help them stay in school and access essential social services. The programme is implemented by the government of Türkiye in partnership with UNICEF, the Turkish Red Crescent, and other stakeholders. It is funded by the government of Türkiye, while the refugee component has been supported by the EU, Norway, and the United States. Its sustainability is ensured through its integration into Türkiye's national social protection system.

Hayat Sende

Poverty Data

According to 2025 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute, 36.8% of the child population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared to 27.9% of Türkiye's overall population. The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 36% for boys and 37.8% for girls. These figures show that children, particularly girls, face a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than the general population.

Children living in families with low levels of education are among the most affected by poverty. According to TÜİK, the poverty rate was 23.8% among people with no formal education, compared with only 2.5% among university graduates. This suggests that children whose parents have limited education and fewer employment opportunities face a particularly high risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The Investment Gap

The provision of free school meals is an underfunded policy area in Türkiye. In 2023, the Ministry of National Education introduced a programme to provide one free meal per day, five days a week, to all children attending public pre-primary institutions. However, this support is still mainly limited to specific groups, such as children who are living in settlements without local access to schooling and who are transported to designated schools. It does not operate as a universal programme for all children. This limited coverage affects children from low-income families in particular, reducing their access to adequate nutrition and equal participation in education.

In Türkiye, measures to address child poverty are financed primarily through the national budget, while European Union (EU) programmes provide complementary support in areas such as education, social inclusion and assistance for refugee populations. For example, the EU has supported the *Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE)* programme, which has helped improve school attendance among refugee children.

Despite these efforts, existing funding remains insufficient to address the scale of child poverty. With 36.8% of children in Türkiye at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025, there is a continued need for increased and sustainable investment in child-focused social protection and support services.

The OECD has also recommended expanding direct cash benefits for children in low-income households and strengthening social protection in Türkiye.

Civil society organisations are eligible to apply for a range of EU funds, including the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), subject to eligibility requirements and the priorities of individual funding calls. However, access to funding remains project based and competitive, which may limit the long-term sustainability of interventions led by non-governmental organisations.

The European Child Guarantee

In Türkiye, the *European Child Guarantee* is still at an early stage of implementation. Türkiye has appointed a national contact point and is developing a national action plan to improve vulnerable children's access to education, healthcare, adequate nutrition, housing and social services.

Introducing a legally guaranteed, free and healthy school meal for every child in public education would significantly strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee. This would directly support

children's nutrition, school participation and equality, especially for those from low-income families.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

An example of an integrated approach to social support in Türkiye is the *Social and Economic Support Programme*, implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services. The programme provides regular financial assistance to families with children who are at risk of entering alternative care due to economic hardship, with the aim of enabling children to remain safely within their families whenever possible.

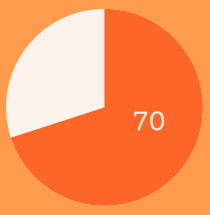
Beyond income support, the programme is supposed to be integrated with child protection and social work services. Families are supposed to be assessed by social workers, should receive regular monitoring and counselling, and be referred to additional services such as education, healthcare, psycho-social support and other social assistance programmes, where needed. For now, however, the programme provides mainly financial support.

The programme is financed through the national budget and forms part of Türkiye's permanent social protection and child protection system, supporting its long-term sustainability. According to the Ministry of Family and Social Services, 182,997 children had benefited from the *Social and Economic Support Programme* by the end of 2025, demonstrating its nationwide reach.



Country Profile 2026

Ukraine



Children experiencing material deprivation
70% (2025)
No comparison available

Polina Klykova - Individual member

Poverty Data

Around 70% of children (approximately 3.5 million) experience material deprivation, compared with around 18% in 2021.

Housing costs are a significant driver of poverty, especially for those who are internally displaced. Among those who moved to another region after 24 February 2022, 65% rent their accommodation, and 44% of renters spend more than half of their income on rent and utilities.

However, this data does not include families whose households were destroyed by the Russian army. According to the KSE Institute, as of May 2023 8.6% of Ukraine's entire housing stock was damaged by war. This assessment is now three years old, and the destruction has continued since then. 847 apartment buildings in Kyiv alone were damaged during the first five months of 2026 - more than in 2022, 2023 and 2024 combined.

Access to education and healthcare is constrained by the war, which has led to the migration and military mobilisation of healthcare workers, to damage to schools, disrupted energy and water supplies that limits both classroom and distance learning, and the mining of areas previously used for recreation and play.

There is a tendency to identify the most affected children primarily through traditional categories of vulnerability (e.g. children with disabilities or Roma children), and these children may indeed face additional barriers. However, the war has created risks for an entire generation of children in Ukraine. The loss of education, barriers to healthcare, and unstable housing have profound effects on their lives today and on their future opportunities.

The Investment Gap

Ukraine's minimum subsistence level and living standards are outdated. Current standards are based on sets of goods and services from 2016 and were outdated even 10 years ago. For example, for a child aged 6-18, these provide for one dress and one pair of trousers for two years and include a landline telephone, but no internet access.
In 2026, the statutory subsistence minimum is UAH 2,817 per month (approximately €55) for a child under six, and UAH 3,512 (approximately €69) for a child aged 6-18.

These calculations continue to determine the amount of social support available to families in need, and are significantly below the actual prices for necessary goods and services.

Child poverty cannot be addressed through cash benefits alone, where families lack access to services. Only 2.1% of municipalities provide the full minimum package of social services for children, while 58.6% provide only one or two services. The largest deficits are in services for children with disabilities, early intervention and support for families in crisis. However, even this data only indicates nominal availability, not actual accessibility or quality of services.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

eYasla is a state-run programme that connects childcare support with parents' participation in the labour market. The programme provides a childcare allowance of UAH 8,000 per month for children aged one to three, paid to a mother or another legal guardian who has been caring for the child and

returns to full-time work. In 2026, the allowance is UAH 12,000 per month for families caring for a child with a disability.

The allowance is intended to help cover eligible childcare costs, including nursery care and nanny services. The programme is also integrated into existing government systems: applications can be submitted through Diia, Ukraine's national digital public services platform, while eligibility assessments and payments are administered by the Pension Fund of Ukraine through the existing system of state support for families with children. Data from state information systems is used to verify eligibility.

However, it is too early to evaluate this programme as it has only operated since 2026.

A common challenge in Ukraine is that mothers often remain outside the labour market until their children reach the age of three. A prolonged break from employment following the birth of a child can weaken a parent's position in the labour market and contribute to lower family income over a longer period.



Ukrainian Education Platform

Poverty Data

Standard measures of income poverty are no longer able to give the full picture of Ukrainian children's lives. According to UNICEF, the percentage of children facing material deprivation (lack of food, clothes, heating, learning materials) has grown from 18% in 2021 to 70% (3.5 million children) in 2025. A third of children live in houses without a water supply or sewage system, and about half lack access to a safe place to play. Moreover, poverty levels among households with children grew from 43% in 2021 to 65% in 2023. The main challenge today is not only a lack of family income, but also cumulative deprivation caused by damage to infrastructure and services due to the war.

Children with multiple vulnerabilities are the most affected, including those living near the frontline, children with disabilities, those in institutions or foster care and displaced children. According to UNICEF, over a third of Ukraine's children (2,589.900) remain displaced in the fifth year of the war, including 791,000 who are internally displaced.

Half of all children are at high risk of distress, with displaced children, those near the frontline, children with disabilities, returnees and those in alternative care facing the greatest risks. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) therefore prioritise these groups. Overlapping vulnerabilities (displacement, poverty, loss of access to services) often lead to social exclusion. Support systems should assess children's needs holistically.

The Investment Gap

Local social services are underfunded. Although national spending on child and family support is ostensibly increasing, the state is shifting more financial responsibility to local budgets, while reducing their revenues (e.g. military personnel's personal income tax now goes to the state rather than local budgets). At the same time, funding for communities affected by hostilities is expected to fall by about 17% in 2026 compared to 2025, despite growing demand for psycho-social support, social workers and early intervention services. As a result, access to support increasingly depends on where children live and the financial capacity of their municipality rather than their actual needs, reinforcing war-driven inequalities.

Funding for child support initiatives combines state and local budgets with international aid. Following 2022, international donors enabled the rapid expansion of psycho-social support services. In January 2025, Ukraine's Cabinet approved a joint project with UNICEF providing grants of up to $60,000 for social services for families with children and early intervention services, creating opportunities for civil society organisations (CSOs) to become official community service providers. However, this remains a pilot project. Although CSOs can access international grants, their participation in state-funded social services is still limited and fragmented. Ensuring sustainability requires expanding social contracting and long-term partnerships between the state and CSOs, instead of relying primarily on donors.

The European Child Guarantee

Despite the fact that Ukraine is not a member of the European Union (EU), on 24 July 2025 it became the first candidate country to officially announce a *European Child Guarantee*. In April 2026 the government of Ukraine approved the *National Plan of the European Child Guarantee*, to be implemented for every child by 2030. This makes

the Guarantee not just a declaration, but a policy initiative with specific tasks and a timeline. The EU is already supporting Ukraine's Better Care reform (focused on promoting alternative family-based care instead of institutional care).

For the Child Guarantee to be effective, sustainable local financing is needed, rather than relying on short-term grants or donor funding.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Local initiatives are a great example of combining financial support for families with comprehensive social support. Instead of just receiving financial aid, a family has access to a single contact point, such as a social worker or a psychologist, along with consultations on state benefits and documentation, psycho-social support for children and, if necessary, referrals to special services (medical, legal, or educational).

Such a model is usually funded by international donors and charity funds, not by the state. Local NGOs that provide this service have access to mentoring and organisational support, helping them to become stable, self-reliant service providers for communities. However, this initiative is only available in a few communities, confirming the need to transition to a national, sustainable and state-funded approach.

Partnership for Every Child (P4EC)

Poverty Data

In 2024, Ukraine published the results of a *National Sample Survey of the Socio-Economic Status of Households* (with information collected between December 2023 and February 2024), which did not include temporarily occupied territories. Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Household Living Conditions Survey was done regularly. Both surveys combined indicate an ongoing trend: children, especially in their early years, are at a disproportionately higher risk of poverty compared to adults, and the risk of deep poverty among families rises significantly after the birth of a child.

The 2023-2024 *National Sample Survey of the Socio-Economic Status of Households* indicated that 40.3% of children lived in income poverty[1], 40.1% lived in subjective poverty[2] and 70.4% lived in deprivation poverty.[3]

Several factors contribute to families' risk of income poverty. Income poverty affects 71.8% of families with several children (especially three or more); families living in small towns or villages (39.1% and 52.2% respectively); 51.8% of families with elderly people (over 75 years old); 51.4% of families with at least one unemployed member; 51.9% of families without higher education; 44% of single-parent households; and 41.9% of families with children under the age of three.

Deep deprivation affects 87% of families where all adults are elderly or are persons with disabilities; 78.3% of families with some members who are elderly or have a disability; 73.3% of families with people with disabilities; and 75.6% of families with internally displaced persons.

Due to the war, new vulnerability factors need to be taken into account: households affected by conflict (loss of family members, property, accommodation and access to services); households on de-occupied territories; and internally displaced households.

Also, several groups of children are 'invisible' in the surveys: children in institutions, children living on the street, imprisoned children, children who are living under occupation or who have been deported or evacuated, Roma children, and other children in especially difficult circumstances.

The Investment Gap

The government's cash support to poor households is not sufficient for overcoming poverty. Families in need require more comprehensive assistance, including services and employment support. Support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donors, and corporate social responsibility mechanisms should be coordinated to maximise outcomes. In addition, multiple vulnerability factors, which exacerbate the depth of poverty, need to be considered when providing support.

1 This refers to the share of children in families with a per capital equivalent income below the subsistence minimum.

2 This refers to the share of children in families reporting that they are not able to afford sufficient nutritious food or that they constantly deprive themselves of other necessary items apart from food.

3 This refers to the share of children who experience three or more kinds of deprivation out of 17 defined markers.

The European Child Guarantee

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted Decree No.1558 On the Introduction of the *European Child Guarantee* in Ukraine on 19 November 2025. This Decree approves the framework *National Plan of Implementation of the European Child Guarantee for the Period Until 2030*, and also establishes a National Coordinator for the Child Guarantee. A detailed action plan was approved by the Cabinet by Order No.320-p on 8 April 2026. A further decree clarified the obligations of national actors vis-à-vis the monitoring of the Child Guarantee.

The funding model for the *European Child Guarantee* envisions a combination of state funds and other sources.

Improving coordination between various programmes, creating a separate, integrated funding mechanism, and learning from positive results in European Union countries would strengthen the impact of the Child Guarantee.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

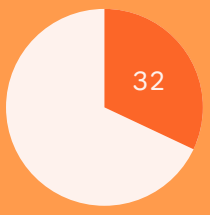
Income support and services are, as a rule, not directly linked. The new *SPIRIT* initiative by the World Bank, aimed at transforming Ukraine's social protection system, is meant to address this issue by ensuring a 'single window' approach and linking financial support with social services and employment through an integrated case management system.

Since 2022, all projects implemented by the Partnership for Every Child (P4EC) combine the provision of material support (cash assistance and assistance for non-food items such as water filtration systems, air conditioning units, power generators, power banks, furniture, orthopaedic and rehabilitation equipment) with the provision of services at community level. P4EC teams work with local providers to assess families' needs and ensure the provision of both material support and essential services.



Country Profile 2026

Wales



Child Poverty
32% (2025)
▲ +1.0 percentage points
compared to 2024

Children in Wales – Plant Yng Nghymru

Poverty Data

The latest three-year average data on relative income poverty, from the Welsh Government, shows that 32% of children are living in poverty, an increase of 2% on previous figures.

This is higher than the other three nations of the UK, with Wales having the highest number of children in poverty in any United Kingdom (UK) region outside of London.

In Wales, the children who are most affected by poverty and social exclusion include: children in large families and in single-parent families; children from some minority ethnic backgrounds; children with a disability or in families with a disabled adult; children in families with young children under five; children in working families and those on low pay; and children living in rented accommodation.

In Wales, many children and families living in rural areas are unable to access essential services and struggle with the increased cost of transport and low incomes. Many families lack or have poor digital connectivity, and will spend more on essential goods and services than families in urban communities.

Researchers increasingly argue that child poverty is driven by intersecting disadvantages rather than one single factor.

The Investment Gap

The UK Government's decision to abolish the two-child limit (which prevented parents from receiving any extra financial support through Universal Credit[1] or child tax credit for a third or subsequent child born after 6 April 2017), is welcome. However, the current social security system does not provide the necessary financial safety net for families. Benefit levels remain inadequate and broader reforms, with investment, are urgently needed.

The main elements of the social security system are largely reserved matters, so decisions about almost all welfare benefits are made by the UK rather than the Welsh Government.

The present social security system has not kept pace with the rise in the cost of living. Many families receiving the basic rate of income from benefits still experience material deprivation. Reductions in the value of working-age benefits has occurred alongside rising housing costs, low wages and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The benefit cap remains in place – this restricts the total amount of support a working-age household can receive from the social security system. Calls have been made for a protected minimum amount of support to be introduced below the current Universal Credit basic rate.

Good Practice in Integrated Approaches

Due to the complexity of the UK devolution settlement, with the main elements of the social security system being controlled by the UK Government and notable policy areas (such as education, health and family support) under the control of the Welsh Government, a 'gold standard' initiative which integrates income support with services is not easily recognised.

1 Universal Credit is a working-age benefit for those on a low income or not in work, to help households with living costs.

However, the Welsh Government is working towards a more coordinated Welsh benefits system which will help address concerns around fragmentation and low levels of take-up, making it easier for families to access a range of financial support to help with the cost of school meals, other school costs, housing costs, and to receive emergency grants.

The Welsh Government also delivers an early years *Flying Start* programme in disadvantaged areas, which provides a package of support for eligible families including childcare, enhanced health visiting support, parenting support and speech and language support. This programme helps to mitigate the impacts of child poverty while also helping parents to maximise their income.





Eurochild
Child Participation





Introduction

Eurochild believes that children are experts in their own lives and works to embed their direct involvement across the organisation. Eurochild involves children in advocacy, projects and governance through three main structures: the Eurochild Children's Council, National Eurochild Forums and the NOVA Council (Network of Online Visionaries in Action). Through these structures, Eurochild creates spaces for children to meet decision-makers and express their views at national and European Union (EU) level, contribute to governance and event organisation, and help develop accessible documents for children. The aim is to create meaningful dialogue between children and decision-makers, enabling children to influence decisions that affect their lives.

The **Eurochild Children's Council (ECC)**, established in 2017, brings together 12 children from different European countries between the ages of 10 and 17, for a two-year mandate. The Council's members contribute directly to Eurochild's events and activities, take part in decision-making within the NGO's internal structure, and advocate on children's rights. Eurochild's 2026 Conference in Cyprus marked the end of the 2024-2026 ECC mandate. During their two years, members led work that included the creation of a child-friendly version of the European Commission's *Guidelines on Mental Health and Wellbeing at School*, engagement in a consultation on the Council of Europe's new strategy, and extensive activism and speaking on children's rights in the EU space. They also contributed to the selection of the next ECC cohort, whose mandate runs from 2026 to 2028.

National Eurochild Forums (NEFs), created in 2019 and currently active in six countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Malta, Ukraine and Wales), aim to ensure that children living in vulnerable circumstances are able to participate in a more accessible way and in their mother tongue. Each NEF brings together 15-25 children aged 10-18 who work together in their national contexts to gather and explore children's views at local level, with the aim of influencing national and EU decision-makers.

Eurochild also carries out thematic consultations with its NEFs on issues such as child poverty, mental health and meaningful child participation, seen most recently in the *Our Voices Matter* report, which consulted 128 children across five NEFs on what meaningful participation means to them. The report highlighted how important it is to include children in decisions that shape their everyday lives, rather than consulting them occasionally. It showed how much trust can be damaged when participation is done poorly, and how valued and meaningful it can be when it is done well. Children were clear that they are not asking adults to agree with every idea, but want honesty, transparency and a real impact from their participation.

The **NOVA Council (Network of Online Visionaries in Action)** is a council of eight children aged 12 to 17, focusing specifically on digital rights of the child. Please see the following page to read more about the NOVA and their work.

Together, these three structures reflect Eurochild's ultimate goal for child participation: children should never be spoken for, but should be included as equal partners, whether through a central child participation body like the ECC, raising national concerns through NEFs, or advocating for children's rights online through the NOVA.

The Eurochild Network of Online Visionaries in Action (NOVA)

Established in April 2025, Eurochild's NOVA Council brings together eight children aged 12 to 17 from six European countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, and Romania) who want to make the digital environment a safer place for children. Over a two-year mandate, NOVA members share their insights directly and indirectly with representatives of EU institutions, shaping the rules that affect children's lives in the digital world. For example, the NOVA Council shaped Eurochild's position on age restrictions on social media, which allowed Eurochild to engage in the debate, including through the Special Panel to advise European Commission President von der Leyen on child online safety.

Eurochild asked NOVA members what they would like to share in this flagship report.
Here, in their own words, they share what they want you, the reader, to reflect on. →

“It is undeniable - if you want to do something right, you should consult experts and the people affected. When talking about children's rights online, Eurochild’s NOVA Council is the perfect place to look for opinions.”
(Denis, 18, Bulgaria)

“Being part of NOVA has shown me that children’s voices matter. Every child deserves to be safe and included online, and we should be involved in decisions that affect our digital lives.”
(Elena, 14, Malta)

“Our experience of the digital world looks completely differently across countries. It is important to represent diverse perspectives on EU policies rather than simply accept them as children.
Innovation and rights both depend on meaningful participation.”
(Lili, 16, Hungary)

“I don’t think we should ban older children from social media, as it’s often a source of community for them. Safety is important though, and I agree that platforms should implement more policies around that.”
(Tom, 14, Ireland)

"Children should be able to browse freely in a safe environment, protected from judgement, and have the right tools and support to navigate the digital space confidently and effectively.”
(Jake, 14, Malta)

“Online laws should grant us safe freedom to explore, not just limit our choices. True protection means giving youth the tools to thrive safely, rather than shutting doors. To innovate and protect rights, we must listen to diverse voices. Inclusion fuels justice.”
(Maya, 17, Romania)

"NOVA has given me an opportunity to voice what matters to me. I feel strongly about children's safety online and this gives me a meaningful way to express that. This is why child participation matters.”
(Ruth, 16, Ireland)

Safety settings should be more accessible, they are hard to find sometimes, when you start to use an app you should be introduced to the safety concerns with the app and safety settings for safer internet browsing."
(Mihael, 14, Croatia)



2026 Eurochild Conference Report: Child Protection Systems



Introduction

Eurochild held its Conference on Child Protection Systems on 16–17 June 2026 in Paphos, Cyprus, bringing together more than 160 participants from 31 countries. Organised in partnership with Eurochild member the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC), and The Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the conference brought together representatives from European, national and international institutions, children and young people, civil society and academia.

This report brings together the reflections and outcomes from the workshops and Human Library sessions led by Eurochild members and invited guests. It captures the key discussions, experiences and learning shared during these sessions, highlighting different perspectives and practical approaches to strengthening child protection systems.

About the Conference

The conference considered child protection from a systemic perspective, with a particular focus on prevention, inclusion, coordination and children's rights. Participants recognised that effective protection requires more than responses to individual cases of harm. It also depends on the wider systems, services and relationships that support children and families.
Against a backdrop of persistent inequality, poverty, conflict and social and political pressures, participants explored how child protection systems can be strengthened and how different actors can contribute to more coherent child-centred approaches.

The programme combined policy discussions with perspectives from experts and practitioners, as well as from children themselves, and provided opportunities for direct exchange. Plenary and panel sessions were complemented by workshops, the Human Library and child-led contributions. Together, these explored issues including care reform and deinstitutionalisation, guardianship, social protection, access to justice, participation, disability and mental health, and online safety.

Meaningful child participation and collaboration were recurring themes throughout the conference. Participants highlighted the importance of connecting policy development with practice and children's lived experiences, and of bringing together the expertise and responsibilities of children and families, public authorities, professionals, civil society organisations and policymakers. Trust, communication and shared responsibility were identified as important foundations for more coordinated and effective child protection systems.

Child Participation

Children's participation was integrated throughout the programme. Members of the Eurochild Children's Council contributed as facilitators and moderators, including in sessions on children's experiences of the digital environment and the development of child-friendly materials. They also co-moderated the closing panel, creating direct dialogue between children and representatives of European and national institutions. Members of the Cyprus Children's Parliament also contributed to the wider programme.

The presentation of Eurochild's report *Our voices matter* further reinforced this focus. Drawing on consultations with 128 children in five countries, the report examines children's experiences of participation in decision-making processes. It provides a basis for considering how policies, services, and child protection systems can meaningfully incorporate children's views, including those of children with additional needs or from less privileged backgrounds.

Workshops

The workshops provided an opportunity to explore specific aspects of child protection in greater depth and to exchange practical approaches from across Europe. Topics included family- and community-based

care, deinstitutionalisation, guardianship, social protection and poverty prevention, as well as access to justice, online safety and child participation. The sessions used a range of participatory methods, supporting discussion and peer exchange alongside the presentation of practical experiences.

Human Library

The Human Library provided a dedicated space for dialogue and the exchange of personal stories and professional experience. Over three 30-minute sessions, participants could choose from 15 stories covering a wide range of experiences related to social protection. The sessions addressed issues including family separation, poverty, violence against children, disability, adoption and the right to origins, children's participation, and the role of civil society and European institutions in strengthening children's rights. The format encouraged direct conversations in small groups rather than formal presentations, allowing participants to engage with different perspectives, ask questions and reflect on experiences that are not always captured in policy or professional discussions.

Members' reflections

Following the conference, Eurochild members reflected on the themes and experiences shared during the event. These contributions provide further insight into participation, collaboration and child-centred practice, and highlight the value of cross-country exchange and cooperation among civil society organisations. Among these contributions, Pelopidas Nikolopoulos reflects on meaningful participation and collaboration, highlighting the active role of children throughout the conference, the value of learning across countries and the importance of cooperation among civil society organisations. His reflection also shows how the programme's different elements created opportunities for learning, dialogue and professional exchange.

What participants said

The comments below reflect feedback collected from conference participants and have been lightly edited for clarity and length.

One of the strongest aspects of the conference was the meaningful participation of children and young people. They were not simply present, but they actively contributed, led sessions and shared their perspectives alongside adults.

It was inspiring to see children and young people participating so confidently alongside professionals and policymakers. Their perspectives brought authenticity and a different dimension to the conversations.

The conference addressed highly relevant and timely issues around child protection systems, bringing together perspectives from different countries, sectors and areas of expertise.

The focus on prevention and early intervention was particularly valuable. It encouraged us to see child protection not only as a response to a crisis, but also as a way of supporting children and families earlier and preventing difficulties from escalating.

The diversity of perspectives made the content especially enriching. Hearing from children and young people alongside practitioners, researchers, policymakers and civil society created a much broader understanding of the challenges and possible solutions.

The variety of formats, including the workshops, Human Library and child-led activities, made the programme dynamic and created different ways for participants to engage with the topics and with one another.

The conference created an excellent environment for networking and exchange. Participants had real opportunities to meet colleagues from across Europe, share experiences and build connections for future collaboration.

“What made this conference particularly meaningful was seeing children and young people participate fully and contribute on an equal basis with adults. It demonstrated that, when given the space and opportunity, children can make a real contribution to shaping stronger child protection systems. The conference also created valuable opportunities for networking, exchange and collaboration across Europe.”

Ninetta Kazantzis, President of Eurochild Member Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children

Europe-wide



Our digital world - how the online space is perceived through a children's lens

Eurochild Children's Council WORKSHOP

Children want the digital environment to be built with them - through safer platform design, honest conversations at home and at school, and regulation that holds companies accountable rather than a focus on simply limiting children's access.

Effective digital safety policy must combine platform-level accountability (age-appropriate design and meaningful penalties for non-compliance) with interpersonal support (trained teachers and professionals working with children, judgement-free family conversations, children helping children through peer support helplines) - because no single measure can protect children online alone.

Eurochild's child-led workshop brought together children and adults to explore how children experience the online world. It considered issues such as screen time, social media bans, and addiction. The Eurochild Children's Council designed and facilitated every activity, ensuring that children's voices were prioritised, while adults also participated fully. Sessions included an interactive discussion on social media access for children, small group discussions on the topics of grooming and online addiction, and a closing exercise where mixed tables of children and adults drafted recommendations for social media platforms, European Union (EU) institutions, governments, schools, families, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Several key recommendations emerged from the workshop, drafted by children and adults working together:

National governments and EU institutions should ensure stronger enforcement of existing rules (e.g. the Digital Services Act) and improved digital citizenship education from an early age. There should also be increased funding for mental health support and for helplines, stronger penalties for non-compliance, incentives for age-appropriate content, and more ambitious legislation with reduced influence of online platforms over policymakers.

Social media companies should ensure safer-by-default platform design, reducing or removing features that encourage compulsive use, such as infinite scrolling and engagement-maximising recommender systems, meaningful user control over feeds, and age-appropriate privacy and safety settings.

Society, including families, should have open, judgement-free conversations about online life, with parents and guardians encouraged to educate themselves about the platforms used by their children.

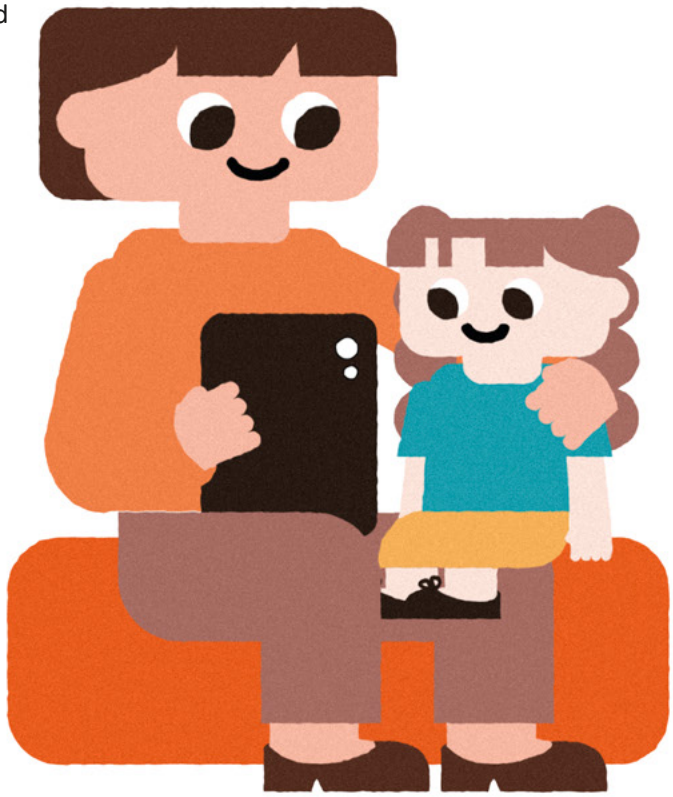
Schools should provide training for teachers, online safety education, and accessible mental health support services.

NGOs should carry out evidence-based advocacy through research and surveys.

Children in one discussion group recommended **peer-to-peer support models** ('children helping children') - services where children can seek support from trained peers who are equipped to listen, provide information and signpost them to appropriate adult or professional support when needed. This would complement, rather than replace, support from trusted adults and professionals.

One of the most valuable aspects of the workshop was the depth of the conversations that were generated by having both children and adults at each table. Adults were often surprised at children's perspectives and contributions, which sometimes were not what they expected. Participants noted that the session had challenged their assumptions and allowed complex, at times intense, conversations, and that they learnt a lot precisely because it was led by the children themselves.

This demonstrates the importance of child participation itself: these exchanges were made possible by the session's format, which deliberately brought both groups together as equals, rather than adults speaking on children's behalf or children being consulted separately. Children and their voices are the key to meaningful understanding and meaningful change.



Europe-wide

GUIDE: Stories of Guardianships

Eurochild WORKSHOP

The workshop organised by Iasis and Fundacja Imago introduced the *GUIDE (Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children)* project and its work to strengthen guardianship systems for unaccompanied children across Europe. The project focuses on assisting guardians of children with disabilities and those at risk of developmental delays in five countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Slovakia, Italy and Poland. It also supports children from Ukraine and those who have been evacuated from institutional care in Ukraine.

Iasis and Fundacja Imago presented the project's objectives, key activities and main results, including the training programme for guardians, peer support activities, Listening Circles (facilitated peer discussions as a safe space for guardians) and the European policy recommendations developed through the project.

The workshop brought together experiences from several *GUIDE* partner countries. The Polish contribution presented the real story of Daria, a young girl who fled the war in Ukraine, and her guardian Oksana. Their story demonstrates how meaningful guardianship can support a child's recovery, education and long-term well-being after forced displacement.

The workshop also included reflections from *GUIDE* Listening Circle facilitators from Greece, Italy and Poland. They shared their experiences of working with guardians, discussed the challenges they face in different national systems, and explained how Listening Circles provide a safe space for peer support, reflection and professional learning.

In the second part of the workshop, participants took part in a simulated Listening Circle. Together, they discussed the protection of unaccompanied children across Europe, with a particular focus on Greece, Cyprus and Poland.

Participants were also introduced to the practical resources developed within the *GUIDE* project, including the *Guardianship Manual*, the *Listening Circles Facilitator Guide* and training materials. These resources can support organisations and professionals working with unaccompanied children.

The workshop concluded with the presentation of *GUIDE*'s recommendations for strengthening guardianship systems in Europe.

The recommendations call for:

- sustainable investment in guardianship services;
- continuous training and professional support for guardians;
- faster appointment procedures;
- stronger cooperation between child protection, migration, education and health services;
- child-centred and inclusive practices;
- better coordination and information sharing;
- improved data collection;
- greater awareness of the important role guardians play in protecting unaccompanied children.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on how policy and practice can work together to strengthen guardianship systems.

One of the most significant insights that emerged from the workshop was that guardianship is much more than a legal responsibility. Participants agreed that children need trusted adults who provide stability, emotional safety and hope, while guardians themselves need continuous training, peer support and opportunities to reflect on their practice. The simulated Listening Circle also showed that, although child protection systems differ across Europe, professionals face many of the same challenges. Sharing experiences across countries helped participants identify common priorities and practical solutions.

A key message from the workshop was that strong child protection systems are built on strong relationships. By investing in guardians, listening to children's voices and improving cooperation between services, we can better protect unaccompanied children and help them build safe and hopeful futures.

Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Kosovo and Moldova

From Basic Needs to Holistic and Lasting Impact: Practical Pathways to Preventing Generational Poverty

CONCORDIA Social Projects WORKSHOP

CONCORDIA's workshop *From Basic Needs to Holistic and Lasting Impact: Practical Pathways to Preventing Generational Poverty* explored how meaningful youth participation can strengthen child-centred social protection systems by moving beyond consultation towards genuine partnership with children and young people.

Drawing on CONCORDIA's experience across Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Kosovo and Moldova, participants reflected on how young people, particularly those growing up in vulnerable situations, can contribute to improving services, shaping policies and advocating for changes in their communities. The workshop demonstrated that participation is not an additional activity, but an essential element of effective social inclusion and systems change.

Children and young people should be recognised as partners in designing, delivering and evaluating the services and policies that affect them. Social protection systems become more effective, inclusive and responsive when they invest in meaningful participation.

A strong message from the workshop was that no single actor can ensure a child's well-being alone. Participants highlighted the collective responsibility of families, professionals, schools, communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), public authorities, policymakers and the media in creating opportunities and supportive environments in which children can thrive, alongside meaningful opportunities for children and young people to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Participants also reiterated that effective social protection depends on the availability, accessibility and sustainability of quality services throughout every stage of a child's life, and that investing in prevention, family support and community-based services not only improves children's well-being but also reduces the need for more intensive and costly interventions later. Participants concluded that effective social protection systems must combine strong prevention with high-quality protection and continuous support when children and families need it most.

Across different countries, participants identified remarkably similar challenges and priorities. The workshop reinforced CONCORDIA's advocacy messages, which call for addressing inter-generational child poverty at its root by securing reliable EU funding for prevention, embedding prevention structurally within the European Child Guarantee, and investing in the social workforce. These priorities are particularly relevant to the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) and the continued implementation of the European Child Guarantee. Discussions highlighted the need for sustained investment in integrated community-based prevention services, long-term and predictable financing for CSOs, stronger investment in the social workforce, and meaningful participation of children and young people in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies that affect them.

Bulgaria

Strengthening Families, Preventing Poverty: Advancing Integrated Child Protection Systems in Europe

Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University
WORKSHOP

Eurochild members and Bulgarian organisations co-led the workshop *Strengthening Families, Preventing Poverty: Advancing Integrated Child Protection Systems in Europe*, bringing together EU-level and national perspectives to explore how family strengthening and prevention can be placed at the heart of child and social protection systems. Contributions included a review from the Know-How Centre challenging the ways in which 'good practices' are currently identified and used to inform EU and national policy, using Bulgaria's second biennial Child Guarantee report as a cautionary case study.

The Bulgarian experience shows that most practices labelled 'good' in official reports are simply lists of routine activities whose actual effectiveness in preventing family separation has never been empirically tested. With the European Commission planning a compendium of 'good practices' in 2027 to guide national investment in children, there is a need for reliable data to ensure that future European funding supports effective practices and models that can address structural issues that threaten vulnerable families and communities, rather than relying simply on scale, budget size, or administrative survival as proxies for quality.

Participants recognised that without systematic evidence on mechanisms for change, on cost efficiency and on family participation, current reporting on national 'good practice' risks producing an inflated, uncritical inventory rather than a genuinely useful evidence base for scaling up reforms at EU level.

Eurochild
WORKSHOP

The workshop *Strengthening Families, Preventing Poverty: Advancing Integrated Child Protection Systems in Europe* brought together EU and national perspectives to explore how early intervention and family strengthening can be placed at the heart of child and social protection systems. Eurochild presented a European overview, focusing on a Tanya's Dream Fund project that aims to strengthen EU and national policy, funding and accountability frameworks to help Bulgaria prevent family separation and ensure children can grow up in supportive family environments. The workshop also featured concrete experiences from Bulgaria and discussions among participants from different countries. The European Child Guarantee, the EU's key instrument for tackling child poverty and social exclusion, provided the main policy framework for the discussions.

The workshop highlighted the need to shift from responding to families once difficulties have escalated, towards early intervention, integrated services and community-based support. Social protection systems should ensure not only that those services are available, but that children and families can actually access them.

Experiences from Bulgaria showed how financial, administrative and structural barriers - including inability to afford medicines, lack of documentation or address registration, inadequate housing and difficulties accessing healthcare - can prevent disadvantaged families from exercising their rights.

Three complementary perspectives, from Bulgaria, were presented:

1. independent monitoring and accountability of social protection systems through the National Network for Children's Report Card;

2. community-based prevention and outreach through the Trust for Social Achievement and the We Care Network;

3. the Know-How Centre's evidence-based approach to identifying and assessing 'good practice' in social protection systems.

Together, they demonstrated that effective social protection requires strong universal systems combined with targeted measures for children and families facing the greatest disadvantages.

One of the strongest insights was that children and families described as 'hard to reach' are often not inherently difficult to reach - rather, they are excluded by the way systems are designed.

Families may formally be entitled to healthcare, social assistance, early years education or other support, but remain unable to use these services because of administrative requirements, poverty, lack of documentation, transport or other barriers. The challenge for social protection systems is therefore not simply to create more services, but to identify and remove the barriers between formal entitlement and effective access.

In addition, participants highlighted the fact that referral systems on their own are not sufficient, and that effective integration of services is needed. While each service may respond to families' different needs, effective prevention and early intervention requires them to work together around the family, with a shared plan, clear responsibilities and follow-up.

Experiences from Bulgaria

The Bulgarian perspective demonstrated progress in deinstitutionalisation and community-based services, but also persistent challenges, including child poverty, regional inequalities, fragmented data and insufficient prevention, particularly affecting Roma children and children living in disadvantaged and rural communities.

The presentations highlighted four priorities: early intervention, including prenatal and early childhood support; removing practical barriers to accessing universal services; recognising community-based and Roma and pro-Roma organisations as structural partners; and strengthening independent monitoring and accountability.

The discussion also challenged simplistic definitions of 'good practice'. Successful practices should demonstrate effectiveness, sustainability, integrated responses to risks, cost-efficiency, attention to structural and material causes of vulnerability, and meaningful participation of children and families. Transferability should mean identifying the essential elements that can be adapted to another context rather than simply copying a project.

EU perspectives

From an EU perspective, the workshop highlighted the opportunity to strengthen the European Child Guarantee as a driver of systemic change. Monitoring should increasingly focus on whether investments reduce poverty and inequalities, improve well-being and strengthen families.

EU policies and funding should also encourage integrated approaches across social protection, health, education and housing, and promote meaningful participation of children, families and civil society in designing, implementing and evaluating policies.

Experiences from other countries

Participants from different countries exchanged experiences on community-based services, barriers to access, conditions for successful early intervention, and the role of national governments and the EU in scaling up effective practices. Discussions focused on three practical questions: What worked? Why did it work? What should governments, EU institutions or funders change?

The workshop concluded that there is no single model that can simply be replicated across countries. Successful approaches need to respond to national and local contexts while identifying common elements for success.

Workshop conclusions

Overall, the key message from the discussion was that social protection should be preventive rather than reactive, integrated rather than fragmented, accessible rather than merely formally available, and accountable for outcomes rather than activities.

The main conclusion from the workshop was that child and social protection systems should intervene before families reach crisis point, combining adequate material support with accessible and integrated services across health, education, housing and social protection. The success of the European Child Guarantee should not be measured primarily by activities and services delivered, but by a real decrease in child poverty and inequalities, by improved family resilience and real, tangible improvements in children's lives.

This reflects the workshop's central message that prevention should become an organising principle of child protection and that monitoring needs to shift from outputs towards outcomes for children.

"Integrated services remain essential. Children do not experience separate systems for health, education and social protection. Their lives require coordinated responses across all sectors."

– George Bogdanov, Executive Director, National Network of Children Bulgaria

Cyprus

Child Participation: Is it real?

Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC)

HUMAN LIBRARY

PCCPWC's Human Library session was based on the experience of the Cyprus Children's Parliament (CCP), bringing together former and current Child Parliamentarians to explain how meaningful child participation has developed over the years. Former Child Parliamentarians shared the story of the institution's establishment and development, and the contribution it has made to promoting children's rights.

Through dialogue and discussions with children, using easy-to-understand language and creating a platform for them to express their views freely and openly, PCCPWC ensures that any action taken benefits children, protects their rights and strengthens their connection with institutions and policymakers. The session was interactive, with opportunities for participants to pose questions, exchange ideas, and understand how this example of child participation operates.

The experience of the CCP demonstrates that children, when offered a structure to participate in, can provide significant inputs, contributing to inclusive, responsive and rights-based policies and services.

For social protection systems to be effective, they need to be developed with the meaningful participation of those for whom they are intended – in this case, children. Children possess first-hand knowledge of their struggles and challenges and are key in providing advice on how policies and services can better meet their needs. Social protection policies and services become more effective when children are seen as partners rather than mere recipients. Meaningful child participation plays a critical role in all stages of policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Listening to children, providing them with accessible information and facilitating open and inclusive discussions helps to ensure that measures actually meet their needs, uphold their rights and enhance the bond between children, institutions and policymakers.

England

Legal intervention to ensure access to justice for children and enforcing their rights

Children's Rights Alliance for England, part of Just for Kids Law

WORKSHOP

The main conclusion of the workshop *Legal intervention to ensure access to justice for children and enforcing their rights* was that children and young people's safeguarding and welfare needs were often misunderstood by government, placing children at risk of harm, neglect and abuse, and that access to justice would ensure that their welfare and best interests are safeguarded and enforced through effective use of the law and legal procedures.
The workshop highlighted the international differences in children and young people's access to justice, including the varying availability of legal aid systems, as well as the lack of access that children and young people have to justice, limiting the realisation of their rights.

Estonia

From Children's Voices to Action: Strengthening Trust in Child Protection Systems

Estonian Union for Child Welfare
WORKSHOP

The workshop *From Children's Voices to Action: Strengthening Trust in Child Protection Systems* was delivered as part of the *Child Participation Initiative for Child Protection Systems (CHIPS)*, a regional partnership between organisations from Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and Latvia, funded by the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

The workshop reflected this collaboration by bringing together research, practice and advocacy perspectives from across the region. Participants exchanged experiences from different national contexts and found that although child protection systems differ, the ethical dilemmas surrounding children's participation are remarkably similar.

Child participation should not be understood only as a legal obligation, but as a foundation for trust in child protection and broader social protection systems. The workshop demonstrated that meaningful participation requires professionals to navigate complex ethical dilemmas rather than simply overcome practical barriers, and that children's experiences can be translated into concrete advocacy actions and system-level improvements.

Across all discussion groups, participants agreed that meaningful participation is not achieved simply by asking for children's views. Instead, it requires transparent communication, trusting relationships between children and professionals, and clear explanations to children when their views cannot be acted on. Participants repeatedly emphasised that participation should be viewed as an investment rather than an additional burden, as early and meaningful consultation can improve decision-making and reduce repeated interventions across services.

During the workshop, participants developed short advocacy roadmaps, translating the key dilemmas and proposed solutions discussed in the groups into concrete actions for improving child participation in child protection systems. These roadmaps consistently highlighted the need for child-centred consultation methods, professional training, stronger feedback mechanisms for children, and cross-sector collaboration to embed participation into everyday practice.

Germany

Future Voices: Now it's our turn! Turning Children's Voices into Policy Action

Bertelsmann Stiftung
WORKSHOP

The workshop *Future Voices: Now it's our turn! Turning Children's Voices into Policy Action* presented the peer-to-peer conference model developed by Bertelsmann Stiftung together with its Young Experts Team. Through practical examples and insights from previous children's conferences, participants explored how meaningful child participation can be designed and implemented. The workshop demonstrated that, with appropriate methods and facilitation, even very young children, children who do not speak the local language, children who cannot yet read or write, and children with additional support needs can actively contribute their perspectives.

The session focused on how children's voices can be translated into concrete policy action. Bertelsmann Stiftung presented its current dissemination strategy, which includes the systematic involvement of local decision-makers in children's conferences and the development of a dashboard that will make children's recommendations visible. The aim is to strengthen policy-making based on evidence, by ensuring that children's voices become a consistent part of decision-making processes.

The discussions confirmed a shared challenge - while children's participation is increasingly embedded in practice, involving younger children in meaningful ways often requires tailored methods and facilitation.

Hungary

Listening to grassroots voices: 17 Stories of combating violence against children across Europe

Terre des hommes foundation Lausanne
HUMAN LIBRARY

Eurochild and Terre des hommes (Tdh) implemented a three-year sub-granting and capacity-building programmee, DAPHNE Child – Shaping Tomorrow's Child Protection Services with Children. The programme supported grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs) in nine countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain and Ukraine, to address violence against children and strengthen child protection systems. Meaningful child participation was at the heart of the programme, with each supported project incorporating children's views into the design and delivery of its activities. The learning and evidence generated through the programme will be shared with national and European decision-makers to inform efforts to develop more integrated, effective and child-centred child protection systems at European Union (EU) level.

The session during the Eurochild Conference - *Listening to Grassroots Voices: 17 Stories of Combating Violence Against Children Across Europe* - shared insights from 17 Daphne-CHILD Grantee Spotlight podcast conversations with CSOs across the nine countries, allowing frontline practitioners' own words to illustrate what grassroots child protection looks like.

The session aimed to show integrated, child-centred protection in practice, with small CSOs combining psycho-social support, legal aid, education, and family support, often without stable public funding.

The key learning point was that effective protection is often invisible and slow, built on sustained, trust-based relationships rather than quick, measurable interventions. Social protection systems should be designed and funded to allow for that relational, time-intensive work, rather than short-term outputs.

Italy

The Right to Origins of Adopted Persons: what social protection systems still struggle to see

Rosalba Mirci – Individual Member

HUMAN LIBRARY

The Human Library session, *The Right to Origins of Adopted Persons: What Social Protection Systems Still Struggle to See*, explored what protection systems overlook after adoption. Adoption is relevant to social protection because it creates lifelong public responsibilities for record-keeping, access to information and psycho-social support.

Drawing on sixteen years of professional experience and the lived experiences of adopted persons, Rosalba Mirci showed that loving one's adoptive family and wishing to know one's origins are compatible.

Placing this experience within a broader European context, the session highlighted differences in how countries recognise and implement adopted people's wish to access information about their adoption. In Flanders, persons adopted through intercountry adoption have a recognised right to information about their origins and adoption process, and to access their adoption file under certain defined conditions.

The key message from the session was that social protection should provide safe, transparent and supported pathways for those who are adopted to learn about their origins, while respecting individual choice in decisions on whether or not to seek information on their adoption.

Luxembourg

Poor children in a prosperous country

Ombudsman fir Kanner a Jugendlecher in Luxembourgish - The Ombudsman for Children and Youth (OKAJU)

HUMAN LIBRARY

The *Poor Children in a Prosperous Country* Human Library Book explored the lived realities of children growing up in poverty in Luxembourg, one of Europe's most prosperous countries. The session aimed to challenge stereotypes about poverty, encourage participants to question existing policies and assumptions, and create space for open conversation about what it means to experience poverty in a wealthy country.

Participants gained a deeper understanding of the realities faced by children and families living in poverty and were particularly struck by the levels of poverty in Luxembourg, given the country's strong image of wealth and prosperity. The discussions also provided an opportunity to compare experiences and challenges across different countries. These included practical issues such as difficulties in collecting child support from an ex-partner, as well as examples from countries experiencing higher levels of poverty, such as Cyprus, and countries with lower levels of poverty, such as Norway.

A key message from the discussions was the importance of listening to people with lived experience of poverty when developing solutions. Their experiences and perspectives can help ensure that policies and interventions respond to the realities of families and children and contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Netherlands



When Collaboration Gets Messy: Working Across Disciplines for Children's Well-Being

Utrecht University, Dynamics of Youth

WORKSHOP

This interactive workshop explored the realities of transdisciplinary collaboration in work with and for children and young people. Rather than focusing only on success stories, participants reflected on both the challenges ('stumbles') and enabling factors ('bright spots') they had experienced when working across sectors and disciplines. Through facilitated dialogue, they identified practical lessons on building trust, navigating different perspectives, and strengthening collaboration.

The session was relevant to social protection because children and families often depend on coordinated support across multiple services and organisations. The workshop highlighted that effective, child-centred social protection requires not only good policies and evidence, but also strong relationships, trust, and opportunities for reflection and mutual learning.

Children's rights and well-being depend on systems that work together, yet effective collaboration across sectors does not happen automatically. Policymakers should recognise that investing in relationships, trust, and opportunities for reflection is just as important as investing in programmes, because strong collaboration is what enables integrated support for children and families.

Perhaps the strongest insight was that participants rarely described their biggest challenges as technical or knowledge-based. Instead, they highlighted that the quality of collaboration was dependent on having the time and psychological safety to build relationships, understand different perspectives, and openly discuss failures. Many participants also reflected that the workshop itself modelled the kind of collaborative space that is often missing in day-to-day practice: slowing down, listening deeply, and learning together rather than focusing solely on delivering outputs.

Scotland

Do children's rights change systems – or do systems change children's rights?

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

HUMAN LIBRARY

Together's presentation reflected on what it takes for children's rights to genuinely shape social protection systems and on how systems, in turn, shape children's rights. Drawing on her experience working alongside children in youth justice processes, Together's Assistant Director explored how making children's rights binding in law has influenced practice and culture. She shared Scotland's experience of incorporating the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law, and reflected on how frontline workers, policymakers and public authorities are using the UNCRC to influence everyday decisions with and for children. The main takeaway was that while children's rights can and do shape systems, it is only through meaningful implementation in culture and practice that those systems, in turn, shape how rights are realised day-to-day for children.

Ukraine

The local programme builder for local costed planning of (child)care reform: a digital enabler of the Ukraine Better Care Reform

Francesca Stuer – Individual Member

WORKSHOP

The workshop, *The local programme builder for local costed planning of (child)care* reform: a digital enabler of the *Ukraine Better Care Reform, introduced the Local Programme (Action Plan) Builder, a Google Workspace-based planning tool (already used in Ukraine's Better Care Reform)* that helps municipalities turn national Child Guarantee commitments into costed, monitored local action plans. This tool enables regional targeting, costs the case for protecting child-focused budgets, supports inter-agency coordination between Public Centres for Social Welfare and child protection services, allows targeted (not just generic) interventions, and reduces the administrative burden that drives non-take-up of child benefits.

Ukraine



Recovering Childhood: The Challenges Ukrainian Adolescents Face Today and Solutions That Support Their Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing

Kids of Ukraine
WORKSHOP

The workshop organised by Kids of Ukraine, *Recovering Childhood: The Challenges Ukrainian Adolescents Face Today and Solutions That Support Their Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing*, focused on the daily challenges Ukrainian adolescents face because of the war, and on the solutions that help them to recover.

Through a short presentation and an interactive quiz, participants learned about air raids, interrupted education, stress, uncertainty, and the impact of war on children's mental health. Kids of Ukraine also explained how psycho-social support programmes in Ukraine create safe spaces where children can receive professional support, build friendships, and feel more confident. The workshop showed that social protection is not only about financial support, but it also includes access to mental health services, safe spaces, education, and opportunities that help children recover and continue their development.

In the second part of the workshop, participants joined a World Café discussion. They worked in small groups and discussed three main issues: how to better protect the rights, safety, and well-being of children affected by war; what types of psycho-social support helps children and adolescents cope with the emotional impacts of war; and which education opportunities and youth activities can help them grow, develop their skills, and plan for the future.

Participants shared good practices from their organisations and developed practical ideas together. They highlighted the importance of safe spaces, long-term psychological support, peer support, family involvement, and trauma-informed approaches. They also suggested improving non-formal education, career guidance, youth participation, international exchanges, and cooperation between organisations and countries.

After the workshop, the World Café results were shared with all participants, so they could use these ideas in their own work.

The discussions showed that people from different places shared many of the same priorities, that many of these ideas can be adapted in different countries, and that cooperation and learning between organisations is important to improve support for children affected by crises. Participants agreed that children need safe spaces, mental health support, education, and the opportunity to take part in decisions that affect their lives.

One of the main conclusions from the workshop was that children affected by war need more than emergency help. They need safe spaces, psycho-social support, and long-term opportunities to recover, learn, and build their future.



Statistics Explained

The data on population and child poverty provided in this publication was taken from Eurostat (September 2026).
No data is currently available from Eurostat for child poverty and child population in some non-EU countries, for which other sources provided by members have been used, when available.

As England, Scotland, and Wales are not geopolitical entities for which Eurostat provides data, the data included in this report is drawn from national data available in each country. The source of these specific datasets can be found in each of the country reports.

Eurostat data on child poverty is derived from *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions - EU-SILC*, compiled annually and a key instrument for providing information required by the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights. AROPE data (at risk of poverty or social exclusion) remains crucial to monitor European social policies. It reflects the share of the population fulfilling at least one of the following three conditions:

- at risk of poverty, meaning below the poverty threshold,
- in a situation of severe material deprivation,
- living in a household with a very low work intensity.

More information on poverty rates in Europe

More information on AROPE methodology

Other Eurochild Publications

Child Poverty
Poverty takes away the right to childhood
Eradicating child poverty in Europe
Housing challenges faced by children in Europe
Eurochild analysis of the 2026 European Semester Spring Package

European Child Guarantee
Child Guarantee National Action Plans at a glance
Biennial reports on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee
Promising Practices from the European Child Guarantee
The European Child Guarantee and Roma children: Between commitment and practice

Child Protection
Breaking the silence on racial discrimination in childhood
Violence against children in Europe

Digital Environment
Eurochild's position on age restrictions on social media
Strengthening children's rights in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive
The rights of children in the digital environment
Speaking up for change: Children's and caregivers' voices for safer online experiences

Child Participation
Our Voices Matter
A Guide to Create Accessible Documents with and for Children

Mental Health
How children feel

To keep up to date with our work, subscribe to our eNews Bulletin monthly newsletter.

Eurochild

Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Scan Me

Scan the QR code to download
the PDF version of this report